

THE Freethinker

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All philosophy must be loved and lived. Think about living.—GOETHE.

A Few Questions.

SOMEONE has been good enough to send me a couple of pamphlets of a somewhat unusual description. They form numbers one and two of a series written by a Mr. W. Starkey, who, whatever else he may be, is not deficient in a sense of his own abilities. The series is entitled the *Reconciler*, and since receiving these pamphlets I have seen them advertised, with the announcement that they will answer every objection that can be put by Freethinker or Atheist. The program is a comprehensive one, and the author is not likely to find time hang heavy on his hands. I feel, too, that a man who sets out with the object of meeting every objection to Christianity that a Freethinker might raise would not wish his work to be in any sense incomplete. It is, therefore, in a spirit of brotherly co-operation that I suggest a few questions that may be dealt with in future numbers of the *Reconciler*.

And first of all, why is a reconciliation necessary? Facts have a way of reconciling themselves one to the other. If the Christian religion contains nothing but the truth, it should by this time have quite worn down all opposition. A newly discovered fact does often seem to be in conflict with other facts already in our possession; but in a little the new fact settles with the old ones, and everything is harmoniously adjusted. But the Christian religion never has been reconciled to the facts we possess. Each generation has noted the want of harmony, and Christians have admitted it by setting up the plea of "mystery," which is really a plea of guilty. Any one truth will reconcile itself to all other truths; it is only a pseudo-truth or a lie that needs a labored reconciliation with truth, and then at best it is not peace that is secured, but a mere cessation of hostilities.

Numbers one and two of the *Reconciler* are both concerned with the Bible, which leads one to ask, Why was any revelation necessary? All that we know in any of the physical sciences has been achieved without the assistance of a revelation. All our numerous inventions are due to unaided human capacity. Man, unaided, could discover the constituents of distant stars, measure and weigh the earth he stands on, discover and harness to his service obscure natural forces, plumb the depths of the ocean, and gauge the heights of towering mountains. What he could not discover without revelation, we are asked to believe, was that it is better to tell the truth than a lie, better to be kind than cruel, better to be honest than to steal. Perhaps Mr. Starkey will explain why, if man could do so much without revelation, he could not have managed just a little more, and done without it altogether?

A dependable and all-round revelation would be, of course, exceedingly useful. A book or a person to whom one could go for absolutely reliable revelation would be something for which to be grateful. But when we turn to those who have depended upon the Christian revelation we find nothing but blundering,

or worse. The people who depended upon it for their knowledge in astronomy were at fault. Those who went to it for information on geology were in error. Its history had to be corrected by knowledge acquired from other sources. People went to it for instruction in morals, and the result was witch-burning, heresy-hunting, and a general distortion of man's moral vision. Really this revelation has misdirected men in every direction where misdirection was possible; while to-day it is only held to be accurate on subjects concerning which proof or disproof is in the nature of the case impossible.

Mr. Starkey would reply that this was due to man's misreading of revelation. But the first duty of a revelation is that it shall reveal. It must be given in such a manner that those for whose benefit it is given will understand its meaning. A deliverance that contains a message so elaborately hidden that after many centuries of study no one can be quite sure they have discovered it, is not a revelation—it is more like a cryptogram. A sign-post on a country road that every traveller reads differently would not be fulfilling its legitimate function; and a revelation that gives a different message to each is one that the world might get on very well without.

Now for one or two other queries. The belief in religion, it is said, is universal. Personally, I believe it is; it is only in accordance with the theory of evolution that it should be so. I believe that so soon as humanity is capable of reasoning it elaborates a religion, and, provided it continues to reason on the matter, it ultimately gets rid of it again. But is the universality of religious belief an argument for its validity? Is it not, on the contrary, an argument against its truth? The belief in God and a future life are, we are often assured, of the most abstruse character. Granted; but is it likely that savages should so universally have reached the truth on questions of this description, while on other questions—questions of a much simpler character—they were so universally in error? Savages are in error in their ideas concerning the nature and causes of all those natural events concerning which knowledge is at least obtainable. They were, it seems, absolutely right on the one subject on which knowledge is unobtainable.

My next question is to ask how comes it that, notwithstanding the antiquity and widespread nature of the belief in a deity and in a future life, no one has ever yet brought forward a generally acknowledged fact in support of either? The search for the philosopher's stone or for the elixir of life is as nothing compared with the attention paid to the belief in God and a future life. For at least two thousand years writers and speakers have taxed their ingenuity to the utmost to find evidence in their support. But, in spite of this, no one has ever discovered a single acknowledged fact in support of either belief, no one has ever produced even an argument that would command a general assent. Both remain pure speculations. Why is this so? Why is it that, in spite of all the ingenuity expended on these beliefs, they remain absolutely unrelated to the positive knowledge we possess?

Next as to miracles. Miracles, says the Christian, do not happen now; they did occur once, but that time has passed. But is there not as great a necessity now for miracles than ever existed? The world

is still, religiously, desperately wicked. Unbelief grows instead of diminishing, and a single strong, able-bodied miracle would do more to secure conviction than any number of lectures or pamphlets. And why believe that miracles did once occur? Does not a study of the facts show that the belief in miracles always co-exists with ignorance of the principle of natural causation? As one grows the other declines. Does not this make miracles a substitute instead of an objective phenomena? They are not subjects of historical investigation, but of psychological study. Given a certain undeveloped state of mind, and the belief in miracle is a necessary result. Allow for further mental development, and belief in the miraculous becomes an impossibility. And if miracle goes, what becomes of the belief in a particular providence, without which religion is of little value to anybody?

When Mr. Starkey has dealt with these questions, he may next grapple with a group concerning the relation of Christianity to civilisation. Why is it that before its advance the ancient civilisations perished? Admitting pagan civilisation was decaying when Christianity appeared, what did Christianity do to check the decay? Why was it that all that was good in the old civilisations perished, and that civilisation received the strongest checks in just those countries where Christianity was least questioned? Or, again, is it not a fact that wherever any form of Christianity has exerted supreme power deplorable results have followed? Protestants assert this of Catholics, Catholics assert it of Protestants, Dissenters of Episcopalians, and Episcopalians of Dissenters. May it not be that they are all correct on this point, and that it always needs a strongly developed *secular* power to keep Christian aggressiveness in check? Certainly the most progressive nations in the world are those in which Christian teachings are most questioned, while the least progressive are those in which Christian beliefs are held in the most unquestioning manner.

Finally, a couple of questions on morals. What is the relation of religion to morality? Does it stand in the relation of cause and effect? Surely not. People belonging to different religious creeds, with nothing in common save calling themselves religious, show a surprising uniformity of conduct. The same fundamental virtues and vices are everywhere displayed; and if people belonging to one religion have a greater development of one particular virtue than the followers of another religion, it is just as likely that they have some particular vice more developed likewise. And those who are outside of all religion are at least not worse, even though we grant they are not better, than their religious fellow citizens. And both sets of facts are fatal to the belief that morality is based on religion.

Or is it to be said that while morality is in origin independent of religion, it is dependent upon religious conviction for driving power? That religious conviction, in common with conviction in general, incites to action, no one will deny. But that religious conviction acts as a specifically moral incentive no one, who properly considers the subject, will affirm. First of all there is the indisputable fact that religious conviction has never, in the whole of human history, been found to be inconsistent with the greatest cruelty and barbarity. When we read or hear of cruel customs among uncivilised people, it is not always borne in mind that these customs have their roots in religious conviction. Savages, in their natural state, are not, on the whole, unkindly folk, and when we find brutal customs among them we are fairly safe in looking for their association with religious beliefs. And when in the normal course of things the development of the social and sympathetic feelings make for the abolition of such customs, it is religion that operates to keep them alive longer than would otherwise be the case. So, too, in more civilised life, cases in which religion enters almost invariably display greater brutality than is evident in cases where it is absent. In ordinary warfare, for example, one reads of many

instances where the soldiers of either side, during a truce, or in the pause between battles, fraternising. But whoever heard of such a case in any war where religious conviction played a strong part? So, also, in the thirty years' war, or in the wars in Ireland during the seventeenth century, it may be held that in each case religious conviction caused men to fight with the utmost determination; but it is also true that it added a brutality that would not otherwise have been present. "How these Christians love one another" has for long been a stock comment upon the malignity of Christian feeling towards sectarian rivals, and although of late years there has been some weakening in this direction, religion still gives birth to a much greater degree of ill feeling and active malevolence than anything else we know of.

Here, then, are a few questions for Mr. Starkey to deal with in future issues of the *Reconciler*. They are not by any means exhaustive, although they may, fairly faced, exhaust Mr. Starkey's powers of reconciliation. And when he has dealt with them, if he ever does, I shall not be at all averse to supplying him with a few more.

C. COHEN.

Some Common Mistakes.

IT is customary, in certain quarters, to speak of Christianity and civilisation as if they were synonymous terms. The two are represented as being, not merely spatially coterminous, but also practically identical. Very often do Christian ministers exclaim, "Civilisation is an irrefutable demonstration of the divinity of our religion." To everyone who thinks this is a self-evident mistake. The connection between civilisation and religion is the slightest conceivable. It would be more correct to say that the civilisation of Europe has invariably been in advance of its religion, or that it has developed in spite of Christianity. There are many divines who go the length of conceding that our existing civilisation is not Christian, or, as the President of the Wesleyan Conference puts it, that "a truly Christian civilisation" is a thing of the future, the indispensable conditions of which the Churches are exhorted to create. Now, if Christianity and civilisation are convertible terms, the latter cannot be described as a future blessing unless it is admitted that the former has been a colossal failure. On the other hand, if the present civilisation of Christendom is not Christian, what has Christianity been doing during the last nineteen hundred years? And if Christianity has failed to produce its own civilisation in the past, what guarantee is there that it will do so in the future? It is a demonstrable fact that the Church has never yet initiated any social reforms; but it has always been particularly fond of annexing such movements when they were sufficiently powerful to be a menace to its predominance, and of afterwards glorying in them as if they were of its own origination. As a matter of fact, the Church has generally been an obstacle against which civilisation has had to contend; and it has never ceased to be an obstacle until discretion became the better part of valor.

At the present time the Protestant Church is posing as a Divinely-appointed agent of civilisation. Having just discovered that Socialism has become a popular movement outside its borders, it realises that it must either absorb Socialism, or be absorbed by it; and in either case, absorption would mean annihilation. "This movement makes demands upon us," say the preachers, "and these demands we must closely examine." But this is a delusion of the preachers. The social movement of the age made no demands upon them, did not even recognise them or their doings. It was they who laid their hands upon and appropriated the movement in the hope of prolonging their own existence, not the movement that appealed to them for succoring sympathy and affiliation. And yet, judging by the utterances of the pulpit and the religious press one would be led

to infer that had there been no Church there would have been no social movement. The truth is, however, that whether Socialism be a good or a bad thing, it is certainly not a Christian product. What Christianity has always aimed at setting up is the Kingdom of God, not the Brotherhood of Man, a Divine Monarchy, not a Human Democracy.

We are told by the *Methodist Times* that the present outlook "kindles enthusiasm in sympathetic hearts, and especially among the vast body of Christian workers who are brought face to face with the appalling problems of unemployment and destitution, to deal with the underlying causes of social misery and wrong, instead of with its mere symptoms and effects, to substitute righteousness for charity"; but this is the enthusiasm of humanity, not of the Christian creed. In the New Testament righteousness and charity are equally extolled, and it never occurred either to Jesus or to any of his apostles that the one was inconsistent with the other. The central "point" in the Christian teaching is the blessedness of poverty; and the poor exist for the very purpose of affording the rich a glorious opportunity of winning a high place in heaven by doling out charity to them. Throughout its history hitherto the Church has dealt with "symptoms and effects" rather than with "underlying causes," with the inevitable result that society is further away from its ideal estate to-day than it was before Christianity was first introduced.

The *Methodist Times* expresses a great truth when it states that "ultimately the escape from all these difficulties can only be by the moral worth of the people," and that "incidental mistakes may be corrected, if such be made, provided the national character suffers no vital deterioration." But our contemporary is mistaken when it affirms that the "moral worth" of the people is dependent on "the adequacy of religious inspiration." That is an utterly groundless and unverifiable assertion. It is a notorious fact that high religious inspiration and moral worth have never been related to each other as cause and effect. It is incontestable that the former has often flourished exceedingly in the well-nigh total absence of the latter. Benvenuto Cellini is only one among thousands of historical examples of the truth of this statement. Almost every one of us has come across scores, if not hundreds of such cases.

The writer of the leading article in the *Methodist Times* for March 4 has a high opinion of science as long as it keeps within limits. He goes so far as to grant that "the scientific objection to the intrusion of theological and metaphysical assumptions, where exact investigation is required, is certainly justified"; but we are warned that "when science has completed its legitimate task all its results must be reviewed in the light of spiritual consciousness." Thus the theologian is superior to the scientist, and, unless the discoveries of the latter commend themselves to the "spiritual consciousness" of the former, they stand eternally condemned. Science proudly declines to be thus bound and judged. It flatly refuses to say "By your leave" to theology. The scientist is in search of facts, from which his doctrines are but so many legitimate deductions.

Equally unreliable are this writer's observations on "political and economical principles." These principles, he tells us, are important, but mankind should not be governed by them. The politician and the economist are "abstractions" and "useful fictions of the imagination, and no more." Poor things; how they will appreciate the refined compliment, and humbly take a back seat. They are not even real ghosts, but simply illusions of the mind. The only real man is he who is governed by "spiritual motives," and to whom the spiritual world is all in all. Then the writer proceeds thus:—

"Once eliminate religion in thought or practice from the progress of mankind, and there are left political and economic risks which may well stagger cautious minds. The alternative is then either slowly to perish

by decay, and by fear to grapple with the wrong, or to be ruined by the catastrophes of unwise and self-willed change. Let the Christian religion fail in its influence or in its progressive sympathies, and one or other of these evils will be upon us."

That is an ingenious way of wrongly stating the case. The lessons of the past are completely lost upon this writer. The present prevalence of "social wrong" is chiefly due to the influence of the Christian religion, or to its lack of interest in the problems of the life that now is. Now that the masses of the people have lost faith in the life that is to come, and are beginning to concentrate their attention upon this world and its multifarious affairs, the Church is awaking to the fact that unless she comes down from the clouds and concerns herself with the questions which are agitating the crowds, she is doomed to extinction; and in her desperation she cries out: "Hands off these delicate and difficult matters. You will only muddle them more and more by meddling with them. I alone am competent to tackle and satisfactorily settle them. Come, then, one and all, under my protective wing, and put your entire trust in my heaven-given and infallible wisdom."

The writer woefully misrepresents the past. He seems to be under the impression that Christianity is the only religion in which brotherly love is insisted upon. That brotherly love has never flourished under Christianity is a fact which no one can deny, and no section of the round world is farther away from that noble virtue to-day than Christendom. But this writer deliberately misreads history. "The Christian religion," he says, "however hindered by the shortcomings and sins of its representatives, has not failed humanity in the past." But to the great bulk of humanity the Christian religion has never been made known; and what benefit did it ever confer upon those who were compelled to adopt and profess it, or be killed by the sword? It was but a galling joke ruthlessly thrust upon unwilling shoulders. Then our writer adds: "It gave the elements of civilisation to the struggling races, out of which our modern Christendom has been evolved." But it is a mistake to imagine that the "struggling races" referred to were ethically barren when they were driven, at the point of the bayonet, into the fellowship of the Church. They were the very opposite of barren. They were rich in noble qualities which Christianity did not possess until it appropriated them from those strong northerners. Their advent was an unspeakable gain to the Church, and gave birth to modern Europe. Christianity triumphed in the first instance by suppressing and superseding Hellenism, and it continued victorious by standing still and keeping its eyes shut. When those "struggling races" were forced in, Christianity secured a new lease of life; but it received, at the same time, its death-warrant. During the Middle Ages, Hellenism, though crushed beneath the iron heel of the Papacy, was not dead. The entrance of Teutonism was the means of reinstating "fugitive and exiled Greece." Teutonic chivalry and Greek culture embraced each other on the floor of the Church, and out of that union came modern Europe with its love of learning and devotion to science and search for truth. Out of it eventually, and not out of the Methodist Revival, came "our vast enterprises of philanthropy," which the Church falsely calls her own.

The "spiritual consciousness" is doomed. It is already steadily passing away. "Religious inspiration" is claimed by an ever-dwindling company. And while the official champions of the dying superstition are doing their utmost to prolong its life, they cannot be blind to the fact that they are fighting for a lost cause. But while the faith is expiring, the true and safe guides of humanity—instructed reason, trained intelligence, and the social conscience—are gradually taking hold of the reins of life. Herein is the grand hope of the world.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Challenge of Secularism.—IV.

CANON STREATFEILD has still more to say about the *Freethinker*. He indulges in a retrospect of its career, which is evidently based upon a plentiful lack of knowledge. This is what he tells his Christian readers of the past of the most shocking of "infidel" publications:—

"The *Freethinker* was started in 1881, and almost immediately began issuing its notorious comic Bible sketches, which cost Mr. Foote not only a term of imprisonment, but also the countenance of some of the most influential supporters of Secularism. Holyoake himself refused to be associated with colleagues who so grossly outraged the laws of courtesy, and treated things held sacred by an overwhelming majority of their countrymen with a ribaldry and profanity that shocked agnostic and atheist alike. Mr. Joseph McCabe (himself quite as far removed from Christian orthodoxy as Mr. Foote) has recently described these sketches as 'coarse, vulgar, and scurrilous to a lamentable extent.' These comic sketches were recommenced on Mr. Foote's release from prison and consequent resumption of editorship, but were soon discontinued; and this, without doubt, because they were too gross even for the average reader of the *Freethinker*. Unfortunately, no improvement in the letterpress either accompanied or followed the discontinuance of the sketches. It is not easy to arrive at any certain estimate of the weekly circulation of this paper, but it is, I believe, rather under than over ten thousand. It is sad enough that there should be a demand, even to that extent, for literature of such quality."

My clerical critic has accepted the legend that the Comic Bible Sketches were the sole ground on which I was prosecuted for "blasphemy." The fact is that letter-press, as well as illustrations, figured in my two indictments; for I was twice prosecuted for "blasphemy," and actually stood three trials in less than two months. Judge North, before whom I was tried the first time, on the second indictment—the first having been removed by *certiorari* to the Court of Queen's Bench—savagely criticised an extremely well-written "skit" by my sub-editor, Joseph Mazzini Wheeler, who put Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John into the dock on a charge precisely similar to the one I had to answer. It suits the Christians to forget all that now. They put the letter-press out of sight and concentrate attention on the pictures. People are thus led to believe that I was perfectly free to write what I liked, and that I got into trouble simply because of my "shocking" caricatures. It was not, then, the sketches, and the sketches alone, that "cost me a term of imprisonment." Neither did they cost me "the countenance of some of the most influential supporters of Secularism." Holyoake is the only one mentioned. He did, indeed, behave very badly. But I did not lose his countenance, for I did not possess it. He had for some time been practically in retirement as far as the Freethought movement was concerned. He did not "refuse to be associated" with me, for he was not invited to do so. What happened was this. While I was in prison, under Judge North's sentence of twelve months, a memorial to the Home Office for my release was got up by Dr. Aveling and a distinguished psychologist who did not wish to be identified. All sorts of eminent persons were asked to sign it. Many of them did so. Amongst them were Mr. Herbert Spencer, Professor Romanes, Dr. Charlton Bastian, Dr. H. Maudsley, Mr. Frederic Harrison, Dr. Francis Galton, Mr. Leslie Stephen, Professor Tyndall, Professor Beesley, Professor H. S. Foxwell, Professor Adamson, Mr. J. Cotter Morison, Dr. Jonathan Hutchinson, Dr. E. B. Tylor, Mr. Edward Clodd, Professor Ray Lankaster, Rev. J. Llewellyn Davies, Rev. Dr. Abbot, Rev. A. Ainger, Rev. Stopford A. Brooke, Rev. Dr. Fairbairn, Rev. J. G. Rogers, Rev. Charles Beard, Rev. Dr. Crosskey, and the then editors of the *Daily News*, *Spectator*, *Academy*, *Manchester Examiner*, and *Liverpool Daily Post*. Holyoake was asked to sign, and he refused. He, who had been imprisoned under the blasphemy laws for what the judge called an

"indecent" attack on religion, called mine a policy of "outrage." He sneeringly referred to me and my two fellow prisoners as "Foote and Co." He facetiously suggested that he might sign the memorial if I asked him to do so myself; as though I were in a position to ask him, or as though I would ask him, or anyone else, if I had been able to do so. Universal indignation was expressed at Holyoake's conduct. Soon after my release from prison I heard what I never expected to hear, and never wished to hear. A demonstration against the Blasphemy Laws was held in St. James's Hall; some three thousand people were present, the place was packed, and hundreds were unable to gain admittance; and when the name of Holyoake was mentioned a hiss—a fierce, bitter, indignant hiss—ran through that vast assembly. Everybody who was anybody in the Freethought movement was on the platform. Holyoake alone was absent, and his name was soundly hissed. And in these circumstances I must be allowed to smile at the statement that I had lost *his* countenance.

"Ribaldry" and "profanity" are words of such various meaning, that I decline to discuss them. They were flung at Voltaire, they were flung at Paine, they were flung at Bradlaugh, they were flung at Ingersoll—and why should I mind their being flung at me? But when I read that I "shocked agnostic and atheist alike," I must tell the reverend gentleman—plainly and decisively, and with more good-temper than he has any reason to expect—that he is mistaken. He appears to rely upon the testimony of Mr. Joseph McCabe, of whom I will say no more (at present) than this, that he was a Catholic at that time and for many years afterwards, that he had no personal knowledge of the internal affairs of the Freethought party in 1881-1883, and that he is merely Holyoake's parrot in all such matters as the present. Twelve months ago I had to correct Mr. Joseph McCabe on many points. Another battle was then raging. The common law of "blasphemy" was invoked against Mr. Harry Boulter. I was where my name, my traditions, and my position called me—in the front of the fight. I had the support of every leading Freethinker in England. It was recognised that the application of the "blasphemy" laws was to be resisted, and that no other duty lay before Freethinkers when the enemy opened the attack. And where was Mr. Joseph McCabe? Breathing fire and slaughter under the table. He bade the Freethought world see what a big fight he would make when the enemy took his advice and as to when, where, and against whom they should declare war. Meanwhile he had nothing but abuse for those whose courage was ready for the occasion. Mr. Joseph McCabe was alone then. He could not find a single supporter. Why should I trouble about him now? I rather choose to ask Canon Streatfeild whether he knows of the long and careful articles I wrote on these topics in the early part of last year. If he does know of them, his present attitude is hardly creditable. If he does not know of them, I invite him to read them at once.

It is true that I resumed the Comic Bible Sketches the very first week after my release from prison. That was my answer to the bigots. I meant to show them that I was not to be terrified. I cared for nothing else just then. I flung my glove in their faces the moment my hands were free. And it is not true that they were "soon discontinued,"—still less, if possible, that they were discontinued because they were "too gross" for my own readers. They were continued for a long time, in ordinary numbers and in Christmas numbers. I have already said that they were dropped "because we had worked the old book out." Canon Streatfeild says that this "is, on the face of it, absurd." I reply that the absurdity lies with himself. He should be able to see that there is a limit to successful caricature of the Bible. The effectiveness of a caricature largely depends on the readers' familiarity with the original. The well-known features of the Bible get used up in time;

you must then introduce the far-fetched, the recondite,—in brief, you have to resort to subtleties, and you soon lose your popular appeal. Nor is that all. I explained, twelve months ago, why I went in for those Bible Sketches and other "objectionable" features of the old *Freethinker* policy. It was the abominable treatment of Bradlaugh by the Christians inside and outside the House of Commons that made me so determined. I was not prepared for it—it shocked me—it turned the current of my life. I was young and full of vigor, I had a pen and a tongue, and I cried to the Christians "Have at you!" I meant to annoy them, I meant to incense them, and I was prepared to take the consequences. I knew that they hated and dreaded ridicule above all things, and for that reason I gave them plenty of it. What does Canon Streatfeild, what does Mr. Joseph McCabe, know of these things? I was in the fight. I am glad even now, glad with all my heart, that my blade went into a thousand breasts before the enemy bore me down by sheer weight of numbers. And I am glad to believe that, although they took a year of my life away, I have probably taken away as much from the life of their creed.

When my clerical critic talks of "the laws of courtesy" having been "grossly outraged" in this journal, I beg to remind him, or to inform him, as the case may be, that neither I nor my contributors have ever attacked individuals. We have fought under the rules of civilised warfare. No doubt we have shown little respect for some things "held sacred" by our countrymen. But is it not ridiculous vanity on the part of Christians to demand of us respect for what we do not find respectable? Christians have a most egotistical way of regarding their beliefs as property; if you attack their beliefs they treat you as though you were depreciating their assets. It is time to tell them plainly that this is sheer nonsense. There is no property in ideas; and if a man cannot bear to see or hear his ideas remorselessly criticised—whether in politics, sociology, or religion—he should avoid the field of controversy altogether, instead of seeking to make his personal susceptibilities the measure of other people's obligations. And there is something more to be said. We only attacked what to us were false and pernicious ideas; the Christians attacked our liberties, our persons, and our characters. Was nothing "sacred" assailed when Bradlaugh was thrown out of the House of Commons simply because he was an avowed Atheist? When I saw him pale, panting, and dishevelled in Palace Yard, I saw something in comparison with which a jest at a Jewish story or a Christian dogma sank into insignificance.

I conceive, from certain passages in his article, that Canon Streatfeild is ashamed of the treatment which Secularists have received from Christians. Take the following passage, for instance:—

"Approaching the subject as one convinced that the welfare and true progress of the world are bound up with Christianity, I have not hesitated to speak strongly of the aims and views of the secularist. At the same time, the last thing I wish to do is to foster the impression, still widely prevailing, that those who are responsible for this movement are necessarily men of doubtful, if not dangerous, moral character. Many advocates of secularism are, on the contrary, persons of the very highest integrity, strictly loyal to what they honestly believe to be truth and duty."

A confession like this does the reverend gentleman credit; yet the necessity for making it is discreditable to his Church and his religion. Christians still play the pharisee. "I am holier than thou" is still their cry to every dissident. Their attitude is as painfully vulgar as it is grotesquely absurd. Nor do they confine it to the dissidents in their own localities. They display it, especially through their missionaries, all over the world. They welcome the most ridiculous accounts of the immorality of "heathen" lands. They are bigots in the worst sense of the word. They cannot understand how persons who do not see eye to eye with them in

matters of religious opinion can be possessed of a single moral virtue.

It is amusing to hear Canon Streatfeild say that "The Christian Evidence Society does a noble work." He must be speaking from hearsay, for that Society has cultivated insult as a fine art, and has lived on the systematic slander of every leading Secularist. If the reverend gentleman doubts this let him listen (incognito) to the Society's outdoor speakers.

Canon Streatfeild's remarks on the Rationalist Press Association I leave its representatives to deal with. One point, however, I think it well to refer to. The reverend gentleman says:—

"It is notorious that there is a somewhat acute difference amongst 'Freethinkers' in regard to the laws against blasphemy. Those, speaking roughly, represented by the National Secular Society, would have them completely repealed, and will make every effort in that direction; those, on the other hand, again speaking generally, represented by the Rationalist Press Association would retain them as being calculated, without unduly restraining the propagation of free-thought, to secure moderation, decency, and courtesy in its expression."

This is what comes of allowing Mr. Joseph McCabe to speak without a mandate from the Association. Rationalists are supposed to be in favor of retaining the Blasphemy Laws as a discipline in controversy for Freethinkers. A meaner and more contemptible attitude is scarcely to be conceived. I do not say that it is the attitude of Rationalists. I only say that their dubious policy and unfortunate utterances have led Canon Streatfeild to think so.

From the pages that Canon Streatfeild devotes to Freethought in Europe I quote the following:—

"The frankly agnostic attitude (to say nothing more) of the French Government, has done much to deliver the people into the hands of the secularists, who hold a menacingly strong position, especially in the urban population. It has been stated on good authority that eight millions of the French people are professed atheists. The secularist propaganda in Paris and other large towns is both active and unscrupulous. Anticlerical and atheistic literature abounds, some of it polluted by obscenity and lewdness, from which English free-thought publications are happily free."

The last sentence puzzles me. I should like to know what papers are referred to. There is no "obscenity" or "lewdness" in the Freethought journals I receive from France.

But I must draw to a close. The vital point of Canon Streatfeild's article lies in a single sentence. "The Church," he says, "is face to face with a determined enemy, an enemy, moreover, which, it cannot be denied, is gaining ground." He argues that "it ought to be confronted more strenuously and systematically than hitherto." He calls upon the Churches to unite in a crusade against Secularism. I fear they will not respond, but I wish they would. The open enemies of Secularism are its helpers. They brace it, they strengthen it, they confirm it; they draw attention to its principles, they extend the scope of its propaganda, they stimulate its missionary spirit, they drive it forward conquering and to conquer. And therefore I wish every success to Canon Streatfeild's appeal.

G. W. FOOTE.

What right has any person to assert audaciously that he knows what no living individual can of possibility know? The credulous believer in statements supposed to have been made by those who are said to have lived in times when scientific discoveries were non-existent and astronomical research had not even commenced among people who supposed the Earth to be flat, and the "Heavens" a surface of a similar description situated at some distance above the Earth, says, with satisfied assurance, "I know." The deep thinker and profound student, whose life has been spent in efforts to unravel the mysteries of Nature and the marvels of science, who has devoted his energies to searching out the problems of the Universe, says, with modest humility, "I do not know anything; I only believe what is consistent with common sense and the comprehension of my reasoning faculties."—*Libertas*.

Acid Drops.

They have a dinner-hour service at Messrs. Armstrong, Whitworth's works, Openshaw, and it was taken by Bishop Welldon, Dean of Manchester, on March 3. This gentleman addressed over a thousand of the hands as "Fellow working men." And they listened to him respectfully instead of laughing him out of the place. Which shows what manhood is left in them, and what an easy game the clerical confidence-trick is in this country. The well-fed, well-clothed, well-housed man of God proceeded to boast of his size, and incidentally to prove that his profession is still A I at the art which, according to Revelation xxi. 8, helps to fill the bottomless pit. We recollect that in his younger days Mr. Bernard Shaw described himself as "a fluent liar," but he is not in the running with Bishop Welldon. Besides, the great "G. B. S." only lied for fun, whereas the Dean of Manchester lies for a living. He actually had the face to talk in this way:—

"I once heard a little Atheistic lecturer denying that there was a God, and he went on to call upon God, if there was a God, to strike him down. Well, the Almighty did not take any notice of that challenge, but there stepped out of the throng of his hearers a great stalwart man, as big as I am, and said, 'You don't need to call upon the Almighty to knock you down: his humble servant will do that,' and he shook his fist at the little lecturer, who turned tail."

It is amazing—or rather it would be if we didn't know his species so well—to see Bishop Welldon relating this frowsy "chestnut" as a fact of his own experience. We beg to tell him that he never heard an Atheistic lecturer deny that there is "a God," and that he never heard an Atheistic lecturer call upon God to strike him down. This yarn has been told of all sorts of Freethought advocates during the last hundred years. Bradlaugh once prosecuted a pious liar who told it of him, and made the fellow eat his words. There is only one thing for Bishop Welldon to do now. He must accept the reputation of a "fluent liar" or state when and where the incident he relates occurred—and what was the lecturer's name. Atheistic lecturers were never very numerous, they are all easily traceable, and if this reverend servant of Christ objects to being considered "a fluent liar" he has the remedy in his own hands.

Bishop Welldon's little decorations of the ancient "chestnut" are characteristic of himself and his creed. It is so natural for a big Christian to threaten someone very much smaller than himself. It is so natural, too, for a Christian to interfere with other people's business—especially in the name of God.

The Bishop of Bath and Wells has solemnly expelled Smyth-Pigott from the Church of England. He is no longer a priest of that body. But does that really dispose of his priestly claims? When he was ordained he "received the Holy Ghost." How does anybody know that he is not full of the Holy Ghost still? There is no guarantee that the upper powers endorse the Bishop's action. Even if they do, what difference will it make to the Messiah of the Agapemone? He lives on in clover with his dupes, and occasionally calls in the registrar to enter up details of a new baby obtained by him in concert with a female devotee. Smyth-Pigott smiles. He has the best of the joke. And his motto is still "The Lord with us."

In a leader on this affair the *Daily News* regrets that "there seems to be no limit to human credulity." This is true. The pious piffle in the *Daily News* is a proof of it.

A boy of twelve has been sentenced to five years in a reformatory for picking up threepenny-worth of coal from a disused tip of the Main Colliery Company. A younger brother was fined 20s. for the same offence. The boy of twelve was already a breadwinner, helping his mother, a widow with eight children, by selling newspapers. Evidently this is a Christian country.

The Churches are advancing. The other day a clergyman confessed his ignorance of things usually regarded as fundamental and vital. When asked if he believed in the Divinity of Christ, he answered that he did not know what the term signified. Yet he was installed as pastor of a large Congregational Church.

Who are J. & W. Langley, dating from 6 Colonial-avenue, Minories, London, E.? We have a circular of theirs lying before us, bearing no date, offering to supply six volumes, bearing no title, by "an eminent Bible student" at 1s. 6d. and 1s. 8d. each. These books have "proved beneficial to

ourselves personally," and J. & W. Langley seem anxious to extend the benefit (in a business way) to others. They hope to be "favored with the privilege of supplying you with a copy." Of the questions dealt with in these volumes, the seventh and last is "What Does God Intend to Do?" He certainly ought to do something, considering the uses J. & W. Langley are making of his name.

Mr. C. F. G. Masterman, M.P., has been talking at Whitefield's Tabernacle, which is one of the principal centres of gaseous rhetoric in London. The reverend gentleman—we beg pardon, the gentleman who ought to have been a reverend—said that "it was in the cultivation of the spirit of the Christian message to the poor that he saw any hope." We dare say this was very well received and even loudly applauded. The people who go to Whitefield's like listening to that sort of thing. No doubt it sounds very "hopeful" to them. But what hope will it bring to the poor? The history of nearly two thousand years—with the poor as poor as ever at the finish—show its real value.

"Rice Christians" are a well-known description of "heathen" converts in more than one part of Asia. These converts remain Christians while the missionaries practically keep them. Something of the same sort appears to be going on amongst the natives in South Africa. One of our readers out there sends us a clipping from the *East London Daily Dispatch* (Cape Colony) of January 20. A trader at a place called Tolso, a small magistracy in Griqualand East, received the following letter from a native, and it is so good that we reproduce it in its entirety:—

"Sir My Lord,—I went into your town most especially to speak with you and ask your humble assistance in the way of helping me to marriage by letting me have goods for credit against me, not for a long time as I could pay in 9 months, but my good sir I did not speak to you as I saw you were troubled by not being well. So I went home, and I went to sleep and in the night I am sure my Great Father the Lord most High came to my assistance. I had a dream in which he urged me to get up and write to you begging you to supply me with my wants to hasten my marriage as my own dear girl's people say that I am to be in a hurry because there is another young man with cash enough to pay for the wedding goods at once. Sir you can feel that I am in a great state of mind as I cannot allow another man to take away my girl who is educated like myself up to standard 4, the goods I want are not much, a bed for two, two blankets, sugar, meal, suit of wedding clothes and boots. Waiting Sir your reply to make me happy,—I am, Sir, Your ever friend."

Using the name of the Lord to get what you want is an old trick with lots of white Christians, and we are not surprised that the colored ones pick it up quickly.

The *Christian World* says that "Education is far too important a matter to be left in the hands of departments and paid officials, with their fondness for cut and dried methods." We agree; and would also add that it is too important to be left under the control, or even dominant influence, of Christian sects, each one of whom is fighting for a sectarian advantage. This is an aspect of the matter left out of sight by the editor of the *C. W.*

The editor goes on to remark that in the present fight Free Churchmen are not the aggressors; they are fighting on the defensive against the aggressions of the Established Church. This, however, is quite misleading. Free Churchmen became aggressors on the educational welfare of the nation when they set up the Bill of 1870. They have maintained that attitude ever since, and officially maintain it still. Their defence now consists solely in maintaining the advantage over other Christians and the non-Christian section of the community. To that extent they are on the defensive. So, too, would be a burglar who, having completed a successful raid, defended his plunder from the aggressive action of the householder or a policeman.

In the *Methodist Leader*, the Rev. B. Moore writes that there are in the Free Churches three currents of opinion. There is "a persecuting section, which simply desires to replace the tyranny of denominationalism by the tyranny of undenominationalism, and to impose upon others the grievance from which we suffer ourselves." Next there is a compromising section, genuinely anxious to retain simple Bible teaching. Lastly, a section "which stands by the old, sound, Free Church principle of secular education by the State, leaving religious education, including simple Bible teaching, to be provided by parents and churches, according to their own arrangements and at their own cost. The only section that makes any headway is the last." The italics are ours, and we note the statement as a gratifying sign of the growth of a healthy opinion on this subject.

Mr. H. C. Hughes, an educational worker of some repute, has raised a strong protest against the repetition of the Ten Commandments in certain schools. He holds they are deficient in both their moral and filial aspect. They do not condemn slavery, drinking, or gambling, and are deficient in teachings bearing on philanthropy and general humanity. We have said the same thing ourselves for years, and are therefore pleased to find our opinion endorsed.

In addition to agitating for votes, the Suffragettes, or that section of the movement that is religiously inclined, is now agitating for the right of election to the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. Some years ago this question was raised, but the Conference declined to permit such an anti-Christian arrangement. The present agitation may be more successful, although there is still the whole of the spirit and teaching of the Bible, the New Testament, and Christian practice against placing women on an equality with men. Still, if opinion is only strong enough, we have no doubt whatever that Christian leaders will be able to interpret the "Blessed Book" in a new direction. In justice to the Wesleyan and other Churches, it ought to be pointed out that they have always recognised the importance of women. When it was a question of making collections, embroidering slippers, delivering tracts, or doing the general drudgery, the Churches have cheerfully recognised and utilised the value of women. It is when it came to occupying prominent, and profitable, positions that the inferiority of the sex was insisted on.

Dr. W. T. Grenfell says that God never intended his servants to have long faces. Not being so conversant with God's intentions as Dr. Grenfell seems to be, we can only confess our ignorance on the matter. Still, if religious records are to be trusted, most of the people the Lord has hobnobbed with have been more distinguished for their long faces than for anything else. Joyousness has never been an outstanding feature of the typical Christian make-up.

We are pleased to see Mr. R. J. Campbell, in a review of Dr. Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, pointing out that the article on Agnosticism should have been written by someone other than a Christian minister. We quite agree with him. The number of writers of acknowledged ability who call themselves Agnostics is sufficiently large to give the editor a wide range of choice. Mr. Campbell pertinently asks, "Is it the work of a writer on this subject merely to prepare a brief against it, ably though it may be done?" It should be the aim of an encyclopædia to give a candid exposition of a subject, leaving, as is possible, the readers to form a judgment upon the matter placed before them. This, however, is not the Christian method, which is to see that only one view of a question appears, and that the Christian view.

Mr. Campbell himself, by the way, might exercise a little more care in some directions. In the course of a recent sermon he had occasion to point out that religion has seldom been found inconsistent with cruelty. He then went on to remark that when the Spaniards conquered South America they found a religion encouraging human sacrifice to such an extent that "it was no uncommon thing for fifty thousand victims to be offered at once to appease the supposed fury of the gods." Now it does appear that human sacrifice was practised in South America. But fifty thousand at one time? The thing seems incredible on the face of it. To commence with, many of the South American tribes did not practise human sacrifice at all. The Maya religion was destitute of it. The worship of the great god Quetzalcoatl was of quite a bloodless character. Human sacrifice was chiefly associated with the worship of the Mexican deity, Huitzilopochtli. But anyone need only consider how long the ceremonial slaughter of fifty thousand persons would take, each one of whom must be killed in a special manner, to see how absurd such a statement is. We may also note that, whatever the extent of the practice, it was associated with religion. And the practice may be found much nearer home than South America—in the Bible, for example.

The subject of God, says the Rev. A. Boyd-Carpenter, is one of all importance. Well, we beg to differ. Intrinsically, the subject of God is of very little importance. Other things equal, so far as one can see whether one believes in a God or not makes no perceptible difference either to the individual or to others. A man can be as honest, as truthful, as loyal, and in every way as noble without the belief in God as he can be with it. The belief adds nothing to our knowledge of nature, and is not even a sure help in the matter of conduct. How then can it be of "all importance"? To justify a claim to importance it must be shown that the

belief in God is vital to the right ordering of life, which is exactly what no one has yet been able to do. The truth is, that people have got so in the habit of talking of this particular belief as though it really was of profound importance—professional preachers, for obvious reasons, and others by force of example—that the statement passes without examination. The importance attaching to the belief in God is *extrinsic*, not *intrinsic*. It has become associated with various institutions, and there is a tremendous fund of human energy expended in association therewith. From this point of view it becomes of importance to settle, if we can, how far the belief is solidly based. From another point of view, the subject has a purely speculative value, no greater than that attaching to the question of whether Mars sustains animal life or whether the Moon carries an atmosphere.

The Rev. A. B. Boyd-Carpenter, M.A., lecturing on God to a congregation in St. Olave's Church, London, said: "I take it that to-day we are all agreed that there is a God." That may have been true of the people addressed by the reverend gentleman. Atheists are not in the habit of omitting their lunch on a Thursday to hear a professional discourse on the Deity. But if Mr. Boyd-Carpenter's "we all" embraced all British people, or the entire population of the globe, then the man of God uttered what he knew to be false. There are many thousands in London alone who do not believe that there is a God. If Mr. Boyd-Carpenter does not know this, he must be ignorant indeed.

Dr. Robertson Nicoll says that "abysmal depths of personality lie hidden in man," and asks, "who can fathom the personality of God?" But Dr. Nicoll ignores several prior questions, such as, Who can tell us that there is a God? And if there is, who knows that it or he is a person? No divine can answer either of these questions except in the negative. And yet Dr. Nicoll writes a long article dealing in the most positive style with God's nature, God's judgments, God's deep things, and God's Spirit. It is a characteristic of theologians of every school that they exhibit the cocksureness of absolute ignorance.

Preaching before the Hampshire Free Church Federation, the Rev. John Wills bore this witness:—

"For God has other words for other worlds,
But for this world the word of God is Christ."

Had that witness been true, God would have stood condemned as the vilest criminal in his own universe. Without this word of God every man is said to be lost forever; and yet there are to-day fully 1,000,000,000 people who have never heard it. If the Rev. Mr. Wills reflected a little, he would see how utterly absurd and how frightfully dishonoring to the God of love his witness is. If he cannot be just to his Master he would be wise to quit his alleged service.

Rev. Charles Stelzie, called an "Apostle of Labor," lives in America (the U.S.A. portion of it), when he is at home. At present he is very much abroad. He is making a tour of Europe to study social and economical conditions among the working classes—which he might just as well have studied, and to more purpose, in his own country. It appears that this "Apostle of Labor" is the Superintendent of the Department of Church and Labor of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church, the object of which organisation is "to interpret the Church to working men, and to interpret working men to the Church." The reverend gentleman himself was once a journeyman mechanic. His great soul brooded over the question whether he should become a Labor agitator or a preacher. With true Yankee astuteness he decided for the ministry. Jobs in that line are better paid, less trying, and less precarious than Labor agitation. But the reverend gentleman's great soul still urged him onward. For six years he has bossed the Church-and-Labor movement, and what is the result? "To-day," he says proudly, "nearly all the leading Labor men are on my side." Prodigious! The "Apostle of Labor" wants little assistance in blowing his own trumpet.

"Capture the Churches for Socialism," cries the Rev. Stewart Headlam. What he and his friends really mean is, "Capture Socialism for the Churches."

"God Almighty must have gone bankrupt to send round the hat to the devil for subscriptions." So said the Rev. F. B. Meyer at Liverpool, with reference to theatricals and whist-drives to raise the wind for religious purposes. The first half of the reverend gentleman's observation seems certainly to be true.

The *Labor Leader* ought to be thoroughly ashamed of itself. In its issue for March 5 it reproduced what it called an "exquisite article" from the *Atlantic Monthly*, in which there is a reference to "Renan and Ingersoll, who toiled in search of truth like soldiers detached from their commands and stumbling down darkening roads." Heine is referred to as "the apostate Jew." And all three of them are classed amongst "the world's greatest sinners." This "exquisite article" of a Yankee scribe, whose name is not given, is passed on by the pious gentleman who edits the *Labor Leader* to his readers. Some of those readers know what insolent nonsense the "exquisite article" is. But a good many of them probably need to be informed that Heine was one of the finest of modern poets and soldiers in the war of the liberation of humanity, and that Renan and Ingersoll, besides being men of genius, were men of the sweetest and purest character. Why are so many little Christian scribes belonging to the Socialist party in England allowed to fling dirty ink at their intellectual and moral betters?

The Oxford undergraduates who broke up Mr. Keir Hardie's meeting were guilty of the most vulgar hooliganism. Persons who try to prevent the expression of views from which they happen to dissent are criminals. They attack the most vital interest of civilisation. And there must be something radically wrong with what is too often, we fear, ironically called the higher education, when university students are so prone to rowdiness. They ought to be better-mannered than people less advantageously placed in the world, but they are too frequently worse. Medical students have an especially bad reputation—and divinity students have the worst of all. Which "gives one furiously to think"—as the French say.

Dr. Clifford has been sued again for the "sectarian" portion of the Education rate. Of course there will be no "sectarian" portion of the Education rate when Dr. Clifford and his friends control the religious teaching in the elementary schools. The reverend gentleman "wished the magistrates would send him to prison," but it was a safe wish, as he knew they couldn't do it. They made the usual order. We understand that Dr. Clifford's furniture now belongs to his wife,—which is a good old arrangement, and the distraint will be made upon *her* goods, and that saves him from paying. What a farce!

How eminently touchy men of God are. The Rev. Rhondda Williams has withdrawn from his engagement to preach in connection with the Free Church Council meetings at Swansea, because the chapel to which he was assigned was too insignificant and unknown. He had never heard or seen the name of it in his life before. How amazingly beautiful Christian humility is in practice, to be sure.

The *British Congregationalist* regrets that "thoughtfulness and spiritual passion are so seldom found together in pulpit work." The fact that they are so seldom found together is the pulpit's one redeeming virtue. The real thinker, being of necessity an unbeliever, naturally never enters the pulpit. A preacher has no right to reason, or to think, his one business being to proclaim his beliefs, and urge his hearers to share them with him. He may be hysterically sentimental, he may be intoxicated with emotionalism; but a bold, independent, honest thinker he cannot be. A preacher of the Gospel and a thinker have never met in one person.

A correspondent of ours, Mr. W. W. Strickland, in an anti-pious tract he has lately issued, prints a verse of a Christian hymn as he has heard it sung by the refined and erudite disciples of the Nazarene. Here it is:—

"Oh! 'appy band of brothers,
As onward we do tread,
With Christ 'oo his hour capt'in,
With Christ 'oo his hour red."

These noble songsters want to convert the rest of the world, including the Chinamen and Japs, to their own likeness. Our readers know how much we hope they will succeed.

The Lord Mayor of Liverpool occupied the chair at the annual meeting of the Sunday School Union, and one of the speakers was the Rev. J. Williams Butcher. This gentleman said that "Britain's supremacy rested not upon armaments or commerce, but upon the character of its citizens, which was to be determined on the principles of true religion and loyal obedience to the teaching of Jesus." This statement was greeted with applause. But just imagine a member of the House of Commons talking in that way when Mr. Haldane's "Territorial" scheme and the Navy estimates are

under discussion! It is only at irresponsible religious gatherings that foolish Christians can utter such drivel.

The *Christian Commonwealth* continues at its old tricks. In a descriptive report of Mr. Keir Hardie's recent lecture at the City Temple it burst forth in this fashion:—

"A magnificent idealism ran throughout Mr. Keir Hardie's speech. The bitterest opponents of Socialism could not have complained that this was materialism or atheism. What could be more beautiful or spiritual?"

The notion these people have of themselves! All the "beauty" and "spirituality" belong to them. When they don't go in for exclusive salvation they go in for exclusive virtue. This is the spirit that has made Christianity hated by outsiders all over the world. And before we drop the subject we may inform our pious and pharisaic contemporary that Mr. Keir Hardie owes more to his dead father and mother—who were both atheists—than he could ever repay.

The same number of the *Christian Commonwealth* contains a "literary" article by J. M. Wilson. This gentleman finds that Swinburne, Tennyson, Browning, etc., are all played out. He introduces us to a new poet who is being played in. And who is it? Miss E. Nesbit (Mrs. Hubert Bland). Well, well! But what can you expect from a paper that regards Mr. Campbell's sermons as literature?

Father Vaughan is a very restless gentleman. He has just drawn up a series of thirty-six tableaux illustrating the life of Christ which are going to be modelled in wax by Mr. Louis Tussaud, and will no doubt prove a serious rival to the Chamber of Horrors, especially as there is to be a "Crucifixion" and a "Resurrection." At the other end there will be an "Annunciation" and a "Visitation." But we hope these will not be executed too literally, or there will be work for the police. Perhaps we ought to suggest that Mr. Louis Tussaud should get some wax models of similar scenes in the story of Isis and Horus, in Egypt, thousands of years before the Christian era. Parallel tableaux would be most instructive to the general public.

The Bishop of Durham, who has a wonderful Soapy-Sam look in his photographs, preached a sermon at the Church of St. Andrew, Stanley, which was crowded with mining people living round the scene of the late disaster. He assured them, in spite of the disaster, with its shocking loss of life, that "God is love." The Bishop knows it from his own experience,—which we can well believe. He also assured them that the West Stanley disaster was "only the occasion in which God's eternal love was saying: 'Trust me a little longer, and you shall see the break of eternal day through the darkness.'" Of course it is the clergy who want to be trusted a little longer; that is, until their dupes die. And men take thousands a year for talking this oily stuff. The Bishop of Durham gets £8 000. And the mining people listened to him, instead of hissing him out of the place. We are sorry for them—and a bit ashamed.

Rev. Father James Hughes has been lecturing at Liverpool on "The Future of Religion in England." He wound up by saying that the great struggle of the future would be between "Infidelity" and Catholicism. We quite agree with him. We have said it for any number of years, and Bradlaugh said it before us.

In a prayer made to order a would-be saint says to God: "It hath pleased our Father to bid us pray, as if he know nothing, as if he would hear the tale of want and pain and sorrow from our own lips." Does God like being addressed in the third person? Does he enjoy listening to deliberate lies about himself? Does it give him pleasure to be told, "We cry unto thee hour by hour, yea, moment by moment, for there is no cessation to our want"? If there were a God, the perpetual and silly prattle of those who call themselves his own elect, would drive him mad. He wouldn't know a moment's peace.

A South London place of worship had an announcement outside for last Sunday. The subject of the sermon was "Is there a Hell?" And the next line was "Strangers Invited."

England boasts of being the most Christian country in the world. She also boasts of a new gun that will "play hell" at eighteen miles. And she wonders that the "heathen" smile at her.

The Salvation Army boasts that it preaches the Gospel in thirty-one languages. Well, it isn't true in any of them.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday, March 14, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham Place, London, W.; at 7.30, "Bernard Shaw Among the Prophets."

March 21, Woolwich.

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—241 High-road, Leyton.—March 14, Aberdare; 21, Forest Gate.
- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—March 14, Woolwich; 28, Holloway; April 4, Forest Gate; 25, Greenwich.
- THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £147 19s. Received since.—R. Wood, 5s.; D. J. D., £2.
- M. E. PEGG.—Pleased to hear that Mr. Lloyd had fairly good audiences at Manchester "in spite of the atrocious weather," and that his evening lecture was much applauded. Sorry you have been ill. Mr. Foote is steadily at work, but hoping for better weather.
- D. J. D., sending subscription to the President's Fund, says: "As to advt. in *Freethinker*, we enjoy Typhoo Tea, and are highly pleased with Whitehouse and Co.'s boots."
- W. WILSON (Liverpool), who sends the *Freethinker* weekly to his son at Detroit, Michigan, informs us that it is "placed on the table for reading, at the Mechanics' Union Hall in that town, and is eagerly sought for by the members."
- W. BELL.—Glad, though not surprised, to hear that several members of the small West Stanley N. S. S. Branch volunteered for rescue work; also that the disaster has played havoc with the local belief in a benevolent God.
- W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.
- W. E. ELLIS.—Too late for this week; in our next.
- G. PHILLIP.—See paragraphs. Shall be glad to hear from you again as suggested.
- A. M. (Glasgow).—It was a quotation from our *Bible Romances*.
- B. L. PACE.—Our shop manager has attended to your request. Glad you find our reply to Canon Streatfeild so interesting.
- R. H. ROSETTI.—We wish the West Ham Branch all success.
- S. WARD.—We note that the *Birmingham Gazette* also reported Mr. Foote's lecture in the Town Hall. Thanks for cuttings.
- W. H. HARBAP.—See our comments. Thanks.
- J. HOLDOROW.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.
- F. A. WILSON writes us from Johannesburg: "Quite recently I have become a reader of the *Freethinker*, and think it is GREAT."
- C. A. BRIGG.—Thanks for cutting.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

Sugar Plums.

The abominable weather thinned Mr. Foote's audience a bit on Sunday evening at Queen's (Minor) Hall. There was a good gathering in the circumstances, however; and the audience, which included a fine proportion of ladies, was very appreciative. It is to be hoped that the weather will be more favorable this evening (March 14), when Mr. Foote lectures again from the same platform on "Bernard Shaw Amongst the Prophets."

We have received no report from Woolwich, where Mr. Cohen lectured on Sunday evening. We can only announce, therefore, that Mr. Lloyd delivers the second of that course of lectures this evening (March 14). We hope to hear of a good meeting.

Mr. Cohen delivers two lectures, afternoon and evening, to-day (March 14) at Aberdare. South Wales "saints" will doubtless give him a fine reception.

The West Ham Branch starts a fresh course of Sunday lectures this evening (March 14) at the Forest Gate Public Hall, Woodgrange-road. Mr. W. J. Ramsay is the lecturer. He will be followed by Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Davies, and other lecturers until the end of April. There will be

instrumental music for half an hour before each lecture. Admission is free.

The *South London Press* gave a two-column report of the Dulwich Baths meeting of protest against the exclusion of the *Freethinker* from the Camberwell Free Libraries. It admits that the meeting was "well attended"—which was a great deal on such a night. The report of the meeting is followed by a report of the next nights' discussion on the Camberwell Borough Council. Councillor Moss moved that the report of the Libraries Committee be not received. He declared that no complaint against the *Freethinker* had been received from any ratepayer in the borough. Councillor Scott, who moved its exclusion, had never read it, and acted in ignorance of the character of its contents. The action of the Libraries Committee was an insult to himself, as the introducer of the paper, and an insult to every freethinking ratepayer. Councillor Shrimpton seconded. He thought it wrong that the organ of any shade of opinion should be suppressed. Alderman Hearson supported. But the mechanical majority was used again, and Councillor Moss's motion was defeated. This is how the so-called Moderates act. They don't see—they haven't the sense to see—that they are inviting reprisals when a different-colored majority appears upon the scene, as it is sure to in time. For the present, we have to thank Councillor Moss and those who spoke and voted with him.

A good and favorable account of the Camberwell protest meeting appeared in the *Dulwich, Peckham, and Camberwell Post*. Our contemporary remarks that "in spite of the snow and the cold a large number assembled at the Dulwich Baths." The summary report of the speeches is ably done. It is noted that the man who moved the amendment "made a very feeble case," and that "four hands only went up against the resolution." Mr. Cohen's is described as "quite a wonderful speech" for its epigrams at the expense of the *Freethinker's* calumniators. Mr. Foote is described as "a speaker of power." "He did not look a very dangerous individual," the report adds, "but, in a massive frame, wore the appearance of mildness and gentleness." We are glad to hear it. For the men who make a big fight for principles, as distinct from self-interest, never go about with a bravo's look on their faces. Even on the purely physical side, it is a curious thing (to many people) that fighting-men are generally good tempered. Several persons, during Mr. Foote's career, have made the fatal mistake of interpreting his "mildness and gentleness" as weakness, and have been undeceived—too late for themselves.

All the speakers who lived at a distance had a bad time in getting home after the Dulwich Baths meeting, for London was in the power of the blizzard. Mr. Cohen had the dregs of a nasty cold hanging about him, and he had a long way to go. Mr. Lloyd was out of it, being prevented from attending by a last-moment engagement in Scotland. Travelling back from the north in the blizzard he caught a chill and bronchitis pounced upon him. Mr. Foote hurried off from the meeting after his speech, in order to catch his last train home from Fenchurch-street Station. He wanted very much to get home to his wife who was ill in bed. Had he caught the train he would have been home by half-past eleven. But he didn't catch it, after all; and had to go miles through the snowstorm to obtain a night's shelter at a friend's. It did him no good, of course; but he got to work as usual the next day.

Mr. Councillor Moss put another notice of motion on the Camberwell Borough Council agenda:—

"That, in view of the fact that it was on account of an alleged objectionable line in a so-called poem that appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* on December 24 last, that the *Freethinker* was excluded from all our Libraries, the Libraries Committee be asked to take into consideration the question of excluding the *Daily Chronicle* from all our Libraries at the earliest possible date."

This is a flat challenge, and all but hypocrites would accept it; but we suppose it will be answered by the mechanical majority in the good old way. Mr. Moss will then, perhaps, have to move the exclusion of the Bible from all the Libraries. There are things in that holy volume which the *Freethinker* would not print for any consideration; things that American courts have held to be obscene when printed anywhere except inside the Bible.

"Arley Lane," who writes the "Pulpit and Pew" in the *Birmingham Weekly Mercury*, devoted his two columns in last week's issue to Mr. Foote's afternoon meeting in the Town Hall. The descriptive report is humorous and sympathetic. The writer begins by poking fun at the orthodox tract distributor outside, who, being asked "What's on?"

replied that "The Devil has sent a missionary from Hell." Whereupon the writer remarks that "it was sweet to hear the old name of the infernal regions." "Now," he adds, "one never hears of Hell. As Mr. G. W. Foote observed, if you tell a man to go to —! he understands. Tell him to go to Hades—the new revised-version word—and he thinks you're inviting him to Brighton." The tract distributor remarked that the *Freethinker* was not allowed to be sold in the Town Hall, and "you may guess what the paper is." "Or," the reporter suggested, "the people who forbid it. Because it seems to me illogical to allow the editor to speak in the Town Hall, and to say the very same things that he writes. And not only the editor, but also Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd, his coadjutors on the *Freethinker*, who come every few months and speak to large audiences, and who do not disguise their opinions."

Tid-bits are given by "Arley Lane" from Mr. Foote's lecture on "God's Message to Messina." With regard to the band, he admits that it played "splendidly, brilliantly." With regard to the lecturer, he says: "There could be no doubt as to the popularity of Mr. G. W. Foote, who was received as though he were a conqueror, or a bishop, or a music-hall artist, or a prize-fighter, or Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, or any other hero of the populace. The burst of applause was hearty and spontaneous, and a curious comment on the opinion of the tract-distributor outside." "Here," he adds, "were at least a thousand people on a bitterly cold afternoon, hanging on the lips of the said Mr. G. W. Foote, who, as he himself stated, has been imprisoned for uttering his opinions. Looking round at the mass of faces, nearly all of middle-aged and young men, I remembered the empty Wesleyan Churches of Smethwick and West Bromwich, with their sprinkling of young women and children, thinly scattered to make up a show, and wondered what on earth we were coming to." "Arley Lane" says that, bearing in mind the tract-distributor's statement that Mr. Foote was a missionary from Hell, he expected to smell brimstone, but was disappointed; there was no trace of it, either in the hall or in the anteroom, where a number of atheists were gathered round a big fire, probably "with the object of becoming acclimatised."

The Camberwell Protest Meeting.

THE public meeting called to protest against the throwing out of the *Freethinker* from the Public Libraries under the Camberwell Borough Council was duly held in the great hall of the Dulwich Baths on Tuesday evening, March 2. There had been considerable difficulty in advertising the meeting, for the Borough of Camberwell covers an immense area, and the Dulwich portion of it is far from central. Moreover, the weather was anything but propitious; in fact, while the meeting was in progress, the great snowstorm began which stopped nearly all the street traffic in London. In the circumstances, therefore, although the hall was not full, the meeting was quite large enough to be considered a capital success. And the press was well represented at the reporters' table.

Mr. A. B. Moss, one of the Camberwell Borough Councillors, presided, and started the ball with an excellent speech. It was grave and gay by turns, and heartily applauded. Mr. Moss gave a brief history of the matter before the meeting, and then pleaded for equal justice for all journals, including the *Freethinker*, which was very far from being such a journal as its enemies represented. One of the most active Councillors in getting the *Freethinker* excluded from the Free Library reading-rooms, Mr. Councillor Scott—"who was a publican by trade, a Christian by profession, and a sinner by heredity"—confessed that he had never read the journal which he was so ready to give a bad character. There were other hostile Councillors who knew just as much about it. These men were simply bigots, and it was only their official position that made them worth a moment's attention. Mr. Moss explained his own position, and how he had stood up for the *Freethinker* at the Council meetings. He intended to fight the battle further on the Council, and would move the exclusion of the religious papers, and even the Bible itself, which was a party book and contained—what the *Freethinker* did not—some remark-

ably warm and blue passages. Mr. Moss wound up with a fine peroration which was loudly cheered.

Mr. Alderman Hearson was called upon to move the following resolution:—

"That this meeting of the ratepayers of Camberwell, held at the Dulwich Baths on Tuesday, March 2, emphatically condemns the narrow-minded action of the Camberwell Borough Council in excluding the *Freethinker* from the tables of all the Public Libraries, and calls upon the members to reconsider their action in the light of the principle that the organs of all forms of opinion should enjoy equal rights at the hands of the public authorities."

This resolution seemed to hit the taste of the meeting exactly. Mr. Alderman Hearson's speech, a very homely and straightforward one, was also to the taste of the meeting. Mr. Councillor Brookes seconded the motion. He spoke as a Christian. He said he was ashamed of his Christian colleagues on the Council who wanted to shield their religion from criticism; and he would be ashamed of Christianity too if it could not afford to give fair play to its opponents. Incidentally, he mentioned that he had been reading the *Freethinker* since the row over it began; and the statement tickled the audience immensely. Mr. Councillor Ayres, who supported the motion, said that he also had been reading the *Freethinker* since its enemies drew his attention to it; and again the audience enjoyed the joke.

Mr. Moss then said some nice things about the *Freethinker*, its editor, and its chief contributors, and called on Mr. Foote to speak in support of the motion before the meeting. Mr. Foote had a great reception. He let himself go for nearly twenty minutes, and worked the audience up to a high state of enthusiasm. The applause as he sat down was worth hearing. Mr. Cohen followed with a well-reasoned, clever speech that was greatly enjoyed and loudly cheered. The Chairman then said he would put the resolution unless someone had an amendment to submit. Thereupon a foolish Christian Evidence man named Woodward got up and moved an amendment:—

"That the *Freethinker* is not a fit and proper journal to lie upon the tables of the Camberwell Libraries."

As far as his foolish speech in support of this amendment was intelligible, it appeared that the late Joseph Symes once wrote something in the *Freethinker* about Jesus Christ that was very shocking to this gentleman "as a Christian who loved his Savior." Another Christian Evidence man, the notorious Noah Bailey, formally seconded the amendment. Mr. Moss then put the amendment to the meeting, and it turned out that each of the two Christian Evidence men had a friend present. Four hands, all told, were held up for the amendment. Everybody else voted for the resolution, which was declared to be "carried by an overwhelming majority." Such was the result in a perfectly open meeting. The enemies of the *Freethinker* had a fair chance of going for it, but they declined the opportunity. They preferred using their mechanical majority on the Borough Council. They knew they would be beaten ignominiously in free and open debate at a public meeting.

Mr. F. A. Davies, in a vigorous speech, proposed a vote of thanks to the chairman. This was carried by acclamation, and the proceedings closed. The meeting was a triumph for the cause of free speech.

God and the Earthquake.

BY J. P. BLAND.

A Lecture delivered at the Paine Memorial Hall, Boston.
ITALY has recently experienced one of the most fearful and fatal calamities that our world has ever seen—a calamity which has not only awakened the beneficent sympathy of all Christendom, but which has also most notably challenged its faith, perturbed its moral sense, perplexed its mind, and left it in a

state of general confusion. And it is to Christendom's answer to this challenge of its faith, to the workings of its moral sense and the gropings of its mind, under the blow which has, for the moment, staggered it, that I wish to call your attention.

And I cannot begin better than by reminding you that this catastrophe neither morally perturbs nor mentally perplexes the Freethinker. That it presents to him no difficulties whatever like those which it presents to the Christian believer. That he sees in it simply one of those natural and necessary phenomena that have been going on here with more or less regularity ever since the forming of our earth's crust. To him it simply means a subsidence of matter beneath the earth's surface, followed by a subsidence of the soil that rested upon it, together with a like subsidence of whatever rested upon this soil. Now the matter which thus subsided, like all inorganic matter, has neither intelligence nor moral sense as we understand and experience these things, nor is it, in so far as we know or believe, within the guiding and controlling grasp of any supreme being who is thus endowed. Consequently, as a moral and mental problem it touch us not, and, as Hamlet said of the galled king, "our withers are unwrung."

Not so, however, with the Christian of every name and nation. To him nature is but the manifestation of the presence and power of God; and of a god who not only thinks, feels, sees, and hears, but of one also who constantly discriminates in his ceaseless doings, and who can be moved to thus discriminate—a god, as the Bible tells us, whose "tender mercies are over all his works," who, "like as a father pitieth his children, pitieth them that fear him"; and who ever keeps those "in perfect peace" whose minds "are stayed on him"; who covers his faithful with his wings so that no evil can befall them, so that they shall not be afraid of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor of the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. That though a thousand fall by their side, and ten thousand at their right hand, yet shall no evil come nigh unto them, and no plague near to their dwelling-place; for he has given, too, his angels charge concerning them, to keep them in all their ways. Jesus, if possible, goes even farther still. He tells us that God is so exceedingly interested in the welfare of those who believe in him that he actually counts the very hairs that are on their heads. That whatsoever they shall ask for, in faith believing, God will give them. He tells us also that it takes but very little faith to bring about some very great results. That if a man had faith as a grain of mustard seed he might say to a mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and it would be done. Moreover, these same scriptures teem with illustrations of the interfering presence and power of God, as witnessed by Aaron's rod, the ten plagues of Egypt, the miraculous falling of the walls of Jericho, the standing still of both sun and moon over Gibeon and Ajalon, the keeping alive of Jonah inside the whale, of the three Hebrew children in the midst of the fiery furnace, and by scores of kindred happenings.

When, therefore, there happens a great calamity like the recent earthquake, one which clearly seems to completely knock the stuffing out of this popular and church-taught conception of God, it is exceedingly interesting to note how the Christian Church seeks to meet and to explain this apparently unanswerable contradiction of so much that it regularly teaches and stands for. And it is to some of these attempted explanations that I will now call your attention.

And I will begin with the Pope, and with a consideration of his course in this matter; since, of all the teachers in Christendom, the Pope is the one from whom the world has a right to claim some explanatory utterances. For the Pope claims that he is God's sole and only earthly representative, God's vicegerent, Christ's vicar, the Holy Virgin's sponsor, and the one unique man who has got a solitary exclusive here for the whole God family.

Moreover, this dire event happened in the Pope's native land, and to the people of his faith and flock; people whom, if his faith is true, God is under the most special and particular obligation to protect and bless. Worse still, it struck his prelates, priests, monks, and nuns; cathedrals and churches, Christ's body and blood, relics and images, the holy water and holy vessels; all, all—as the blunt would say—have gone down to hell together. Now all these things put this matter up to the Pope, and they put it up to him as no like matter has ever been put up to his predecessors. What, then, has he had to say in explanation? Nothing; absolutely nothing at all. But while he has had nothing whatever to say in explanation of this dire event, he has, since its occurrence, spoken very clearly indeed upon another and quite different matter. He has told us that on Christmas night, while in his oratory, just three days before this fearful horror, the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, appeared to him and told him that she approved of his course in France. That is the limit. Even a pope could not exceed that. That the mother of God, the queen of heaven's divine court, the one and only woman deep-knowledged in the counsels and purposes of the Almighty, should tell the Pope on Christmas night, but three days before this blow, that she approved of his course in France, and that she should forget to tell him that in near-by Messina and Reggio there was danger—great danger—and that in a few days the earth would sink there, and to urge him to tell the people to flee at once to some place of safety. That would have gone far, very far indeed, toward the proving of his divine claims; while what he has said simply reveals him as an extremely ignorant and superstitious dupe—that or something worse.

But while the Pope has been explanatorily silent on this event, not so his subordinates, and where the sun has not dared to move, the satellites have rushed in. I will take our Archbishop as an illustration. And in speaking of him I wish it to be understood that I am speaking of him as a religious teacher and not as a man; for, as a man, he is all right, and he would be all right in every way if he would only let religion alone, which he won't. What, then, has our good Archbishop had to say about this earthquake? I will read it to you: "It was a mysterious visitation of God. He could have averted it if he wished. Since he has ordained that it be so, we must turn to the consolations that are offered in our religion. Faith and religion only can explain the mysteries of life." Well, that is all very familiar to us and we have heard it from Christian sources ever since our boyhood days; but how does it appear when viewed by the light of reason? Let us see! Take the opening sentence, "It was a mysterious visitation of God." But was it? Could God, as the Archbishop conceives him, ever have made a visit of that sort? I do not see how it could be possible, for God, as our prelate conceives him, is a God of love, of goodness, of mercy, and infinite compassion. He is man's kind and guarding father, and for him thus to come and ruthlessly, brutally destroy his defenceless own, is more than man's enlightened reason can believe. No! I say to our archbishop, as I say to the millions of others who believe with him in regard to this and kindred happenings, that all explanations of this kind do not explain, but they rather need to be explained; and that it is utterly impossible to reconcile the doctrine of a good god with the fact of a bad, suffering, and sorrow-stricken world. Take the next sentence, "He [God] could have averted it if he wished." The language here is certainly badly chosen, for since he has just told us that God, by his visitation, did this fearful act, to say that he could have averted it if he wished, is to imply that it was done by some power other than that of God, and the word which ought to have been used in order to have the thought harmonise with that which went before it, is not "averted" but "avoided." In either case, however, the matter is only made worse; for a god who could either have averted or avoided the doing of a horror of this kind,

and failed to do so, belongs to the dungeon's cell, and not to the deity's throne. His third sentence adds still more to the horrors that he has already piled upon God's head, and confounds still more the existing confusion. Listen: "Since he has ordained that it be so, we must turn to the consolations that are offered in our religion." Now here is a typical theological salad for you, a regular religious *pot-pourri*. Let us examine it. First we are told that this earthquake was a visitation of God; then we are informed that it was an event which God could have averted if he wished, and as if it was not God's direct work at all; and now we are distinctly told that God had positively ordained it. Now we may make our choice from these three differing and more or less contradictory explanations; but it is not in the power of human reason to reconcile them. The Archbishop has apparently spoken first, and done his thinking, if at all, afterwards. But what kind of a god must he be who has "ordained" a calamity of this kind?—who has thus ruthlessly smitten myriads of his poor and defenceless creatures? And why has he specially smitten them? We can conceive of no reason except that he was displeased with them; and, if so, why then should the Archbishop order collections throughout his diocese for their aid? Who is man that he should seek to bless those whom God has cursed, and thus strive to thwart the ordaining of the Almighty? By what reasonable right did the Archbishop celebrate his gorgeous pontifical mass for the repose of the souls of those whom his God has purposely killed? To questions of this sort there are, and there can be, no satisfactory answers. Then, too, there is his little opera bouffe suggestion of the "consolations that are offered in our religion." That caps the climax. Consolations to be found in worshipping a God who has just "ordained" that between one and two hundred thousand of averagely good people should be pitilessly crushed, burnt, and starved to death, and who to-morrow may ordain the destruction of as many more. Oh no! his Grace must excuse us. A human man might want to kick a god of that sort; but only a fool or a brute could think of worshipping him, or of looking to him for consolation. The last sentence of our prelate reads like an idle jest. I will repeat it: "Faith and religion only can explain the mysteries of life." That shows the Archbishop to be completely at sea on this matter, and to be dead wrong in reckoning. What he ought to have said is that faith and religion *create* the mysteries of life, not that they in the slightest degree explain them.

I now turn from the consideration of these explanatory views from the Catholic pulpit to that of some of those that have been given from the Protestant orthodox pulpit. Now this branch of the Christian pulpit has been very reticent indeed on this matter, and some of those who have professedly dwelt on this explanatory phase of the subject have clearly avoided all treatment of it. Thus one of our well-known Boston clergy announced "God and the Earthquake" as his subject for last Sunday; he was somewhat fully reported in our last Monday's dailies, and under the heading of "God and the Earthquake," but not one word had he said about God, and had only spoken on the generous sympathy which this disaster had caused in man. A prominent Methodist preacher, however, not only announced the subject, but really tried to explainingly treat it, and put out, of course, some rather rank stuff. In the first place, he opens by telling us that "God is not directly responsible for these calamities," but "that the freedom of man introduces a secondary cause, and makes man responsible for his violation of divine laws"; and that man shows this violation by taking this risk, and settling in dangerous localities. He also declares that volcanic eruptions are necessary to prevent a wholesale explosion, that might shatter the whole earth. Now verily this is the man, and wisdom shall die with him! God, he says, did not directly cause this and kindred calamities, and he thus flatly contradicts the Archbishop, who has told

us that God positively "ordained" it. But to the man who stands outside of these theological guessings and casuistries, it matters little or nothing whether he is told that God did this thing directly or indirectly; and the only things that really do matter with regard to God and this sore ill are, first, why did God do it, assuming that there is a God; and, next, how could he do it if he be good? On these two points our Methodist brother gives us no light; and his attempt to shift the responsibility for the ills of this occurrence from God to man, upon the ground that man, in settling there, had violated God's law, is wholly futile, since God had given no law on this matter; had posted no sign on this dangerous place, telling man that it was dangerous; while to say that this disaster may have been necessary in order to prevent some greater one which might shatter the whole earth, is either to assume a fool of a God who has placed man here before he has prepared the earth to receive him; or an impotent or inhuman God, one who either can't make the earth physically safe for man, or who won't.

I will now call your attention to just one more of these orthodox explanations, and will first read to you the passage on which I shall comment, it being from our leading Boston daily: "The Rev. Dr. Lyman Abbott opines that the spiritual benefit of the earthquake will outweigh all the physical suffering. That is the consensus of the Sunday pulpits on the awful subject." Now we here strike another vein altogether. All whom we have thus far noticed have frankly admitted that this event was an evil and a very great one, but this doctor of divinity here butts in and tells us that in his opinion it is not, upon the whole, an evil, but a good. If so, then what we need, of course, is more earthquakes of the same destructive sort, and the obvious duty of the Church is to get down upon its knees to thank God for this great "spiritual benefit," and to implore him to quickly send us some more quakes of the same kind. But what possible spiritual benefit can this divine have in mind? A spiritual benefit commonly means what the Church calls a growth in grace, in saintliness, or in any godly excellency; but really, what is there in this calamity to cause any of these? Why, the very daily which reports this strange opining of Dr. Abbott reports that in this earthquake region many have ceased to pray, have lost all pious hope, and have sullenly resigned themselves to an event which has temporarily shattered their religious faith and left them hopelessly dazed.

I can see but one clear possible benefit in this terrible evil, and that is that it has compelled thousands, who have passively believed in religious matters to now actually think; and whoever, thus stimulated, will think clearly, think straight, and think the matter through to its logical end, that man or woman will then have done, once and for all, not only with Christianity's God, but with all other gods.

Let us now ponder a little on what our friends of the Liberal Christian body have said on this subject, and I cannot do better than bring to your attention the sermon preached here by the most excellent and scholarly minister who now preaches in the pulpit once filled by the saintly Channing. He begins by practically telling us that God had nothing to do with it; that "God has no more to do with it than he has to do with the hurricane that smites the ship at sea, or the fire that sweeps away the home." Now, he very freely talks in this way, as if he seemed to think that by so doing he was explaining this matter; while, as a matter of simple fact, he is not explaining the matter at all; but is really calling our attention to a number of other very constant occurrences here that don't in the least explain this earthquake, but that like the earthquake, cry aloud for explanation from all who believe in the existence of a good god. Now this Christian minister professes to so believe, consequently, the only way for him to squarely meet the difficulty which this earthquake prominently raises, is to seek to directly reconcile this bad event with the sovereignty of a good and

supreme ruler. He tells us that we see in this calamity "the evidence of a natural law at work." Just so; but his faith leads him to believe that God made this natural law, and consequently God, and not the law, is primarily responsible.

He further tells us that "nature is unmoral; she knows not vice nor virtue." But if nature, which God has made, "is unmoral and knows not vice nor virtue," must not God who made her be unmoral also, and does he discriminate between vice and virtue? The common and general error made by this divine, and by the excellent body of Christians to which he belongs, consists in the fact that they have neither wholly freed themselves from religious superstition on the one hand, nor have they accepted the teachings and implications of established science on the other; consequently an event of this kind raises in them a mental confusion and contradictoriness which they do not seem to have either the intelligence to perceive, or the ability to overcome.

The last utterance on this subject to which I shall call your attention is that of the usually clear-headed and always kind-hearted rabbi who ministers to the liberal Jews here. This preacher has given a rather notable interpretation of the earthquake as it is related to God, and one of somewhat unusual interest. "God," he tells us, "is a being of infinite sympathy, compassion and love, who is not all-powerful, but is subject to his own laws, and hence is not responsible for and could not prevent the great catastrophes of the world." And this good rabbi has a positiveness and certainty about him in dealing with this matter, a "rigor and vigor" as Matthew Arnold would have said, that is certainly very refreshing, and that compels one to "sit up."

Let me give you a few of his remarks in illustration. "I cannot accept the statement that God is all-good and all-powerful. If he is one he is not the other." "This event does not attack the beneficence of God. It merely attacks the all-powerfulness of God." "Plainly he was powerless to prevent this disaster. If we can attribute feeling to such a being, I would rather think of him as suffering infinite pain because of the woes of his helpless children."

Plainly our friend has made his god to order, and has not made him well. For a god shorn of omnipotence is no god at all; while one who creates laws that are more potent than himself, and that take from him his governing power is one who may be more or less imperfectly denoted by words, but cannot be construed in thought. Moreover, was not this god of our friend, whom he practically tells us was originally omnipotent, but who has surrendered his omnipotence to his self-created laws; was not this god, I say, originally omniscient, and is he not so still? and, if so, then he is clearly responsible for the evil results that flow from the operation of the laws that he has created, since these results must have been foreseen by him when he set these laws in action. And where, too, did this rabbi get his information to the effect that God "is a being of infinite sympathy, compassion and love," and where in the whole universe does he find any verification of such a statement? The whole of this gentleman's case may be fairly summed up by saying that he has got a god who is all goodness, but because he has created laws that are very full of badness, and because these laws are greater than he is, therefore he cannot show to us the goodness that he feels; and, that being so, we rightly ask our would-be teacher, how he really either knows or can know that this good god of his exists at all?

What a blessed relief it is to get away from all these gods of men, and to leave them to the ignorance which creates them and the superstition that believes in them; to walk by reason's light and follow nature's leading; to no longer pretend to believe that which we really cannot or should not believe; and to be able to say, whatever happens, if we have only done our best, great nature, awakener and silencer of us all, we bow to thy decrees.

—Truthseeker (New York).

To Robert Burns.

ON THE THIRD JUBILEE OF THE POET'S BIRTH.

AULD Reekie's scholars, fops and wits,

Admired and patronised thy work,
Then pulled thy character to bits

Because of that low stool at kirk;
They loved the virtues, hated shames,
And left us—idle empty names.

Some little things still pat thy back
That they in thy renown may share;
They tell us what thy art doth lack,
And gauge thy merit to a hair,
And gently blame thy evil life,
Thy friends, thy folly, and thy wife.

Yet, spite of calumny, we know
That with thy pen—the poet's plough—
Thy work was done in heart's full glow
As ne'er man since has quite known how;
Thy lyrics ring out, true as steel;
Thy satire even brutes can feel.

Thy song shall render good for ill,
Shall keep the name of Ayrshire green
When all thy race are gone—until
It is as though they had not been.
The stranger in thy land shall see
And know but one, and that one, thee.

Hail, master-minstrel, lyric-lord!
With thee we sorrow and rejoice,
The songs that loving hearts accord
Are world-wide echoes of thy voice,
As kindly welcome even now
As when first heard behind the plough.

There is no virtue born of words,
No out-worn faith can save or slay;
But heaven is open to the birds
That chant angelic roundelay.
Rest thee, sweet singer. It is just!
Thy genius lives, thy faults are dust.

VERDANT GREEN.

The Capital Punishment Question.

THE following resolution has been passed by the Criminal Law and Prison Reform Committee of the Humanitarian League:—

"That this Committee desires to give its entire support to Mr. George Greenwood's Law of Murder Bill; and while approving of its general aim, viz., to discriminate between the crimes of various degree now classed as "murder," especially welcomes the provision made in the Bill for putting an end to the passing of the death sentence in those cases of infanticide where there is no intention of carrying the present law into effect."

Progress is Secular not Christian. The true Christian ages were "the Dark Ages" when men lay prone at the foot of the altar and the throne. The light of Arabian science flashing upon Europe was the daybreak of our modern era. The infidel Mohammedans had homes of science and seats of learning when the Christian prayed and hymned in mental darkness, and the Mosque had its school when the Church had none. Science lifted her head in Christendom, and the Church crushed her down. It made Galileo recant what everybody now knows to be true; it burnt Bruno at the stake; it plucked out the tongue of Vanini before reducing his body to ashes. It fought against reason with the ferocity of a tiger. It revelled for ages in blood. It broke men on the wheel even in the days of Voltaire. The world grew pale and breathless at its crimes. But that stupendous genius, the greatest Freethinker of France and of the world, challenged its pretensions and impeached it at the bar of humanity. And the peoples have gathered round the tribunal, marvelling at the great indictment, and still more at the weak defence.—G. W. Foote.

Change is in the air; it insists on reopening all questions and asking all institutions, however venerable, by what right they exist, and whether they are in harmony with the real or supposed rights of mankind.—Huxley.

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.

QUEEN'S (MINOR) HALL (Langham-place, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Bernard Shaw among the Prophets."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Lower Hall), Woodgrange-road: 7.30, W. J. Ramsey, "Now the Birth of Jesus was on this wise." Selections by the Band before lecture.

WOOLWICH (Co-operative Institute): 7.30, J. T. Lloyd, "God, Man, and the Devil."

COUNTRY.

ABERDARE BRANCH N. S. S. (New Public Hall): C. Cohen, 2.15, "Science, Faith, and God." A criticism of Sir Oliver Lodge; 6.15, "The Meaning and Benefits of Unbelief."

EDINBURGH SECULAR SOCIETY (Rooms, 12 Hill-square): 6.30, J. Hutcheon, "Chemistry and Physics: the Problems they deal with."

FAILSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, Concert by Councillor F. B. Grundy's Concert Party.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): Mrs. H. Bradlaugh-Bonner, 12 noon, "The Book of Christian Science." 6.30, "The Thomas Paine Centenary."

GLASGOW GREEN: 3, Debate between Mr. Grant and N. Levy, "Did Jesus Christ of the Four Gospels ever Live?"

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, "Sidney Wollen, "The Bishop's Message to the Masses."

NEWCASTLE (Rationalist Literary and Debating Society, Hedley's Café, corner of Clayton and Blackett streets): 7.30, T. H. Elstob, "On Being Alive."

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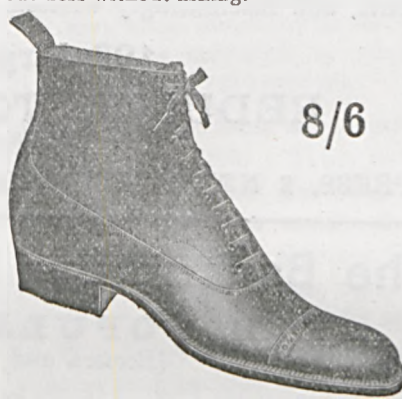
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