

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XXIX.—No. 9

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1909

PRICE TWOPENCE

*Few men think ; but all will have opinions.*

—BERKELEY.

## The Challenge of Secularism.—II.

I AM very sorry that my indisposition caused a nasty break in this series of articles, reviewing an essay of the same title by Canon G. S. Streatfield, of Coventry, in the *London Quarterly Review*. The first of these articles of mine appeared in the *Freethinker* of February 7. It concluded with a quotation in which the reverend gentleman described Bradlaugh as "a leader still more capable" than Holyoake, more "determined" and also more "violent." I admitted that this was the Christian tradition, but I said it was grotesquely false. Bradlaugh was anything but a "violent" man. Strong, determined men are never violent. Violence is a characteristic of weakness. I suppose the reverend gentleman really means that Bradlaugh went into a fight to win, and did all that was necessary, when not dishonorable, to that end. That only showed his will and courage. There is an impression abroad that Bradlaugh was an aggressive man in every sense of the word. But he was nothing of the kind. He hated violence, though he resisted it when it was used against himself, as in the famous instance of his brutal ejection from the House of Commons, when it took eleven picked policemen and attendants to overcome the resistance he offered to that dastardly outrage. He had almost a superstitious respect for law and order. He never tired of telling his followers that everything was to be won within the limits of the law. He always fought his own battles within those limits. It was by winning his appeal in the House of Lords, after years of fierce and costly litigation, that he achieved his greatest victory. Nor was his nature "violent" in the secondary and metaphorical meanings of the word. He was ever a most scrupulous antagonist, even when strife was wantonly forced upon him. He fought under the rules of the contest; he never incurred the censure of the referee. And he was one of the most magnanimous of men when the battle was over. He harbored no malice, he had not an atom of vindictiveness, he forgave, and he forgot. Canon Streatfield is much fairer and more accurate in the following passage:—

"Holyoake was the apostle, before everything else, of the co-operative movement; consequently, his secularism was rather economic than anti-religious. With the militant atheism of Bradlaugh this order was reversed, and his name, in the mind of the public, has always, and rightly, been identified with the religious rather than the social question. Holyoake was not slow to recognise the facts of the situation, and the relations between the two leaders became increasingly strained. Their differences reached a climax in a two

days' debate held in 1870—Holyoake defending the position that secularism is capable of asserting its own principles without directly assailing religious opinion—Bradlaugh, on the other hand (it must be confessed with more consistency), maintaining that Holyoake's utilitarianism being essentially and avowedly atheistic, it was impossible for him, without self-stultification, to assume an attitude of neutrality towards the Christian or any other religion."

There cannot be many persons now living who heard that debate between Holyoake and Bradlaugh in 1870. I am one of them. It was not a "two days' debate" but a two nights' debate. I remember it well, and I think now, as I thought then, that it revealed the two men in all their distinctive characteristics. Bradlaugh was both more logical and more passionate. Holyoake was fond of phrases, rather too apt to make clever expressions do duty for clear thinking, calm, cynical, and a little malicious. Some of his references to the poverty of Secularism, and its want of buildings, were really spiteful—especially as he had not done very much himself to remove the reproach. Those things were quoted by the Christian Evidence people for a quarter of a century afterwards. They laid particular emphasis on "the cowshed opposite the lunatic asylum." The Hall of Science was not a bit like a cowshed, though it had a corrugated iron roof, and it was not opposite the lunatic asylum; but the description caught on in religious circles, where Christian "charity" was predominant. I was once stung into telling one of those charitable souls that the Hall of Science was half way between the church and the lunatic asylum in Old-street, so as to catch some of the demented people in the one place before they reached their hopeless destination in the other.

I thought a good deal over that debate, although I was only a youth; and, without the fear of my elders and betters before my eyes, I wrote a pamphlet called *Secularism Restated*, which I have not seen for ever so many years; but I recollect that, with youthful infallibility, I undertook to set both the disputants right. I held with Holyoake that Secularism did not necessarily involve Atheism; on the other hand, I held with Bradlaugh that Secularism was bound to oppose the theological ideas which were in conflict with its essential principles. For the rest, I imagine I should have a good laugh over that old pamphlet of mine, if I could see it again.

Canon Streatfield thinks that "probably the secularist movement was never so strong in its *personal* element as when it was dominated by the commanding personalities of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant in the decade beginning in 1875." He thinks that Mrs. Besant's secession was "a severe blow" to the movement. It was certainly a misfortune, but I do not think it was more. Mrs. Besant was not really a leader of Secularism in the sense that Bradlaugh was. She was a brilliant advocate. It was he



who had the commanding mind and the striking originality. In spite of her great eloquence, it appears to me that Mrs. Besant is a born disciple, and that this fact is the key to all the changes in her meteoric career.

After a long paragraph on Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant, Canon Streatfield turns to a different aspect of the Secular movement:—

"On the other hand, it is undeniable that the Press is now far more vigorous in the propagation of secularism than it was in the time of Bradlaugh's greatest activity. And in dealing with the efforts of the Press it is well that we should face the fact that, while all forms of religion are obnoxious to the avowed secularist, none is so much so as Christianity, for the simple reason that, of all religious systems, Christianity has the strongest hold upon the civilised world."

The first half of this passage is undoubtedly true. Freethought propaganda through the press is far more scientific and effective than it was from thirty to forty years ago. I conceive, however, that the second half of this passage is inaccurate. Christianity is not opposed by Secularists because of its being the strongest in its hold upon the civilised world. The reason of the opposition is purely geographical. Christianity happens to be the religion—or superstition—of our part of the world. No doubt this sounds very prosaic, after Canon Streatfield's high rapture, but it is the simple truth.

With regard to the spirit and object of Secularism the reverend gentleman writes as follows:—

"Every symptom of a religious tendency is to be regarded as a noxious weed, and to be dealt with accordingly. The main principle of secularism is not simply that religion, from first to last, is a delusion, but a mischievous delusion, as diverting thought and interest from a world of reality to a world which has no existence save in the imagination of those (to use their own words) 'whose intelligence is debauched by superstition.' The secularist, in brief, insists upon facing the problems of life without religious belief of any kind. All considerations arising from even the hypothetical existence of a Supreme Being are excluded. Indeed, the hypothesis itself is dogmatically negated."

Regarding "religion" as synonymous with "supernaturalism" these sentences are true enough. But the final sentence is not so. Secularism does not "dogmatically negative" the hypothesis of God. I would also suggest to Canon Streatfield that "Supreme Being" and "God" are not identical expressions. Monists like Haeckel, and Bradlaugh before him, believe in a Supreme Being no less than Theists do, only their Supreme being is Nature itself, instead of a Personal Deity behind it.

Dealing with the journalistic and other literary forces of Secularism, the reverend gentleman first mentions Mr. Blatchford's paper:—

"The *Clarion*, with its weekly circulation of over eighty thousand, must, taken as a whole, be counted on the side of secularism. Everyone is aware of its bitter attack upon Christianity, some years ago, in *God and My Neighbor*. It would, however, I believe, be a mistake to regard this organ of socialism as altogether anti-religious, or pledged beyond recall against Christianity. Its quarrel, it seems to me, is much more with Christianity in the concrete, *i.e.*, in its present form or forms, than with Christianity in the abstract."

Mr. Blatchford will hardly consider these remarks complimentary. They seem to me a polite way of saying "He dunno w'ere 'e are." The suggestion that he has attacked accidental forms and not the essential substance of the Christian religion is really an insinuation that he lacks intellectual sagacity. On this point, at any rate, we think the reverend gentleman is mistaken. Mr. Blatchford attacked the vital conceptions of Christianity. Canon Streatfield must believe so himself in his heart of hearts, or he would not call Mr. Blatchford's attack "bitter." Whether the editor of the *Clarion* has left Christianity "beyond recall" appears to me a very idle question. It is a problem in prophecy—and prophecy, as George Eliot said, is the most gratuitous form of error.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

## Can We Leave Religion Alone?

THE other day a Scotch newspaper called attention to the fact that in religious matters people use words without any sense of their precise meaning. This fault is not confined to religion, although it exists there in a larger and more obtrusive degree than elsewhere. Moreover, in religion the circumstance is inevitable. For most of the ideas that make up modern religious thought belong to the category of what Spencer called pseudo-ideas; they do not correspond to any objective fact, and the words used do not even represent any definite state of mind. When people talk about "God," "creation," "soul," etc., etc., they are using expressions which answer to no corresponding mental states. They cannot be defined because there are no clear ideas behind them. And every attempt at definition involves further difficulties; until, taught by experience, the up-to-date religious apologist makes it part of his case that it is of the nature of his beliefs that they should not admit of clear definition.

In this way religion develops a cant phraseology of its own. And this fact received an amusing illustration in the course of the article from which I have already quoted. As though this were the one certain thing in connection with religion, it was said that the disappearance of religious belief from our midst would mean the removal of the one force that serves to bind men together in the bonds of a common brotherhood. And this was said as though the question really did not admit of serious dispute. Here, then, is a magnificent illustration of the power of cant phrases. It is repeated so frequently that the plainest of facts, the most repeated experience, seems powerless against it. We are surrounded by numerous sects, in connection with the warfare of which there is more misrepresentation and ill-feeling displayed in the course of a week than is manifested in even politics in a month. Protestants assert that the religious beliefs of Roman Catholics prevent their acting with justice towards their fellow-citizens, and that their influence in the State constitutes a national danger. Catholics retort that Protestant religious prejudice prevents their opponents acting justly towards them. Churchmen and Nonconformists make substantially the same statements of each other. It is chronicled as a remarkable thing that Christians belonging to different sects can meet amicably on the same public platform. History is full of the ill-will generated by religious feeling; and yet the statement that Christianity is the great source of human brotherhood and peace is made as though it did not admit of the slightest question.

The truth is that religion is one of the greatest disruptive forces amongst us. This is so patent that we are all, religious and non-religious, compelled to guard against its influence. It is, for example, one of the commonest of rules with literary, social, and political organisations that in all discussions the subject of religion shall be excluded. Other things may be discussed; this is the one thing that is barred. This rule cannot be due to the general belief that religion is of no consequence, for most of those who uphold it would assert that religious belief is of all things the most important. What they realise is that to open the doors to religion is to open them to ill-feeling, and finally to disruption. Differences of opinion in art, science, literature, politics, may be discussed without threatening the well-being of an organisation; difference in religious belief is the one thing in connection with which friendly discussion is impossible. In other words, religion develops a feeling of brotherhood so effectively that, in order to prevent strife, it is found absolutely essential to exclude it from a large part of our associated life.

Now in some directions this method may be comparatively beneficial. If we cannot discuss certain subjects under perfectly open conditions, it may be better to discuss them under the necessary restrictions than not to discuss them at all. But



the imposition of restrictions in discussing the range and relationships of a selected topic can never be without its disadvantages. The hackneyed saw that the minds of many men work in watertight compartments may be useful as a figure of speech, but no competent thinker regards it as an accurate statement of fact. Each aspect of mental life is conditioned by every other aspect, and all parts of life stand in the relation of an organically connected whole. The frame of mind that sees the hand of God in the Messina earthquake may easily discern the intention of Deity to place Great Britain as the ruler of the world, and may affect conduct accordingly. And without even direct reference to religion, the religious type of mind may persist in politics and sociology long after it has divested itself of formal religious beliefs. Carlyle's deification of the great man, with an almost complete ignoring of all the conditions of which the great man was the expression, is a case in point. We cannot, then, ignore religion in discussing other subjects, if we wish our discussion to yield the greatest possible profit. Religion is too widespread, and too old a phenomenon, to be set on one side as though it were of no more importance than the room in which the discussion is held.

Religious people, were they alive to the situation, would see that the exclusion of religion really endorses all that the Freethinker has to say against it. And those who are not religious would, if they viewed things from the proper point of view, recognise how imperfect their work or their conclusions must be so long as the religious question is left out of sight. This is peculiarly true of those societies that meet with a specifically sociological object. Many branches of the Independent Labor Party, for instance, decline to allow the introduction of religion at their meetings. I am afraid it does not mean exactly this; but rather the introduction of *anti-religious* speeches. Religious Socialists do introduce religious matters, and this is tolerated—perhaps in the same pitying spirit that tolerates the antics of half-witted people in primitive societies—but it takes place. It is the man who does not believe religion to be a social asset of any value who is suppressed.

Personally, I sympathise with the man who believes in religion, and therefore insists on introducing it. His attitude one can understand and appreciate. The foolish position is occupied by the one who believes he can settle social affairs while leaving religion severely alone. This is surely a monumental piece of folly. For it must be remembered that Socialism is not, in theory, a mere matter of passing a particular measure through Parliament. It involves a complete reconstruction of society, a refashioning of human sentiment and belief. And the wisdom that pictures this as possible of accomplishment, while saying nothing of the value of religious belief, does not strike one as of the highest or of the most far-seeing description. For you cannot touch social institutions unless you touch beliefs, and you simply cannot interfere with beliefs in any direction unless you trench on religious ground. It is not the mere physical portion of our environment upon which social institutions rely for their existence. Purely physical conditions are of first importance only in the earliest stages of civilisation. At later stages, institutions become incarnated ideas, and depend for their existence upon the mental condition of the people. Moreover, the course of evolution has been such that the ideas proper to all our social institutions have become more or less entangled with religious beliefs. I need only mention the way in which religion has become associated with marriage and general morality to prove this.

A fight with institutions, an attempt to modify the social state, necessarily, therefore, resolves itself into a contest with ideas and beliefs. And it is a matter of impossibility to discuss these without at the same time discussing, and to some degree determining, the value of religious beliefs. Leave them alone, and our survey of the situation is of necessity

incomplete, and our efforts proportionately fruitless. Enlarge the survey, and it will be found that religious beliefs are a part of the mental environment that demands modification. To leave religion out of the discussion may be necessary in the interests of peace and good feeling at the moment. No Freethinker would question this; he fully recognises that there is no subject so fruitful in ill-feeling as is religion; still, if our work is to be complete, not to talk about religion is like discussing typhoid fever and eschewing sanitation.

The mere economic weight of religion is enough to entitle it to full discussion by sociologists of all classes. As property holders only, religious organisations play a large part in social life. As moulders of opinion, the many thousands of clergymen play a still larger part. And as their direction of opinion is in turn ordered by their peculiar beliefs, we are again brought to the same position by yet another road. If their religious beliefs are sound or valuable, their standing in the community should be of first-rate importance. If they are not, their position is a social imposture. But whether they are or not, their influence in social affairs represents a force that none can afford to despise. As a matter of fact, religion is not left on one side, for the simple reason that it cannot be left alone. It is at the back of the minds of all of us, and is implied in much of our action. Men's acceptance or rejection of this or that particular social theory is more or less determined by their religious opinions. The pretence that religion is not considered in such organisations as those I have referred to is a more or less elaborate hypocrisy. It is a pretence kept up in the belief that it will induce religious people to lend a hand where they would otherwise refrain. But it is a mistaken view. The place and value of religion in social life must be decided, or, if left alone, religion will decide the place of everything else. The policy of suppressing the free expression of opinion in order to encourage straightforwardness, is quite a mistaken one. In the long run, nothing pays like facing *all* the facts oneself, and so offering the example for others to do likewise.

I have, apparently, wandered far from the point at which I commenced, but the departure is more apparent than real. For this separation of religion from social subjects is based upon the avowed belief that it will operate as a cause of disagreement and division. This is unquestionably the case, but it is in flagrant contradiction to the belief that religion operates as a bond of brotherhood. But with all the disruptive influences of religion, it is sheer folly to imagine that we can safely leave it alone. We can no more afford to leave religion alone than we can leave sanitation out of our calculation in dealing with an unhealthy district. Sooner or later, no matter what our position or theories may be, we are brought face to face with the necessity of dealing with the prevalence of the religious type of mind. We may evade the question for a time, but it is always there, and the wisest policy is to face the problem at once and so influence in the right direction those who look to us for counsel. In this case courage, honesty, and profit run in a single leash.

C. COHEN.

### A House Divided Against Itself.

"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand."—MATT. XII. 25.

To outsiders, nothing is more genuinely amusing than the burning controversies from which the Christian Church has never been free; and these are so amusing because they have always been taken so seriously. It has never occurred to the theologians that their work has chiefly consisted in providing merriment for the nations. While they were so earnestly proving the unprovable and defining the indefinable, and while the dominant party of them



was ferociously demolishing all other parties, the big world was enjoying a wholesome laugh in its sleeve. Let us glance at what is called the orthodox school, by which is meant, either the party that was numerically the strongest, or the party that happened to be in favor at the imperial court. The claim put forth was that the Bible was a complete and final revelation of God and of the law of human conduct. But although the Bible was said to be or to contain a *revelation*, it was yet a concealed revelation. The Bible was likened to a mine in which the precious ore of Divine truth was buried; and the business of the Church was to work the mine and bring its contents into the light of day. The theologians were not creators, but diggers, not inventors but finders. But the curious thing was that the diggers could seldom agree as to the nature of their finds, and their disagreement often degenerated into extremely unlovely strife. The whole business was ineffably absurd. The idea that God granted a revelation of himself, and then hid it in a book; that afterwards he inspired the Church to dig it out of the volume, and make it a reality in its life, and yet that the members of this Divinely guided society should be perpetually quarreling among themselves over their respective discoveries in the sacred mine—is not this the most ridiculous idea ever heard of? Does it not represent God himself as the most ludicrous of beings? Does it not render belief in any of the Christian claims absolutely impossible? Does it not even make Christianity itself a laughing-stock to the enlightened reason?

Try to think of the Bible as a Divinely constructed mine chockful of the ore of eternal truth, and of the Church as the Divinely appointed agent to dig for the priceless treasure. Then think of the controversy between Arius and Athanasius about the "ineffable relations of the Godhead before the remotest beginning of time." Arius argued that the terms "Father" and "Son" imply that the Father must have existed prior to the Son. This, of course, related to eternity, before time was created. Of the Son, therefore, Arius said: "There was when he was not." Athanasius held, with an air of absolute infallibility, that in the Trinity Father and Son were the same age. Not only was the Son never without the Father, but also the Father was never without the Son. Both men had numerous followers, and each party abused the other in the forcible Billingsgate of the day. "So violent were the discussions," says Dean Stanley, "that they were parodied in the Pagan theatres, and the Emperor's statues were broken in the public squares in the conflicts which took place." The nickname by which the Arians were called was "maniacs." Sailors, millers, and travellers were constantly coming into collision over "generated and ungenerated being." The streets, the market-places, the drapers, the money-changers, the victuallers, all places and all people were full of the dispute. Gregory of Nyssa says: "Ask a man, 'How many oboli?' he answers by dogmatizing on the distinction between the Father and the Son. Inquire the price of bread, and you are told, 'The Son is subordinate to the Father.' Ask if the bath is ready, and you are told, 'The Son arose out of nothing.'" It was chiefly to settle this dispute that the Council of Nicæa was convened by Constantine. Here Athanasius was victorious, and poor Arius was sent into exile to the accompaniment of bitter invectives against him uttered by the Emperor himself. Athanasius carried the day, not by the interposition of the Holy Ghost, but by the personal influence of Constantine. What about the treasured revelation in the Bible mine, and the Divinely inspired digger to fetch it out? The answer is that in history there has never been any trace of either.

At Nicæa the Holy Ghost was conspicuous only by his absence. It was the Emperor who was supreme there. It was to Constantine that Athanasius was indebted for his triumph, and Arius for his disgrace. It was Constantine, not the risen Christ, who ruled the Church. And Constantine was a man

of moods and passions and many crimes; and his guilty conscience occasioned him many a bad hour. After a few years Arius and his friends were restored to favor, while Athanasius had to be removed from the fury of his enemies. It was the Emperor's decree that Arius was to be received in triumph at Constantinople, and welcomed back into the bosom of the Church. At this stage, as the Athanasians declared, Heaven did step in and prevent the public discomfiture of the orthodox Trinitarians by mercifully putting Arius to death, a Divine intervention for which they returned fervent thanks in their churches. But the controversy went on as fiercely as before for many years, and the fortunes of the parties were every now and then reversed, until the rise of Catholicism, which adopted the Nicene doctrine as the authoritative teaching of the Church.

Catholicism, from the time of Theodosius the Great downward, has been sufficiently united and strong to prevent any heretical views from gaining influence and power. All who dared to think for themselves were summarily dealt with, which continues to be the case to our own day. But in the Protestant Churches the old battles are still being fought, though under different circumstances and with somewhat altered weapons. Jesus Christ is still the bone of contention. Instead of two hostile factions, we have now many dozens, and each of them claims to be the one accurate, if not infallible, interpreter of the Christ of God. The old Trinitarian orthodoxy is still with us, with certain unavoidable modifications; but there is also what calls itself the New Theology, which is only of yesterday, and yet already split up into ever so many different schools. There is bitter war between the Old and the New, and also between the different sections of the New. Dr. Warschauer has now taken up an attitude of opposition to Mr. Campbell, and seems to be a firm believer in a supernatural Jesus. At any rate, he identifies the Christ of the Churches with the Jesus of the Gospels. And now at last we have amongst us the strangest of all religious phenomena, a Christian minister of the Congregational order who not only distinguishes between Jesus and Christ, but also in most emphatic terms denies the historicity of the latter. Whether the Rev. R. Roberts, of Bradford, believes in the personality of Christ or not is not quite clear, though it might be a fair deduction from some of his words that he does not. Both in his article in the current number of the *Hibbert Journal*, and in his controversy with Dr. Warschauer in the columns of the *Christian World*, what he maintains with much vigor is that the writers of the New Testament Epistles do not appear to have been aware that the Jesus of the Gospels had ever lived. Neither directly nor indirectly do they mention his career, or quote his teaching on any disputed point. When he comes to deal with the Gospel Jesus himself, he is in practical agreement with the majority of Freethinkers. He contends, as we do, that whatever the Evangelists themselves may have thought of him, the Jesus they portray is in no respect superior to the average Jew of the period, but is subject to all the ordinary limitations of his contemporaries. He makes great fun of the evangelical divines who speak of him as the "fulness of the God-head bodily expressed," or as "Very God of Very God," or as the "Crown and essence of Humanity, the Savior of the world, who by the loftiness of his teaching, the beauty of his character, the sufficiency of his atoning sacrifice, is able to save to the uttermost all who will come to him and trust in him." Such expressions applied to the Gospel Jesus, he says, "crack the sinews of language, and reduce the sequences of speech to incoherences of thought."

Admitting that the "silence of non-Christian literature as to Jesus has more significance than is usually assigned to it," Mr. Roberts proceeds to weigh his ethical teaching in the balance of criticism, and finds it seriously wanting. After pointing out how mistaken were his views on many points,



such as the origin of disease and the end of the world, he criticises his teaching as to divorce thus:—

“There is no recognition of adultery on the part of the husband as a ground for divorce which the wife might urge, while the right of the husband to decide these matters himself without reference to any constituted law courts, strikes the modern mind as callous and iniquitous to the last degree. The teaching is governed throughout by an admission of the iniquitous principles of sex-inferiority as against woman, and let it be remembered this principle has inflicted infinite suffering on half of the human race.”

Thus we see that the house of the Church is radically divided against itself, and it is already becoming more and more evident that it shall not stand. The Church has never known what theological peace means, except a forced peace under the tyrannical rule of the Papacy. And now that the day of knowledge is dawning, the day of patient endurance of the yoke of bondage to the mutually destructive vagaries of metaphysical speculators and hair-splitters is necessarily waning. Such a debate as the one just closed between Mr. Roberts and Dr. Warschauer will open many eyes and emancipate many an intellect. The reign of the Churches is doomed, and shall soon be substituted by the reasonable sovereignty of fully awakened intelligence.

J. T. LLOYD.

### Omar Khayyam.

ON March 31 will fall the centenary of Edward Fitzgerald, the most brilliant translator of Omar Khayyam's quatrains. On like celebrations the so-called “Literary” journals usually find ample space for gush, headed, as a rule, “Shelleyana,” “Burnsiana,” or “Miltoniana,” as the case may be. The mysterious and somewhat idiotic protraction of the name gives people the impression that they are about to read some newly-discovered anecdotes or literary gems of the departed one. Generally, however, taking *T. P.'s Weekly* as an example, it consists in a drivelling string of scrappy apologies for the defunct one's religious or political opinions.

The writer is awaiting with no small amount of trepidation the near approach of March 31. Whatever twaddle may be written about Omar on that occasion, “one thing at least is certain”—that it will endeavor to clothe his words with a Grundyish respectability, and to give an air of religious significance to his verses. It is to be hoped that students of Omar will not allow themselves to be misled by the jargon of pedantry. Mons. Nicholas attempted to conceal Omar's militant attitude towards established religion, but was very successfully bowled over by Fitzgerald. He interpreted the frequently occurring word “wine” as “Dieu,” and carefully annotated his translation accordingly, thus introducing Omar as a profound mystic, devoutly and persistently shadowing the Deity under the figure of wine. This, of course, is absurd; for in one of Omar's quatrains he expresses the wish: “When I die wash my body with wine, and from the wood of the vine make the planks of my coffin”—which Fitzgerald has beautifully converted thus:—

“Ah! with the vine my fading life provide,  
And wash my body whence the life has died,  
And lay me shrouded in the vine-leaf wrapt,  
By some not unfrequented garden side.”

This easily disposes of the “mystic” theory; it is pure Materialism.

Omar only went to church twice, “not,” as one of his contemporaries tells us, “because of his devotion, but rather by accident.” Omar's own words, however, are more interesting and explicit still:—

“I went into a mosque the other day,  
But by great Allah! it was not to pray,  
No: but to steal a prayer-mat—now 'tis worn,  
I go to filch another mat away.”

There is a magnificent depth of satire in that. His contempt for the average servant of the “Most High” is expressed in the following biting quatrain:—

“A parson spied a harlot, and quoth he,  
‘You seem a slave to drink and lechery’;  
And she made answer, ‘What I seem I am;  
But, parson, are you all you seem to be?’”

And later he bursts indignantly forth:—

“These fools, by dint of ignorance most crass,  
Think they in wisdom all mankind surpass,  
And glibly do they damn as infidel  
Whoever is not—like themselves—an ass.”

Delightful reading for parsons, is it not?

Omar dealt a terrific blow to the “Blessed be ye that hunger” doctrine. Eight centuries ago this grand old Freethinker put forward an argument which has never yet been answered:—

“In paradise are houris, as you know,  
And fountains that with wine and honey flow.  
If these be lawful in the world above,  
What harm to love the like down here below?”

Now then, “General” Booth, where are your “empty drums”?

Omar had searched for the truth; he had found, instead of lofty promises fulfilled, only the hollowness and mockery of ignorant fetish-worship. He had scanned life's horizon, seen nothing beyond, and settled philosophically and sensibly down to make the most of it. Of the good and bad within man's nature he said: “Impute them not to the heavens, for in the way of wisdom those heavens are a thousandfold more helpless than thou art.” To those who find no satisfaction in trying to understand and reconcile the apparent contradictions of this world, or to accept life as it is, but equally unsatisfactorily seek refuge in the consolatory joys of an imagined hereafter, his advice is: “Drink wine, for thy body becomes atoms in the earth; thy earth after that becomes goblets. Be thou heedless of Hell or Heaven. Why should a wise man be deceived about such things?” Like every deep thinker, Omar believed in and preached the doctrine of necessity. He saw the links of the mighty chain, and though he failed to piece them together, his mind was perfectly easy. He sleeps in the Garden of Naisápúr, and the perfume arising from his rose-laden tomb still “overtakes the true believer unaware.”

J. S. C.

### SWEARING OFF.

Good Deacon Hobbs had a righteous mind,  
Religious and austere,  
Another such you might not find  
In many a passing year.

When New Year's came he was put out  
By a most peculiar plight;  
He wrestled with a horrid doubt,  
Which would not take to flight.

He'd sworn off everything that man  
Could think of stopping short,  
In other years he'd put the ban  
On things of every sort.

But suddenly his face grew bright,  
He laughed a smothered cough,  
He saw a path as clear as light—  
He swore off swearing off. —Housekeeper.

### SUCCESSFUL SUBSTITUTE.

Colonel White: “I understand that your congregation is in a fair way to get the church debt paid off, soon?”

Parson Bagster: “Yassah, Cuhnel! Yassah, 'bleegd to yo', sah, for askin'. De Lawd sholy do 'pear to be wid us in our financials, dese days, mo' specially since we done engaged a one-armed man to take up de c'lection. Dat's an ideo, sah, dat our new converted brudder, Mistah Jack Pullyam, the refawmed gamblin' man, put up us to. How true 'tis, as de 'postle says, dat de child'en o' darkness am wiser dan de child'en o' light! Hadn't-uh been for Brudder Jack we never would-uh thought o' that scheme in de livin' world!”



## Acid Drops.

Rev. J. T. Wardle Stafford has been lecturing at the Wesleyan Church, Muswell-hill, on "Fools." From the report in the local *Record* we should say that this is a subject on which he is an authority. He made some "scathing remarks" on the "Atheist Fool"—who, after all, was less a fool than a man of "brutish" nature. Atheism was really not in the head, but in the heart. And so forth, and so forth, in the vein so dear to Christian charity. Mr. Stafford's lecture was heartily applauded. The "Fools" of Muswell-hill had made a big rally.

We like a good joke, and the Rev. Arthur Bentley supplies us with one. He writes to us from Park-road, Heaton-park, Manchester, in the following strain: "Dear Sir,—I have noticed that you are constantly *untruthful* in asserting that scientific men are opposed to Christianity. See enclosed statement, which shows that, with very few exceptions, Christianity has no opponents amongst men of science. Professor Tyndall publicly denied Atheism as his creed, so did Lyell and Max Müller." After this, the reverend gentleman remains "faithfully yours." And what is the "enclosed statement" which made such an impression on this clerical innocent, and which he expects will make a great impression on us? It is a page from the *Daily Mail* "Year Book of the Churches," on which Professor Edward Hull—who is not a scientist, in the common meaning of the word, but the Secretary of that pious haunt of the clergy called the Victoria Institute—declares that—"It may be stated without hesitation that with very few exceptions, such as Professor Haeckel in Germany, Christianity has no opponents amongst men of science." Professor Hull would naturally make this statement "without hesitation." Why should he hesitate? When you tell a lie you may as well go the whole hog and lie like truth. And his statement is a lie, a grotesque lie, a lie that very properly makes its appearance in a *Daily Mail* publication. But even if it were true, what a set-off there would be in the "few exceptions" if they included "such" scientists as "Professor Haeckel" in Germany. Why, to talk of scientists, and to specialise "Professor Haeckel in Germany" is a good deal like talking of infernal spirits and specialising "Satan in Hell," or talking of celestial spirits and specialising "God in Heaven."

This clerical innocent lumps Tyndall—a physicist, Lyell—a geologist, and Max Müller—a professor of languages and comparative religion, all together as "men of science." By his reference to their denial of Atheism, he evidently thinks that if they were not Atheists they must have been Christians—which, as our ancient friend Euclid says, is absurd. Moreover, the clerical innocent doesn't appear to have heard of Huxley and Clifford, who boldly attacked Christianity, or of the mighty Darwin who rejected Christianity before he was forty, and passed on through Deism to Agnosticism, which is only Atheism done up in silver paper. What a rare innocent this clerical innocent is to be sure! He would surely take the prize in a Manchester exhibition of such articles.

We have a final word for this clerical innocent. Why should he be angry with us if we were "untruthful"? He ought to feel a certain sympathy with us on that account. He himself belongs to the most "untruthful" profession in the world. Perhaps he thinks we have poached upon his preserves. Yes, that must be it. We have got the explanation at last.

Reason is not a feature that distinguishes religious periodicals, and so no one is greatly surprised at the *Methodist Times* not recognising the logical character of what is known as the "Secular Solution" of the education question. This, it declares, instead of being logical is profoundly illogical, because there are large numbers of Christians who would not be content with it. Well, we may point out to our contemporary that the logical character of the proposed solution, and the question of whether all Christians would be satisfied with it, are quite distinct. The solution is logical because it is only an application of the principle that money raised by common taxation should be spent upon common ends, and of the principle that religious matters lie outside the legitimate concern of the modern State. Those who advocate this solution do not pretend for a moment that all Christians will be content with the Secular Solution. All they say is, that they ought to be. And as in this case logic and justice run on identical lines, it would not be amiss if those who act as leaders in the Christian world made some effort to make what ought to be coincide with what is.

After the father the son. The Prince of Wales has sent General Booth a cheque for £50 to help him in his "great and noble work." A great work, it may be; a noble work, is a matter of opinion; a useful work, it certainly is not. We believe it will eventually be seen that General Booth's influence has been disastrous. He does not lessen poverty, or drink, or "the social evil." And he has made the first, at any rate, worse. From a sociological point of view he is a mere mountebank.

In his annual appeal for funds, General Booth announces that a gift of £10 will take an emigrant to Canada. This may be true, in a sense. But as the Salvation Army merely lends the money to the emigrant, it is a gift, not to the emigrant, but to the Army. Moreover, the Army receives out of the £10 a commission from shipping and railway companies, and, in addition, a sum of £1 from the Canadian Government. In common honesty these statements should accompany the appeal for funds. But Salvation Army methods are nothing if they are not "slim."

"Few people know nearly as much as they should do concerning the sources whence the present stream of our religious life originally sprang," says the *British Congregationalist*. Every Freethinker will heartily agree with this. Religious people, above all, know least of the origin and history of their religious beliefs—which is why they remain religious. It is only those who have ceased to believe, as a consequence of their knowledge, who know how direct is the connection between Christian doctrines and the savage customs of primitive man. Every religious doctrine in the world rests upon no stronger foundation than the crude guessings of the primitive savage. These have been modified in the course of generations, and many of the more repellant features disguised by the addition of the more civilised contemporary beliefs. But they remain in essentials, and all students of folk-lore know it. For genuine students of the nature and history of religion, the work—in its essential features—has been accomplished. The task now is to bring this knowledge home to others—in other words, to teach religious people the real nature of their religion. And when this is done the game will be over.

The importance of religion to a community that wishes to develop its better feelings has just been demonstrated at Jefferson, U.S.A. A sect calling itself the "Firstfruit Harvesters" has just established itself in that city, and, as is usual, made an attack upon the other Churches as not being of the true faith. Whereupon the followers of the gospel of love and brotherhood rose and drove the leaders of the "Firstfruit Harvesters" out of the town. Then they blew up their meeting-place with dynamite. And so the spirit of Christian love and unity once more broods over Jefferson, U.S.A., while the Christians therein will doubtless subscribe with enthusiasm to a mission for converting the heathen.

Our compliments to the Rev. Campbell Morgan. This gentleman has just informed an interviewer that he is prepared to take Genesis i.ii. literally. He also added that he sees "no reason to doubt that Joshua actually did stay the course of the sun upon Ajalon." If Mr. Morgan can swallow the first couple of chapters of Genesis, it would be foolish indeed to make a wry face over Joshua. And, candidly, we prefer the man who is honest enough—even though in involves some amount of stupidity—to accept the Bible as it stands to those who convert it into a modern text-book of ethics and economics, and manage to find a profound moral teaching in its crudest anthropomorphism.

Here is an awful experience! A correspondent writes to the Rev. David Smith, of the *British Weekly*, asking him: "How ought I to answer when a man, a doctor, unconverted, says, 'How do we know our Bible is true?' I get hot and say I do not know; but I am not believed." We quite appreciate this gentleman's difficulty, and can assure him that many others have felt "hot" when asked to substantiate the truth of the Bible. The Rev. David Smith says the man who put such a question "should be ashamed of himself." Why, we are quite at a loss to see, since the question seems a most natural one. And if a man believes in the Bible he ought to know why, and be able to say so without feeling "hot." Mr. Smith says such a question is both "ungentlemanly and silly," wise and gentlemanly behavior consisting, in Mr. Smith's opinion, of one allowing others to believe in any absurdity so long as they are satisfied with it. That is, so long as the absurdities believed in are of the Christian variety. Of course, if one finds comfort in beliefs that are not Christian, there is then every reason for interference. Mr. Smith says that if the Doctor had "any knowledge of the science of Apologetic, any appreciation of the



magnitude of the problem, he would never ask how you know the Bible is true." We do not see how this would prevent one asking the question, but it might be that if the Doctor had possessed an adequate appreciation of the intelligent nature of Christian belief he might well have thought putting such a question waste of time. Mr. Smith's reply strikes one as a very good sample of the manner in which many persons impose upon those weaker than themselves, and insult those they cannot impose on.

We are glad to see the *Daily Mail* publishing a summary of the Duchess of Marlborough's *North American Review* articles on "Woman." One of the summaries deals with the attitude of the Church towards women, and, while it contains nothing new to readers of this journal, it will probably open the eyes of Christian readers of the *Mail*. Her Grace recounts the high position attained by woman in ancient Rome, and her subsequent degradation under Christian influences. She adds that Christianity "does not add any new virtue to the list already drawn up for woman's acceptance." She also strikes a sound note when she says that "the Church has exerted a conservative influence, and imbued us with a prejudice against all that is not strictly orthodox; so that, for no logical reason whatever, we view unfavorably any innovation or concession to modern thought." Unquestionably it is the general mental type induced and perpetuated by Christianity that has been more hostile to progress than its specific evil actions. This influence has impressed itself upon every aspect of life, and in every direction meets the reformer as his most deadly obstacle. The publication of the article by the Duchess of Marlborough, and its republication in the *Mail*, are both pleasing signs of the times.

Theatre-going is a sin against God, and games of chance are an insult to the Savior. So the Rev. F. B. Meyer told the Nottingham people the other day. Theatres smell worldly and card-playing shuts the door against religious fervor. So strongly did the man of God feel on this subject that he exclaimed, "If you must go in for these worldly things, for heaven's sake strike your name off the church roll." Of course, Mr. Meyer is quite right, if the New Testament is to be taken as the standard of conduct. But, to be consistent, he should dissuade Christians from having anything to do with any worldly concerns whatsoever, because the time is short, and their citizenship is now in heaven.

Gipsy Smith puts Jesus of Nazareth completely in the shade. Though the only begotten Son of God, the latter made only about 120 converts altogether, while the former wins ten times that number in a single day. In a long epistle from the States of America, the Gipsy himself tells us what mighty miracles he has already accomplished there. He informs us how millionaires and working men, Directors of Public Safety and leading judges, drunken men and abandoned women, robbers and thieves and murderers, crowd the churches and halls in which his meetings are held, and get saved in the twinkling of an eye. At my services, he says, men and women are "brought to God by the thousand." In a word, under the magic spell of his personality, America is being made anew, and will be a perfect paradise ere he leaves it. At this point, the Gipsy, being a very modest man, blushes deeply and bows his head, and says: "Here let the curtain drop, for the angels must tell the rest of the story."

The Lord has specially spoken to a Congregational minister, and he conveys the message to the churches, which is to the effect that throughout the month of May the ministers should make prayer the subject of their sermons, and that during June all meetings should be converted into prayer-meetings. The simple-minded man imagines that in this way Christianity may yet be saved; but he will be disappointed. The Lord neither speaks nor hears; the Lord is enjoying an eternal vacation.

The Rev. Canon Henson naturally deprecates the present rapid secularisation of Christianity, because to secularise Christianity is to annihilate it. But the reverend gentleman allows his Christian zeal to bias and blind his judgment. He has nothing good to say of Secularism. In fact, he charges it with being the parent of all evils. Whenever a people give up the belief in a future life, the inevitable result is moral degradation. Unbelievers in immortality have never been and never can be good citizens. They cannot be trusted.

Such is this man of God's accusation against Secularism. But the moment he attempts to make it good he flounders as from blunder to blunder. At the Renaissance, he tells us, Italy lost her "other-worldly convictions," and went

back to the old-conquered Paganism, with the result that she "became the synonym for cynical profligacy, and the seducer of the nations." Surely, Canon Henson must know that he grossly misrepresents the facts. It was the Papacy that demoralised the Italians in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The popes were despots, and did their best to establish their relatives in principalities. Naturally, such down-trodden people enthusiastically welcomed and were "enchanted by the beauty of the ancient models of art and poetry, more particularly those of Greece." It is true that they bitterly hated the Church and everything associated with it, even Aristotle himself. But will Canon Henson be good enough to give us one instance of Italy "seducing the nations" because of her secularity, or because of her adoption of the old Pagan Philosophy?

Canon Henson repeats Bishop Wilkinson's foolish charges against secularist France. Everything has been on the down grade in that land ever since it threw off the yoke of the Church. "A cynical materialism appears to be spreading in the nation. Sexual morality is first revealing the disastrous effect of the withdrawal of the beneficent influence of Christ's religion." There is taking place "a weakening of the fibre of individual character, and the nation is almost consciously failing from within." All this is monstrously untrue, as all official reports and statistics abundantly show, and as all who have taken the trouble to study French history during the last fifteen years are fully aware.

But that is not all, nor the worst. Referring to "the English-speaking communities," Canon Henson asserts that the "same moral is pointed by our latest experience." Why not specify this "our latest experience," and prove it to be the fruit of Secularism? He dare not do it. But he *does* dare, from his Coward's Castle, to libel a philosophy of life, without offering a single scrap of evidence, in the following terms: "The spread of Secularism has been accompanied by sinister demonstrations of moral decline." We challenge the Canon to substantiate that statement by fully-attested facts and figures, and until he does so he must be accounted guilty of bearing false witness.

The Colonial and Continental Church Society held its annual meeting lately in the Cheltenham Town Hall. One of the speakers was the Rev. A. J. E. Harris Rivett (Wangaratta, Australia). This gentleman gave a dreadful account of his Christian fellow citizens out there. We take the following from the *Cheltenham Echo* report:—

"From his infancy onward he had always had it impressed on him that Britishers always elevated the people they came into contact with. But it was not so. When he looked at the past in Australia there were many black pages there the British nation were ashamed of to-day. And there were things happening there still that caused them to be ashamed of their own people. He did not wish to have harsh feelings, although they did feel these things very much out there. Didn't they think that there was something wrong with the Church at home when she sent out to these places all these people who so very quickly drifted into heathenism, and were guilty of doing things which would bring the blush on their cheeks if he were to mention them? Some of these were guilty of teaching the black people to commit sins which they would never think of doing in their own heathen state. The secular Government of one of the Colonies offered them several hundred acres of land for their work amongst the blacks, and promised to make their headminister their agent for the district for distributing food amongst the blacks. But this offer they could only accept on the promise that white people should be kept out of the district. They knew that if white people got in before them they would make the work twenty times more difficult."

This is a pretty character for Christian whites, who are worse than the heathen blacks. Will it be believed that, after telling these sad truths, the reverend gentleman proceeded to denounce Secular Education? He ought to have welcomed it with both hands.

Mr. Tolofree Parr, so well known as an evangelist, delivers the severest condemnation of Christianity imaginable. Christianity has been in England some fifteen hundred years. In other words, the omnipotent love of God in Christ has for that length of time been seeking to win this country. And yet, Mr. Parr informs us that this absolutely perfect and universal religion has yet to be tried in our land. That is the truth, however, and it is destined to be the truth to the end of time. The most ardent Atheist can say no more.

The Rev. J. Tolofree Parr says that Christianity is not "played out" because it is not yet "played in." The reverend gentleman hits the nail on the head. Christianity, as a religion, has always been a failure. Its ends have never been shaped by an omnipotent Divinity. But while that is



undoubtedly true, it is yet undeniable that Christianity is a more conspicuous failure to-day than it ever was before. Its disintegration is now proceeding with amazing swiftness. Even by many of its friends it is being gradually, though very politely, left behind.

At an after-service in Bloomsbury Chapel, the Rev. Thomas Phillips asked if there was one present who had conquered temptation without Christ. Of course, to this challenge there was no reply, and Mr. Phillips rejoiced. As a matter of fact, there are multitudes who successfully resist evil solicitations without Christ; but they are not likely to turn up at after-services in Bloomsbury Chapel. They put their leisure time to better use.

The Rev. Harry Bisseker, of the Leysian Mission, says that everyone who yields loving and unselfish obedience to Christ is a Christian. As no one does comply with that condition, there is not a single Christian anywhere. Obedience to Christ is a thing to talk about, not to practise. All the sayings of Jesus are so interpreted as to be in harmony with the actual life of twentieth century disciples. In other words, the Christian life is and always has been a complete farce.

Mr. H. Jeffs, a journalist and a Primitive Methodist local preacher, says that "men everywhere are hungry for the living Christ"; and yet, curiously enough, it is next to impossible to prevail upon these hungry men to accept Christ as their souls' food. But the hunger exists only in Mr. Jeffs' fertile imagination. It is the complaint of most preachers that the bulk of the people are religiously insensible and unconcerned.

The Church and Medical Union, meeting (O ye gods and little fishes!) at the Church House, Westminster, heard with pleasure that "the Bishop of London intended to appoint a joint committee of clergymen and doctors to investigate the question of spiritual healing." We suggest that they should begin with it in relation to cancer. But they won't. They know if they began there they would end there.

Lient.-Colonel J. S. Hepworth was present at that meeting. Is he a doctor or a parson? Or is he related to them as the gentleman was related to the Jew and the Christian, who said "the Jew's religion is in the Old Testament, and the Christian's in the New Testament, and mine is the blank leaf which is between them"? Anyhow, the Lieut.-Colonel said that "the Church has the gift of healing, but it has allowed it to slumber." Then the Church ought to be thoroughly ashamed of itself. Myriads of poor creatures suffering from dire diseases, and the men of God letting their gift of healing "rust in them unused." They ought to be warned to wake up, and if they don't a dozen of them should be taken out and shot "to encourage the others." In the course of time, if we kept the holy healers up to the scratch, we should have very cheap hospitals. The clergy would be able to heal us all. But as yet, alas, they can't even heal themselves. Look at the crowd of them at Bath, for instance, looking for health—and rich widows.

Another speaker at that prayer-and-physic meeting made the following announcement. "Two years ago," he declared, "I said I would not catch a cold, and I have never had one since." Well, he may have one next week. He shouldn't shout till he is a good deal farther out of the wood,—unless he is under the curious impression that average people have several colds in the course of every two years. We may also observe that this speaker's declaration may be perfectly true without being in the least degree mysterious. It is extremely probable that if he made up his mind not to have another cold he took care to run as little risk as possible. But that is not the prayer cure; it is the common sense cure.

The cat was let out of the bag by Police Commissioner Bingham, of New York, in a discussion on the "social evil." "To do anything with this question," he said, "you must call off the ministers. They mean well, but they are ignorant of the subject. A certain very distinguished man was the cause of more evil to this community in the last four years than any other factor." This is what we have always been saying in the *Freethinker*. The men of God spoil everything they touch, and very often the better they mean the more they spoil it. They are fastening on to the Socialist movement at present, and the leaders of that movement ought to adopt Commissioner Bingham's motto—"Call off the ministers."

The Bishop of London is a funny man. His salary is £10,000 a year, and he says he loses on his job; yet he is concerned about the small incomes of the "poor clergy," and wants see them raised—so that they may lose on their jobs too. His lordship—fancy a representative of the meek and lowly Jesus a lordship!—stated recently at St. Paul's Cathedral that "they had about 21,000 clergy altogether who were active workers, and of those 12,000 were earning not more than £150 a year, which was the wages of a mechanic." What sort of mechanic? His lordship must not fancy that skilled workmen average £3 a week in England. He can easily correct that impression by consulting the Board of Trade returns. But even if his figures were right, what is his grievance? If he thinks half those 12,000 clergymen, who get no more than £150 a year, could earn as much in the general labor market, he is very considerably mistaken. Besides, they are preachers of the gospel of poverty and renunciation—"Blessed be ye poor," "Woe unto you rich," "Take no thought for the morrow," "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth," etc., etc. Why should the preachers of such a gospel want more than £150 a year? They are hypocrites to ask it. And the Bishop of London is a bigger hypocrite to support them—from his lofty financial pedestal of nearly £200 a week.

Two more poor Christians have gone home to Jesus. Rev. Canon Henry William Maddy, of Woodfold, Down Hatherley, Gloucestershire, left £28,260. Rev. Richard Keeling, of Wrose Hill, Shipley, Yorkshire, left £11,157. These gentlemen kept out of heaven for 79 and 84 years respectively. We pinned both specimens down in one morning's newspaper.

"Money and Religion" was the heading of a column in the *Daily News* the other morning. The heading of the very next column was "Rev. R. J. Campbell's Appeal." Under it was a letter from this reverend gentleman soliciting public help for his religious enterprise. The New Theology has resulted thus far in nothing but the formation of "The League of Progressive Thought and Social Service." From 200 different towns this League has enrolled 3,000 subscribing members. These 3,000 members are apparently unable to keep their own league going. Mr. Campbell is allowed to appeal to the outside public for assistance. "Financial aid from sympathisers with our movement," he says, "will be specially welcome." No doubt. To this complexion they all come at last—in spite of the patronage of Jesus and the favor of the Almighty.

It is gravely reported that some of the men saved in the West Stanley Colliery sang hymns and prayed until they were rescued. Nearly five times as many perished through the explosion. Did none of them pray? And if prayer did not save them, how did it save the others? The fact is that the rescuers would have reached them just at the same moment if the entombed men had sung comic songs.

The Bishop of Durham left a convention of the clergy at York and went over to the scene of the pit explosion at West Stanley. He delivered "a touching little speech" to those gathered round. The touching little speech was merely the common pulpit platitudes on such occasions. The Bishop reminded them that the ways of God were inscrutable. Why they should have been afflicted with this visitation it was impossible to say. "We are," he observed, "in the hands of Providence; we must take things as they come with resignation and humility." After filling the poor listeners' mouths with this theological sawdust the Bishop went home, and probably filled his own mouth with something more tasty and nutritious.

Judge Lush-Wilson, K.C., County Court judge at Stonehouse, between Plymouth and Devonport, had a debtor before him named William J. Cobbledick, who raised a natural objection to being sent to prison on a committal order, on the ground that he had only had six weeks' work in eight months. He said he had written to the papers against the Torrey-Alexander mission, and had been a marked man ever since as the "atheist." The judge was "sorry to hear he was an atheist," and "hoped he would some day change his mind." The poor debtor said "it was a question of conscience." "Oh, no," the judge replied, "it cannot be conscience. You are laboring under a delusion." Why on earth will judges play the fool on the bench? Why don't they take Hamlet's advice to Polonius? Mr. Lush-Wilson evidently fancies that only persons of his own way of thinking have a conscience. We don't dispute his private right to such a fancy, but he ought not to take it into court with him. He should leave it in the anteroom with his overcoat.



### Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday, February 28, Town Hall, Birmingham: at 3, "God's Message to Messina"; at 7, "The Silence of the Tomb."

Tuesday, March 2, Dulwich Baths, Goose-green, East Dulwich: at 8, Public Meeting to protest against the expulsion of the *Freethinker* from the Free Libraries by the Camberwell Borough Council.

March 7 and 14, Queen's Hall, London; 21, Woolwich.

### To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—241 High-road, Leyton.—March 7, Woolwich; 14, Aberdare; 21, Forest Gate.

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

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £128 1s. Received since.—J. McMinn, 5s.; E. Smith, 2s. 6d.; J. Pruett, 10s.; S. Hudson, £1; F. D., 10s.; G. Smith, 5s.; R. D. Morris, £1 1s.; R. B. Harrison, 2s. 6d.; J. W. Repton, 2s.; J. Turnbull, 5s.; Anonymous, £5; Mr. and Mrs. Morton, £1; Tome (S. Africa), £1; G. F. H. McCluskey, £1 1s.

R. J. HENDERSON.—Pleased to hear your newsagent now takes the *Freethinker* himself and is trying to get others to do the same.

T. W. HOUGHTON.—Thanks for cuttings.

ANGLODEMOS.—Hardly worth your trouble; certainly not worth ours.

G. BRADFIELD.—We have only suspended, not dropped, the idea of visiting Cheltenham. We note that all the *Freethinkers* you know are anxious for us to come and speak. We like to hear readers say, as you do: "I scarcely know what I should do without the *Freethinker* every week. It seems an unspeakable relief to have got rid of the Christian dogmas."

J. KAY.—Pleased to hear from a new-found reader who looks forward to the *Freethinker* every week. Dr. Wallace's *Darwinism* is a fine all-round exposition, and you might read Baekkel's *Riddle of the Universe*, which is very much cheaper. Our *Bible Romances* and our *Book of God* would help you in another direction; also our *Bible Heroes*, of which a new edition will be published this spring.

F. D., subscribing to the President's Fund says. "I am a regular buyer of your paper and enjoy the reading of it very much. I wish you every success in your crusade against the Camberwell bigots."

MR. AND MRS. MORTON, subscribing to the President's Fund, write: "Best wishes for a speedy recovery, and long may you continue to have strength to fight the sky-pilots."

F. J. VOISEY.—A foolish judge. See paragraph.

J. W. REPTON.—Several of Nietzsche's books are translated into English; you had better read *them* than a book *about* them.

W. ALLDRIFT.—Glad you have always found this journal "cleaving and strengthening."

G. WHITEHEAD.—We will look through it.

A. REEVES.—We do our own work, and cannot undertake yours.

THE CAMBERWELL FIGHT: Collection at Mr. Foote's evening lecture at Glasgow, £1 14s.; E. Raggett, 4s.; Wm. Ellis, 1s.

W. P. BALL.—Thanks for useful cuttings.

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

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

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

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

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

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

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

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### Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote delivers to-day (Feb. 28) the fourth and last of the courses of lectures organised by the Birmingham N. S. S. Branch, under the financial auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd., in the great Birmingham Town Hall. His name and his subjects should attract very large meetings. There will be the usual good music by a first-class band for half an hour in front of the afternoon lecture, and three-quarters of an hour in front of the evening lecture. The Branch also provides at 4.45 p.m., in a large side-room, a tea at 6d. per bead for visitors from a distance. The local "saints" are looking forward to a glorious wind-up of this great experiment.

Mr. Foote strained a point to keep his Glasgow engagement on Sunday. He did not like to disappoint his friends and cause a serious collapse in the Branch program. But he was far from feeling well, and the lecturing and the long travelling were a heavy tax in the circumstances. He is back in the editorial chair on Tuesday, feeling rather tired, but otherwise no worse for the effort.

The Glasgow Branch meetings have suffered somewhat this season from the general trade depression, which has affected other Sunday meetings in the city still more detrimentally. Many people haven't the money to pay for seats at lectures, and others cannot afford the higher-priced seats. This will rectify itself in time, but in the meanwhile the Branch is glad of having laid by something for a rainy day. Mr. Foote's noon meeting was not quite up to his usual level, but the evening meeting was very crowded and very enthusiastic. The committee voluntarily collected at the door as the audience went out, and £1 14s. was dropped in the box towards the expenses of the Camberwell fight.

Glasgow "saints" will note that Mr. Lloyd delivers two lectures at the Secular Hall to-day (Feb. 28). We hope they will do their utmost, in spite of the trade depression, to secure him the large meetings he deserves.

Mr. Cohen delivered the last of the Kentish Town series of lectures on Sunday evening to a good audience. He struggled bravely against a very bad cold, and the meeting appreciated his courage, for he was looking very unwell. We trust he will have an opportunity of showing his true form on the same platform before long.

Readers of the *Freethinker* in South London will bear in mind the meeting arranged by the Free Speech Defence League to protest against the Borough Council's discriminating between different party papers in the Public Libraries. The meeting is to take place on Tuesday evening (March 2) at the Dulwich Public Baths, Goose-green, East Dulwich—the large hall of which is capable of holding two thousand people. Councillor Moss will take the chair at 8, and will be supported by Alderman Hearson, Councillors Ayres and Brooks, and possibly others. Mr. G. W. Foote will speak, together with Mr. C. Cohen, Mr. F. A. Davies, and possibly Mr. J. T. Lloyd. The doors will be open at 7.30, and we strongly invite all our South London friends to be in good time. We want a big meeting, a sympathetic meeting, and a thoroughly successful meeting. *Freethinkers* who will not bestir themselves on an occasion like this might as well join a Church.

There will be room, of course, for some *Freethinkers* from other parts of London. Any tramcar from the Embankment, Westminster, Blackfriars, or Southwark Bridge going to "Peckham Rye" will put them down outside the doors of Dulwich Baths.

Councillor F. J. Gould has once more asked the Education Committee at Leicester to accept the following resolution: "That this Committee approves of the principle of confining the instruction in public elementary schools to secular subjects." Five members voted for the resolution and fifteen against it. This looks like a bad defeat. But we regard it otherwise. The "five" is far more important than the "fifteen."

The *Northern Whig* is liberal enough to publish a long report of the Darwin Centenary meeting held by the Belfast Ethical Society. We hope the Society will pluck up courage to do some real propagandist work in that city. This is what Belfast really wants.

The next "social" under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive takes place at Anderton's Hotel on Thursday



evening, March 18. Members of the N. S. S. are admitted free, and are at liberty to introduce a friend. *Freethinker* readers, not members of the N. S. S., and unable to obtain an introduction by a member, yet wishing to be present, should apply for an admission card to the general secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, 2 Newcastle-street, E.C.

Woolwich Town Hall being refused to the Secularists on account of the success of the meetings they held there during the past two winters, a series of Sunday evening lectures has been arranged to take place in the Co-operative Institute, Parsons' Hill, on March 7, 14, and 21. Mr. Cohen starts this course, Mr. Lloyd continues it, and Mr. Foote winds it up. These lectures are under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd. We hope the local "saints" will work hard to make them a big success.

### At Sunset.

BY R. DE L. GALVANER,

Author of "Fireside Poems," "Sung in the Twilight,"  
"Songs of Liberty," etc., etc.

THE sunset glow is fading  
In the western skies away;  
The flame-lit clouds are changing  
Their hues to a softer grey,  
And the darkening sea is sighing  
The sigh of the dying day.

The rifted rocks rise nobly  
Above a purple tide;  
The salt sea-breeze blows softly  
Across the waters wide;  
And high in the dome of heaven  
The sea-birds bravely ride.

My soul is steeped in sunshine,  
Inspired with pure delight—  
A joy that is born of the splendor  
Which Nature reveals in light,  
The glowing robes of the summer,  
The glories of day and night.

A curse on the men who have driven  
The crowd to herd like swine,  
Pent in the reek of cities,  
Far from the odor of brine;  
Far from the wind and the sunlight  
That gladdens man's heart like wine.

Who lighted the sun's broad flame,  
What time the world was young?  
Who formed the nature of man  
As an instrument finely strung?  
Who lifted the stars into heaven,  
Like lamps in the ether hung?

The Omnipotent God, cries the preacher;  
God is the author of all.  
He reigns alone in the heavens,  
He hears the sea-birds' call;  
He knows the woes of the world,  
And marks e'en a sparrow's fall.

Does God indeed reign in heaven?  
Does He feel as a man may feel?  
Has He witnessed the strife of the ages?  
Does He look upon blood-stained steel,  
And view unmoved all the evil  
That only a God COULD heal?

Is all the world's sorrow before Him—  
Tears falling like pitiless rain!  
Does He see with the vision of God  
The anguish that maddens the brain?  
Sure, his soul must be blighted with horror,  
His heart must be broken with pain.

Or does Nature, out of herself—  
The Eternal, Unconscious, Sublime—  
Evolve all the forces of being,  
The men and the gods of each clime,  
The systems of suns, stars, and planets,  
The myst'ries of Life, Death, and Time?

As our conscience forbids us to commit actions which the conscience of the savage allows, so the moral sense of our successors will stigmatise as crimes those offences against the intellect which are sanctioned by ourselves.—*Winwood Reade.*

## Life and Opinions of Darwin.—VI.

(Continued from p. 123.)

THAT the universal belief in God proves his existence Darwin was unable to admit. "There is ample evidence," he says, "derived not from hasty travellers, but from men who have long resided with savages, that numerous races have existed, and still exist, who have no idea of one or more gods, and who have no words in their language to express such an idea." On the other hand, as he remarks in the same work—

"I am aware that the assumed instinctive belief in God has been used by many persons as an argument for his existence. But this is a rash argument, as we should thus be compelled to believe in the existence of many cruel and malignant spirits, only a little more powerful than man; for the belief in them is far more general than in a beneficent Deity."

Attention should here be called to a silent correction in the second edition of the *Descent of Man*. Referring to the question "whether there exists a Creator and Ruler of the universe," he said, "this has been answered in the affirmative by the highest intellects that have ever existed." This was altered into "some of the highest intellects." Darwin had discovered the inaccuracy of his first statement, and learnt that some of the highest intellects have been Atheists.

Two important passages must be extracted from his *Autobiography*. After remarking that the grandest scenes had no longer the power to make him feel that God exists, he answers the objection that he is "like a man who has become color-blind," which is a favorite one with conceited religionists.

"This argument would be a valid one if all men of all races had the same inward conviction of the existence of one God; but we know that this is very far from being the case. Therefore I cannot see that such inward convictions and feelings are of any weight as evidence of what really exists. The state of mind which grand scenes formerly excited in me, and which was intimately connected with a belief in God, did not essentially differ from that which is often called the sense of sublimity; and however difficult it may be to explain the genesis of this sense, it can hardly be advanced as an argument for the existence of God, any more than the powerful though vague and similar feelings excited by music."

Further on in the same piece of writing he deals with a second and very common argument of Theism.

"Another source of conviction in the existence of God, connected with reason, and not with the feelings, impresses me as having much more weight. This follows from the extreme difficulty, or rather utter impossibility of conceiving this immense and wonderful universe, including man with his capacity of looking far backwards and far into futurity, as the result of blind chance or necessity. When thus reflecting I feel compelled to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man. This conclusion was strong in my mind about the time, as far as I can remember, when I wrote the *Origin of Species*; and it is since that time that it has very gradually, with many fluctuations, become weaker. But then arises the doubt, can the mind of man, which has, as I fully believe, been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the lowest animals, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions?"

This handling of the matter may be somewhat consoling to Theists. One can hear them saying, "Ah, Darwin was not utterly lost." But let them see how he handles the matter in a letter to a Dutch student (April 2, 1873).

"I may say that the impossibility of conceiving that this grand and wondrous universe, with our conscious selves, arose through chance, seems to me the chief argument for the existence of God; but whether this is an argument of real value I have never been able to decide. I am aware that if we admit a first cause, the mind still craves to know whence it came, and how it arose. Nor can I overlook the difficulty from the immense amount of suffering through the world. I am also induced to defer to a certain extent to the judgment of the many able men who have fully believed in



God; but here again I see how poor an argument this is. The safest conclusion seems to me that the whole subject is beyond the scope of man's intellect; but man can do his duty."

"Man can do his duty"—a characteristic touch! The man who said this did *his* duty. His scientific achievements were precious, but they were matched by his lofty and benevolent character.

Darwinism has killed the Design argument, by explaining adaptation as a result without assuming design as a cause. The argument indeed, like all "proofs" of God's existence, was based upon ignorance. It was acutely remarked by Spinoza, in his great majestic manner, that man knows that he wills, but knows not the causes which determine his will. Out of this ignorance the theologians manufactured their chaotic doctrine of free-will. Similarly, out of ignorance of the *causes* of the obvious adaptations in nature, they manufactured their plausible Design argument. The "fitness of things" was indisputable, and as it could not be explained scientifically, the theologians trotted out their usual dogma of "God did it."

Professor Huxley tells us that physical science has created no fresh difficulties in theology. "Not a solitary problem," he says, "presents itself to the philosophical Theist, at the present day, which has not existed from the time that philosophers began to think out the logical grounds and theological consequence of Theism." While in one respect true, the statement is liable to mislead. Adaptation presents no *new* problem—that is undeniable; but the scientific explanation of it cuts away the ground of all teleology. "The teleology," says Huxley, "which supposes that the eye, such as we see it in man, or one of the higher vertebrata, was made for the precise structure it exhibits, for the purpose of enabling the animal which possesses it to see, has undoubtedly received its death-blow." Yet he bids us remember that "there is a wider teleology which is not touched by the doctrine of Evolution, but is actually based upon the fundamental proposition of Evolution. This proposition is that the whole world, living and not living, is the result of the mutual interaction, according to definite laws, of the powers possessed by the molecules of which the primitive nebulosity of the universe was composed."

Theologians in search of a life-buoy in the scientific storm have grasped at this chimerical support, although the wiser heads amongst them may doubt whether Professor Huxley was serious in tendering it. Surely if eyes were not made to see with the Design argument is dead. What is the use of saying that the materialist is still "at the mercy of the teleologist, who can always defy him to disprove that the primordial molecular arrangement was not intended to evolve the phenomena of the universe"? The very word "arrangement" gives the teleologist all he requires, and the implied assumption that we are "at the mercy" of anyone who makes an assertion which is incapable of proof, simply because he "defies" us to disprove it, is a curious ineptitude on the part of such a vigorous thinker.

When, in 1879, Darwin was consulted by a German student, a member of his family replied for him as follows:—"He considers that the theory of Evolution is quite compatible with belief in God; but that you must remember that different persons have different definitions of what they mean by God." Precisely so. You may believe in God if you define him so as not to contradict facts; in other words, you have a right to a Deity if you choose to construct one. This is perfectly harmless, but what connection has it with the "philosophy" of Theism? There is no definition of God which does *not* contradict facts. Why, indeed, is theology full of mystery? Simply because it is full of *impasses*, where dogma and experience are in hopeless collision, and where we are exhorted to abnegate our reason and accept the guidance of faith.

Darwin's attitude towards the Design argument is definite enough for such a cautious thinker. In one of his less popular, but highly important works, the

first edition of which appeared in 1868, he went out of his way to deal with it. After using the simile of an architect, who should rear a noble and commodious edifice, without the use of cut stone, by selecting stones of various shapes from the fragments at the base of a precipice; he goes on to say that these "fragments of stone, though indispensable to the architect, bear to the edifice built by him the same relation which the fluctuating varieties of organic beings bear to the varied and admirable structures ultimately acquired by their modified descendants." The shape of the stones is not accidental, for it depends on geological causes, though it may be said to be accidental with regard to the use they are put to.

"Here we are led to face a great difficulty, in alluding to which I am aware that I am travelling beyond my proper province. An omniscient Creator must have foreseen every consequence which results from the laws imposed by Him. But can it be reasonably maintained that the Creator intentionally ordered, if we use the words in any ordinary sense, that certain fragments of rock should assume certain shapes so that the builder might erect his edifice? If the various laws which have determined the shape of each fragment were not predetermined for the builder's sake, can it be maintained with any greater probability that He specially ordained for the sake of the breeder each of the innumerable variations in our domestic animals and plants;—many of these variations being of no service to man, and not beneficial, far more often injurious, to the creatures themselves? Did He ordain that the crop and tail-feathers of the pigeon should vary in order that the fancier might make his grotesque pouter and fantail breeds? Did he cause the frame and mental qualities of the dog to vary in order that a breed might be formed of indomitable ferocity, with jaws fitted to pin down the bull for man's brutal sport? But if we give up the principle in one case,—if we do not admit that the variations of the primeval dog were intentionally guided in order that the greyhound, for instance, that perfect image of symmetry and vigor, might be formed,—no shadow of reason can be assigned for the belief that variations, alike in nature and the result of the same general laws, which have been the groundwork through natural selection of the formation of the most perfectly adapted animals in the world, man included, were intentionally guided. However much we may wish it, we can hardly follow Professor Asa Gray in his belief "that variation has been led along certain beneficial lines," like a stream "along definite and useful lines of irrigation." If we assume that each particular variation was from the beginning of all time preordained, then that plasticity of organisation, which leads to many injurious deviations of structure, as well as the redundant power of reproduction which inevitably leads to a struggle for existence, and, as a consequence, to the natural selection or survival of the fittest, must appear to us superfluous laws of nature. On the other hand, an omnipotent and omniscient Creator ordains everything and foresees everything. Thus we are brought face to face with a difficulty as insoluble as that of free will and predestination."

Darwin protested that this had met with no reply. What reply, indeed, is possible? Design covers everything or nothing. If the bulldog was not designed, what reason is there for supposing that man was designed? If there is no design in an idiot, how can there be design in a philosopher?

The *Life and Letters* contains many passages less elaborate but more pointed. Here is one.

"The old argument from design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been discovered. We can no longer argue that, for instance, the beautiful hinge of a bivalve shell must have been made by an intelligent being like the hinge of a door by man. There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings, and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows."

The fit survive, the unfit perish; and the theologian is eloquent on the successes, and silent on the failures. He marks the hits and forgets the misses. Were nature liable to human penalties she would have been dishd long ago; but she works with infinite time and infinite resources, and therefore cannot become bankrupt.



Here is a passage from a letter to Miss Julia Wedgwood (July 11, 1861) on the occasion of her article in *Macmillan*.

"The mind refuses to look at this universe, being what it is without having been designed; yet, where one would most expect design, namely, in the structure of a sentient being, the more I think the less I can see proof of design."

This reminds one of a pregnant utterance of another master-mind. Cardinal Newman said he should be an Atheist if it were not for the voice speaking in his conscience, and exclaimed—"If I looked into a mirror, and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which comes upon me when I look into this living busy world, and see no reflection of its Creator."

Here is another passage from a letter (July, 1860) to Dr. Asa Gray.

"One word more on 'designed laws' and 'undesigned results.' I see a bird which I want for food, take my gun and kill it. I do this *designedly*. An innocent and good man stands under a tree and is killed by a flash of lightning. Do you believe (and I really should like to hear) that God *designedly* killed this man? Many or most persons do believe this; I can't, and don't. If you believe so, do you believe when a swallow snaps up a gnat that God designed that that particular swallow should snap up that particular gnat at that particular instant? I believe that the man and the gnat are in the same predicament. If the death of neither man nor gnat is designed, I see no reason to believe that their *first* birth or production should be necessarily designed."

Twenty years later, writing to Mr. W. Graham, the author of the *Creed of Science*, Darwin said: "There are some points in your book which I cannot digest. The chief one is that the existence of so-called natural laws implies purpose. I cannot see this."

During the last year of his life a very interesting conversation took place between Darwin and the Duke of Argyll. Here is the special part in the Duke's own words:—

"In the course of that conversation I said to Mr. Darwin, with reference to some of his own remarkable words on 'Fertilisation of Orchids' and upon 'The Earthworms,' and various other observations he made of the wonderful contrivances for certain purposes in nature—I said it was impossible to look at these without seeing that they were the effect and the expression of mind. He looked at me very hard and said, 'Well, that often comes over me with overwhelming force; but at other times,' and he shook his head vaguely, adding, 'it seems to go away.'"

This is a remarkable story, and the point of it is in the words "it seems to go away." There is nothing extraordinary in the fact that Darwin, who was a Christian till thirty and a Theist till fifty, should sometimes feel a billow of superstition sweep over his mind. The memorable thing is that at other times his free intellect could not harbor the idea of a God of Nature. The indications of mind in the constitution of the universe were not obvious to the one man living who had studied it most profoundly. Belief in the supernatural could not harmonise, in Darwin's mind, with the facts and conclusions of science. The truth of Evolution entered it and gradually took possession. Theology was obliged to leave, and although it returned occasionally, and roamed through its old dwelling, it only came as a visitor, and was never more a resident.

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

the logician, since "mystery" is only a contradiction between the facts and the hypothesis, and the theologian can hardly expect to be saved by what is virtually a plea of "Guilty."

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

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

## Astronomy and God.

BY OTTO WETTSTEIN.

WHEN Galileo invented the telescope he unwittingly produced the grand factor of civilisation destined not only to reveal to the world the superlative glory of infinite Nature, but also to banish eventually all the gods, devils, and lesser spooks from the universe. Theories over which the world has been divided to bitterness and bloodshed shall vanish, and facts and truths, conceded by all nations and races alike, will bring the peace and happiness of a civilisation we all hope for.

It was natural and so easy in the days of the cave-men, when their chief or fakir was called upon to explain the mysteries surrounding them, to people the air with an almighty spook to explain all they did not understand. All primitive races, being alike ignorant, all naturally solved the problem in similar manner. Nobody had been "up there in the sky," nobody could know, nobody could deny or had a better explanation. Densest ignorance concerning the natural operations of Nature and the potentiality of matter prevailed.

If the God-myths had not originated them and been taught and promulgated by scheming charlatans as authoritative law and gospel, intelligent people would have no Gods to-day. The revelations of science and of our giant telescopes, sweeping from mountain-tops in every portion of the world, through boundless expanse, have removed the dense web of mystery enshrouding Nature, and revealed the same to us in all its stupendous vastness and bewildering reality, making all the God-myths appear not only childish and absurd, but such being absolutely impossible in the realms of Nature.

Theism originated when this hypothesis was considered a logical necessity to explain Nature and life. Now, when we know that all phenomena are the necessary result and spontaneous product of Nature's own constituents, the idea must be abandoned—the need of a God gone, the idea explodes.

I will now enumerate a few facts established by the latest data of science and corroborated by the most prominent astronomers of all countries. If you will follow me carefully you will have a true and realistic conception of the vast system of Nature as it really is, so you can decide for yourself if it is reasonable to believe that a personal living God can occupy infinitude of space pre-occupied by countless millions of incandescent, flying, whirling cosmic bodies, most of them so stupendous in size and of such extreme degree of heat that if our little pigmy of a globe would approach one of them even within a million of miles, it would vanish—its 1,500,000,000 vain and foolish "immortal souls" included—like a snowflake falling on a blast furnace.

The earth looks big to man. It is a pebble compared to the sun, but the sun, among other suns, is smaller comparatively than a grain of sand on the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

Our earth, which is of such great importance to us, is about 8,000 miles in diameter, but our sun is 865,000 miles in diameter. Yet there is the little star Arcturus which is a sun 94,000,000 miles in diameter. Can you now realise the insignificance of the little orb we occupy? It would take 1,300,000 bodies like the earth to equal our sun, but 1,500,000 such suns are required to equal the giant sun Arcturus. The sun is only 95,000,000 miles away, but this monster star is 11,500,000 times further off in space.

Sirius, the dog-star, is fifty-eight thousand billions of miles away from us. Polaris, the north-star, two hundred and ten thousand billions of miles, or 2,318,000 times the distance of the earth from the sun. Think of it! The sun is 95,000,000 miles away, but this enormous body of molten fire is off 2,318,000 times further.

What are the stars that people these awful depths of space? They are suns, countless millions of them, all gigantic, seething masses of fire, whirling and sweeping



within their orbits with a velocity entirely beyond human comprehension—our sun merely a spark in an infinite shower of sparks.

Where is God? Think of meeting, seeing, or communicating or praying to a God whose "other parts are countless millions of miles off in space among this shower of sparks composed of the colossal cosmic bodies described.

There is nothing to indicate a limit to the number of solar systems. One of them is 426 trillions of miles away. Since space and the number of these giant cosmic bodies are infinite, there can, of course, not be a most distant star.

We can think of a limited universe no more than of limited time and space. It must be infinite and eternal because the antithetical postulate is absurd.

These are the latest absolutely authentic revelations of Galileo's great invention concerning the universe of which we and our handful of rock and clay are so infinitesimal a part. Can the Church reconcile them with the revelations according to Moses and the prophets? If we but approximately grasp these wonderful, awe-inspiring facts of Nature we become Atheistic, all gods vanish and old Genesis is relegated to the category of fairy-tales.

If a worm, crawling at our feet, could think and imagine this world and all it contains was made for him, it would be no more ridiculous than for us to believe that on "the fourth day" a personal God, "walking in the garden," then and there made our sun, and "the stars also," to "give light upon the earth," placed them in their respective localities billions and trillions of miles off in space, without scorching a single hair on his head, then complacently creating whales and other "creeping things" the next day!

—Searchlight.

### The Fallacy of Self-Sacrifice.

To abstain from a thing is not self-sacrifice, but a question of utility. The abuse of the word "sacrifice" is an ingenious device of the religious to link together religion and conduct—the dead and the living. To sacrifice means literally to make a *saerum*, and practically to cut a pig's throat—or a long-pig's—and eat the result. What connection there may be between that and for a person with a moderate talent for sculpture and medicine (say) to devote himself, for lack of time, to the cultivation of one talent, to the exclusion of the other, is not clear at first sight.

Some light is thrown upon the artificial connection by the following. When the Atys cannibal sacrifice was watered down the priests of Atys, in default of it, unsexed themselves with a knife or a stone. In the Mass a further watering down took place: the priest did not cut himself, but renounced matrimony; and a fiction was invented that such a priest, by means of his continency, could work a miracle at the sacrifice of the Mass and, by turning the bread into human flesh, restore the cannibal sacrifice to all its pristine glory and perfection.

A further watering down took place at the so-called Reformation; the pleasures of the flesh were to be renounced in order to make sure of the pleasures of paradise after death. A last watering down occurred when the humanitarians insisted upon the self-sacrifice being made not to have a good time of it after death, but to make other people happy in this life.

When religion condemned the simple and natural pleasures of the senses, everyone devoted himself to money-making as a substitute and diversion, and this Western religion has practically approved as a sort of counter-irritant to the fleshly lusts, etc. That Western religion makes a somewhat unnecessary fuss about, without, however, really renouncing them behind the altar and down the back stairs. Thus a person's property has come to be looked upon almost as himself, and the gift by a rich person of a sum of money in charity as an act of self-sacrifice. It is really, however, nothing of the kind, because money only possesses any sort of value in being spent; consequently if a person's money represents himself, the real self-sacrificer is the person who shuts up his money in a strong box, and he purchases love and popularity by his act who spends it wisely upon others.

Even here, however, Christianity has tried to retain the sacrificial element by ordering its dupes to send their subscriptions anonymously: as an English apologist puts it, to "do good by stealth and blush to find it fame." It is not quite clear why people ought to act in this way, except that Christians seem always to have made a merit of mean, underhand, and hypocritical modes of action. Moreover, it is practically impossible to carry out the injunction. How, for instance, can a millionaire endow or create a University under a bushel?

When Christians do a generous action it is always marred by being partly done to save the recipient's soul, to bring

him to Jesus and fit him for heaven; in plain words, to gratify the giver's religious vanity by bullying the recipient into his own way of thinking. In fact, until Christians renounce their superstition, they can never rise to the level of the Chinese, who are generous for the sake of good-fellowship and for the pleasure of doing the right thing.

Religion and authority (except the minimum required to keep society together) are the two chief obstacles to the diffusion of wealth by the exercise of the social emotions and the free use of the intellect; when, as is nearly always the case, they insist upon and deify the anti-social instincts (collective murder, militarism, etc.), to the exclusion of their opposites, and ban free thought and investigation, they become a public nuisance, and ought to be vigorously suppressed by general consent.

W. W. STRICKLAND, B.A.

Beliefs we may and must have, but a belief to be changed with new and advancing knowledge impedes no progress, while a creed subscribed to as ultimate truth and sworn to be defended, not only puts a bar to further research, but, as a consequence, throws the odium of distrust on all that may seem to oppose it. Even when such odium cannot deter, it annoys and irritates; hence the frequent unwillingness of men of science to come prominently forward with the avowal of their beliefs. It is time this delicacy were thrown aside, and such theologians plainly told that the scepticism and infidelity—if scepticism and infidelity there be—lies all on their own side. There is no scepticism so offensive as that which doubts the facts of honest and careful observation,—no infidelity so gross as that which disbelieves the deductions of competent and unbiased judgments.—David Page.

### A Voice from Africa.

DEAR MR. FOOTE,—Rather late I beg to enclose a cheque for one guinea for the President's Honorarium Fund, and as I have forgotten to whom it should really be addressed, I have no doubt you will not mind my addressing it to you personally. I have been a reader of the *Freethinker* for just over a year now, and can assure you I have derived much pleasure and instruction from it. It surprises me to hear that it does not pay its way; there must be enough Freethinkers in Britain to give the paper a good circulation. Surely there is not such a thing as a Freethinker who does not buy the paper.

The few small notes which have appeared lately touching upon the question of missionaries in Africa have been of interest to me. There is, in my opinion, not the slightest doubt that the native who has been "converted" is, as a rule, the biggest rogue imaginable; and I don't think there is a merchant out here, and very few Government officials, who would not much rather deal with the most primitive savage than with a native "Christian." And some of the missionaries themselves—oh, Lor', ignorance and arrogance personified; an oyster would be able to assimilate all the instruction they would be capable of imparting. One of these worthies (missionaries—not oysters) once asked me, with an expression of pity on his face, "Surely you don't really believe that man has descended from monkeys?" He looked quite relieved when I assured him I didn't. I thought it would have been a waste of time telling him what I did believe.

With best wishes for your health,

I remain, yours sincerely,

Lokoja, Northern Nigeria.

R. D. MORRIS.

### Obituary.

By the death of Mr. George Felix Finn, of Canterbury, which occurred on February 14, Freethought has lost a faithful adherent and assiduous missionary. Mr. Finn availed himself of every opportunity to render the cause a service, chiefly by the wise distribution of suitable literature. He was a man of sterling character, held in highest esteem by all who knew him. He was an enthusiast for all kinds of sport, and served as handicapper for many years. His generosity to the sick and the poor was a proverb. He had arranged for a Secular funeral, which took place on Friday, February 19, and was very largely attended. A Secular burial service was almost a thing unknown in the cathedral city, and many were curious to know what it was like. Mr. J. T. Lloyd officiated as representative of the National Secular Society.



## 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.

DULWICH BATHS (Goose-green, East Dulwich): Tuesday, March 2, at 8, public meeting of protest against the expulsion of the *Freethinker* from the Free Libraries by the Camberwell Borough Council.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Forest Gate Public (Lower) Hall, Woodgrange-road): 7.30, E. C. Saphin, "Christianity a Moral Fraud and Social Failure." Selections by the Band.

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Alma Hall, 335 High-road, N., three doors from Commerce-road): 7, N. J. Evans, "Reminiscences of an Ex-Deacon."

### COUNTRY.

TOWN HALL (Birmingham): G. W. Foote, 3, "God's Message to Messina"; 7, "The Silence of the Tomb."

FALLSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, Councillor C. Higham, "The Industrial Revolution."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): J. T. Lloyd, 12 noon, "Is Man a Machine? Sin and Its Punishment"; 6.30, "God, Man, and the Devil."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, "Agnostic," "Saviors of Mankind."

NEWCASTLE (Rationalist Literary and Debating Society, Hedley's Café, corner of Clayton and Blakett streets): 7.30, D. R. Bow, "Some Recollections of the Early Freethought Movement."

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