

# THE Freethinker

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*The whole world is in a manner a state: my city and country as far as I am Antoninus is Rome, but so far as I am a man it is the world.*—MARCUS AURELIUS.

## A Dead Soldier of Freethought.

THE last number of the *Truthseeker* to hand from New York contains a piece of news for which I was not exactly unprepared. For twelve months or more Mr. Eugene Montague Macdonald, the editor of that paper, had been making a brave fight for life against one of the most dreadful diseases, tuberculosis of the lungs. He had left the paper in the capable hands of his devoted brother, and had been trying the simple-life cure, spending all his time in the open air. Consumption generally shows one mercy, it leaves its victims hope; and Mr. Macdonald thought he was recovering, though few of his friends could have shared the delusion. In what was to be his last message to them, he said: "I am so grateful to all my friends for their sympathy and aid that I cannot express it." He ended with the words "Always yours." And so I hope he will always remain. For his long, hard fight is over at last, and he is dead. The end came on Friday, February 26. Going upstairs in the winter home he had established in Liberty, New York, he started coughing at the top; the wall of an impaired artery gave way, blood gushed forth in a torrent, and he died in the supporting arms of his wife. The final stroke of death was happily swift when it arrived.

The funeral took place on Monday afternoon, March 1, at the crematorium in North Bergen, New Jersey. Amongst the mourners were Mrs. Ingersoll and her sister, Mrs. Farrell, Miss Maud Ingersoll, Dr. E. B. Foote, and Mr. Harry Stephenson, superintendent of the Edison Electric Light Works. Mr. T. B. Wakeman delivered the address and eulogy. Quoting the last message of the dead man to his friends, he said in conclusion: "In those words E. M. Macdonald surrendered his life to us and to humanity, and so achieved the only real immortality."

Eugene Macdonald was born on February 4, 1855. His death thus occurred three weeks after his fifty-fourth birthday. He was a printer by trade, and this fact brought him into contact with Mr. D. M. Bennett, the founder of the *Truthseeker*. Bennett set up a printing office of his own with Macdonald as foreman. On the death of Bennett, in 1883, Macdonald and two others purchased Mrs. Bennett's interest in the paper and business, forming the "Truthseeker" Company; and in later years he became the sole proprietor, which was no doubt by far the best arrangement. For twenty-six years, then, Macdonald had kept the leading Freethought

weekly in America going; and I, for one, know that this could have been no light achievement; nay, I believe the day will come when that achievement, simply stated as a matter of fact, will do more for his fame than a thousand pompous epitaphs, and will secure him a proud and durable distinction.

Eugene Macdonald was not a public speaker, neither was he a brilliant writer, although he could express his views with force and lucidity. What, then, was the secret of his great achievement? He had a clear, sagacious mind; he was amply endowed with common sense; he always saw the vital point of the question before him; he had much practical capacity; he was veracious and honest, and he was profoundly devoted to the cause of Freethought. Those were the qualities and characteristics that made him successful, when showier talents often led to nothing, sometimes to failure, and occasionally to disaster. One may endorse, in particular, the following words penned almost over his coffin by his brother George:—

"He was absolutely a man of his word, no matter how lightly given. Whatever might happen to him in this or any conceivable world he would not lie, and any equivocation in others lowered them fatally in his esteem. He placed the interests of Freethought and of the Freethinkers of the country before everything else. Thus he was misjudged, and bore the misjudgment in silence, rather than betray Freethinkers to the support of doubtful enterprises undertaken by incompetent persons whose disastrous failure was assured. He would rather be misjudged by others than do what his own judgment did not approve.

Men of this stamp are in more ways than one the salt of the earth. They not only belong to the world's elect spirits, but they keep it from rotting. Theirs is essential manhood. They do not lean upon others,—they rely upon themselves; in the long run, others come to lean upon them,—and they are strong enough to bear the strain, without yielding to the vulgar temptations of covetousness or the subtler temptations of vanity. Nothing turns their heads, any more than it turns them from their purpose.

It is one of my own pleasant memories that I made a personal acquaintance with Eugene Macdonald during my visit to America in 1896. I expressed a high opinion of him then, I have expressed it often since, and I express it with greater conviction than ever now. I believe he had the business ability that would have enabled him to make plenty of money in the commercial world. But his mind was set on something higher. He dedicated himself to the service of principles. He was entitled, in his degree, to echo the noble words of Heine: "Lay a sword upon my coffin, for I was a loyal soldier in the war of the liberation of humanity."

G. W. FOOTE.

## The Bankruptcy of God.

"It looks as though God had gone bankrupt," said the Rev. F. B. Meyer, in the course of a recent letter to the *British Weekly*. The expression is one that could only be counted permissible in a preacher of the Gospel. Had it been used by any other—above all, had it first appeared in the *Freethinker*—it would have been pointed to as an example of our vulgarity, coarse abuse, and want of consideration for other people's feelings. I do not believe that, apart from the absurd claims made for religious opinions, that the expression would show these characteristics; but it would certainly be called all I have said, and more. It is puzzling to see how my next-door neighbor is injured by my saying something concerning God; but on matters of religious belief people are very peculiar. Over the famous pious lie of the Atheist who pulled out his watch and gave God three minutes in which to strike him dead, religious people have worked themselves into a quite unwarrantable state of excitement. Three minutes always seemed to me quite an unreasonably long time to allow; and if there is a God, and anyone cares to take the risk, I fail to see by what right anyone objects. If the Atheist had challenged Deity to prove his existence by killing the Archbishop of Canterbury, the matter would have worn a different aspect. But he took all the risks of his own conduct—a not unusual habit of Atheists. And as the story goes on to say that the Atheist was *not* struck dead, one is bound to infer either that God does not exist or that he was not angry with one who was trying to settle the question one way or the other. Anyway, the interference of believers seems quite gratuitous, and, as regards Deity, highly impertinent.

The blasphemy of believers is evidently permissible. Martin Luther refers pityingly to "poor half-witted God"; Mr. R. J. Campbell says the orthodox Deity is contemptible; and now Mr. Meyer says it looks as though God has gone bankrupt. And so I may be permitted to take up Mr. Meyer's expression, and inquire whether God really is bankrupt or not? It must be admitted there is much to suggest such an inquiry. No one knows whether there is a God or not, and no one is certain what he does, or how he does anything, even assuming his existence. Let one theologian find sure evidence of God's existence in one direction, and another is bound to start up and tell him he is quite mistaken. Whereas one finds the mark of God's anger in a catastrophe like that of Messina, another scouts the suggestion as repugnant to our moral feelings, and an insult to the majesty of God. Nonconformists have said recently that in throwing out the Licensing Bill, the House of Lords was obstructing God's work, which looks as though in this country God can only do as he wishes subject to the approval of our Second Chamber. Others issue appeals for the public to help God's work of human regeneration. Help God! The very suggestion seems to savor of impiety or distrust. For if the Lord only helps those that help themselves, it is also true that those who can adequately help themselves need no other assistance. And the rule must hold as good with God as with man. For if the Deity needs our help it is a sign that his own resources are limited. Altogether there really does seem room for an exhaustive inquiry on the subject of God's bankruptcy.

Let me, then, suggest to Mr. Meyer the lines such an inquiry should take. The first condition of bankruptcy is an inability to meet the legitimate demands made upon one. Now, theistically, the whole of the universe, including of course human nature, is part of an ordered plan. God created everything, designed everything; he foresaw the end from the beginning; and the responsibility for everything rests with him. Human beings are born into the world by no act or wish of their own, and are furnished with characters that they are not in any sense responsible for possessing. Clearly, then, they have a right to demand that the power which decreed their existence should

make that existence tolerably comfortable. But this is plainly not the case. People are born with physical constitutions that mark them from their birth as subjects for the prison or the insane asylum, or with characters that doom them to join the wastrel class. And as though to make the injustice more complete, the circumstances amid which they are born and live seem admirably calculated to develop to the full the defects of their organisation. On a larger scale, social conditions often elevate the unworthy at the expense of the worthy; while the same conditions doom thousands to a constant struggle with misery and poverty, or reduce them to actual starvation.

It is useless pointing out that the majority do not come under either of these heads, or even under all of them collectively. A single unsatisfied creditor may make a concern bankrupt, and a single case of injustice renders bankrupt the providence of God. It is useless, too, to say that God is working to produce a perfect society ultimately. This may be satisfactory to those who share in the felicity of that ultimate state; but it is eminently unsatisfactory to those who precede that state, because God designed that human happiness thousands of years hence should be purchased through the suffering of preceding generations. It is equally useless arguing that human conduct can and does redress many evils, and might redress more. This only shows that man has more benevolence than his Deity. When the Liberator Company became bankrupt a public subscription was raised to help the investors, but the bankruptcy remained. And although human effort may redress the evils of the world as God designed it, the insolvency of the originator of the concern remains.

Again, a concern may be said to be morally bankrupt when it loses its credit. How stands God in this relation? What amount of faith has the world in the guidance or the protection of Deity? It is an old saying that when a man appeals to God he recognises how hopeless his position is. "God help you" is not an expression of confidence that God will help; it is an utterance of despair at the prospect of help, just as "God only knows" is a pious way of proclaiming ignorance. In illness nearly every Christian disbelieves that God will, as the New Testament states, cure the sick, while the few who do believe it are sent to prison by their fellow Christians for their pious folly. Believers profess to believe that God protects the widow and the fatherless, but Christian husbands show no backwardness in well insuring their lives—in case of the help not being forthcoming. "The Lord watches over this house" is a text that decorates many Christian homes, but inquiry will show that the same house is protected by a burglary insurance policy, while special attention is paid to locks and bolts. In the early days of the South African War, when the British troops were meeting with "reverses," there were many outcries as to what was needed in South Africa. No one, however, suggested sending out more ministers of religion. If the suggestion had been made that all the clergy of the country should have been sent out and placed in the firing-line, in all probability none but Freethinkers would have supported the proposal. The very churches themselves are covered with lightning-conductors to protect God's buildings from the anger of their owners. Even the new social Christianity does not trust in God; it appeals to the electorate to send certain men to power, which they might do equally well were it wholly Atheistic. Evidently the belief in Deity is in a condition of moral bankruptcy, or, as Mr. Meyer would say, it looks as though it is.

God's credit is exhausted because no one knows what it is he does or what he is expected to do. In the old days, when God ruled the thunder and hurled the lightning, when he sent disease and averted plague, when prodigies appeared as his messengers, and ordeals were resorted to in his name to separate the innocent from the guilty, faith had a chance, and the credit of Deity was proportionately high. But

now lightning is reduced to a child's toy, and disease, instead of revealing Deity, only reveals an interminable germicidal warfare. Prodiges are catalogued in the most prosaic manner, and, from the proud position of being so many Mercurys, are now regarded as evidence of the blundering of a system perfectly blind to human convenience and welfare. Even trial by ordeal has gone. No judge takes the slightest notice of an accused person's appeal to God to establish his innocence, and the accused himself places most reliance upon a first-rate counsel. The other day, in the case now pending, Mr. Bottomley referred to "God's earth," whereupon the opposing counsel objected to such an expression in a court of law. No reason was given, but it is just possible that the counsel was of opinion that, in a law-court, the Deity could not make good his title to such a possession.

In every branch of knowledge the direct action of Deity is universally ignored, and is often deliberately denied. Theologians to-day assure us that God only works through natural laws, and that it is useless our looking for him in particular phenomena. This, if true, divests the idea of God of all practical value, and endorses the Secularist view of life. For if God only works through natural law, and if natural processes, so far as human life is concerned, are unaffected by our religious beliefs, then it follows that whether there is or is not a God amounts to the same thing. All that we are concerned with is to develop our knowledge of natural forces and our capacity for bending them to our requirements.

Decidedly Mr. Meyer's remark is suggestive. It does look as though God had gone bankrupt. But that is the fate of all concerns that have outlasted their period of utility. When God did the things I have named there was some apparent reason for his existence. Now that that time has gone, there is nothing left but to wind up the concern, and dismiss the large staff of officials who are at present engaged in satisfying a non-existent need with the shadow of a vanished commodity.

C. COHEN.

### "The Malady of the Times."

It is taken for granted by many people that Free-thought is an enemy of the truth, and has for its sole object the pulling down of what is up and the setting up of what is down. A grosser misrepresentation would be impossible; and what makes this possible is the overweening self-conceit of those who are guilty of it. Christian apologists always begin their work by deliberately assuming that they alone are in possession of the truth, and that, consequently, their one business is, not to find the truth, but merely to defend it against unscrupulous and wicked attacks. They invariably speak of unbelief as a deadly sin, and of unbelievers as legitimate objects of the wrath of God. Such an attitude is, of course, fatal to originality and independence of thought. Necessarily a believer cannot think the impartial weighing of evidences for and against is entirely beyond him. He is hopelessly biased by his beliefs, which would be robbed of their purity the moment he dared to sit in judgment upon them. But the orthodox theologian denounces, as utterly without justification, not only positive unbelief, but also every form and degree of doubt. Indeed, doubt is characterised as "the malady of the times." We are told that "in recent years many Christians have been affected by a kind of paralysing fear only a little short of panic," a fear that the Faith is based on a dream or a lie, a nervous dread that the Faith is resting on nothing better than the sand of fable and superstition. As a prominent divine puts it, "there is a secret or avowed dread that the Gospel story has been disproved, that the redeeming and mighty Christ of the New Testament has been dissolved into a dream," and "there is a tendency to despair of the Church." Such is said to be "the

malady of the times," which these timid, fearful Christians "share to the full."

Now, what is the remedy offered for this virulent disorder? How can this disconcerting nervousness of the day be removed? It is candidly conceded that "the citadel has been openly attacked," that "it has been assailed with the most formidable modern weapons," that, in short, "shot and shell have struck it"; but that frank admission is followed by the bold assertion that "still it stands impregnable." It is needless to discuss the admission, its truth being beyond controversy; but the dogmatic assertion is open to the most damaging criticism. As a matter of simple fact, the citadel does not still stand impregnable. It has already fallen. It is a heap of ruins; and it can never be rebuilt. The Gospel Jesus has been finally discredited. It is all very well to assure us that in spite of everything "multitudes of believing souls abide in unbroken tranquillity," and that "these are they for whom the inward solitude of the soul is ended, who have Christ within them, the hope of glory"; but it is equally undeniable that their number is steadily falling. Criticism is silently doing its work, and the results are surely telling. Professors Denney, Orr, and Paterson are strenuous champions of the Gospel Narratives, but they can advance no arguments with which to overthrow the positions so heroically taken up by the critics. Dr. Denney, in his *Jesus and the Gospel*, does not even attempt to destroy them. Although he maintains that it is mainly on the miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus that the truth of Christianity rests, yet he regards the objections raised against this miracle as "absurdities," which he treats with "open contempt." He says:—

"When the possibility of the Resurrection is denied and it is assumed that apologetic and other impulses produced all that is put forward as fact in the Gospels from the empty Tomb to the Ascension, from which Jesus withdrew in a kind of solemn pomp from his post resurrection intercourse with his disciples, and when attempts are made to show how this production of facts actually proceeded, the mind has entered a region practically without law, in which its operations cease to interest."

Here, surely, we have the irrational and foolish attitude of the superior person, who looks down upon all who venture to challenge any of his fondly-cherished dogmas. It would be easy enough to turn the tables on Dr. Denney by declaring that when the Resurrection is affirmed as a historical event, and it is assumed that the contents of the Gospels are so many literal facts, and when attempts are made to show that these alleged facts are due to supernatural interferences, the mind has entered a region practically without law, in which its operations cease to interest. It is not the *possibility* of the Resurrection, but its *actuality*, that we deny; and of its actuality neither Dr. Denney nor Dr. Orr adduces the slightest evidence.

Naturally the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection stand or fall together. If Christ was a supernatural personality, the difficulty in accepting the Virgin Birth vanishes, because such a personality would require "for its exercise a unique physical organ," and this, again, would point to "a creative physical act." Then the Resurrection would come in as an almost necessary corollary. The exodus would not be out of harmony with the genesis. The fact to be proved is the supernatural personality, and this no divine has ever succeeded in doing. The Divinity of Christ has never been, and never can be, established, because no one knows what the term signifies. The Church claims that it is a supernatural institution, and lives by supernatural revelation and supernatural aids; but nothing is more certain than that there is nothing supernatural attaching to its members. They are exactly like other people in everything except their professions. So, likewise, Christ is spoken of as a supernatural person; but when we examine his teaching, as recorded in the Gospels, we fail to detect anything in it that savors of supernaturalism, while the deeds ascribed to him

are similar to the deeds attributed to all the Pagan Savior-Gods, in whose Divinity Christian theologians do not believe.

A little while ago the Virgin Birth was discussed in the columns of the *Daily News*. In that debate two well-known clergymen took opposite sides. The one was a Unitarian, and he argued against the Virgin Birth. He emphasised the historical unreliability of the Gospel story, and pointed out that virgin births were common in the heathen world. The other was a Presbyterian, who firmly believed in the Virgin Birth; but his strongest argument for it was the undoubted fact that many Christian scholars accepted it as true. Then he administered a severe castigation to his Unitarian brother for the assertion that virgin births were common in the Pagan world, and challenged him to prove that even one had ever occurred therein. This was merely an ignoble subterfuge, for it must have been perfectly clear to everybody that what the Unitarian meant was that the *belief* in virgin births was prevalent among the heathen, not that a virgin birth had actually taken place. No, a virgin birth never did happen in any part of the Pagan world; and we as confidently challenge the Presbyterian to prove that one ever took place in Palestine. Justin Martyr was more consistent than our orthodox friend, for he said: "When I hear that Perseus was begotten of a virgin, I understand that the deceiving serpent counterfeited also this." Justin perceived that, so far as evidence was concerned, there was no difference between the birth of Perseus and that of Jesus, only the former was brought about by the Devil and the latter by the Holy Ghost. But when a man flatly denies the historicity of all the Pagan virgin births, one is emboldened to demand from him an irrefutable proof of the Christian virgin birth; and this he is powerless to supply. Professor Orr has published a large volume in defence of the belief in it; but even now so orthodox a theologian as Professor Paterson is obliged to confess, in his article on "Jesus Christ" in Hastings' New Dictionary of the Bible, that "the literary and doctrinal evidence for the Virgin Birth leaves something to be desired."

It is asked, "Is it true that historical criticism has taken away from us the Christ of the Gospels?" and the theological answer is this: "We are fully persuaded that the failure of historical criticism to do any such thing was never more evident than it is to-day." There is a sense in which this is wholly true. What the comparative study of religions has done is the assigning to Christianity its right place among the other great religions of the world. It has not taken away from us the Christ of the Gospels, it has only made plain to us that he is only one among many similar Christs, all virgin born, and all risen from the dead after dying for the world's salvation. It has proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus is fully as mythological as Buddha or Dionysus or Mithras, or any other Divine Being or God-man.

It follows that what has been called "the malady of the times" is not a disease at all, but a symptom of incoming mental health. It marks a stage in the passage from dream-life to real life. By the help of modern scholarship the people are beginning to learn that, while under the spell of the Church, they were intellectually asleep and emotionally out of balance, and that the otherworldism which they were instructed to cultivate seriously hindered their human progress. Even the most orthodox man knows that great changes have already taken place, and that greater ones are at the door. He may comfort himself by saying "We have the historical Jesus Christ, and we need no more," and he may still impose upon a few simple-minded people with the assurance that "the clear and unwavering cry still rings forth from the city that is set on a hill, the herald cry that speaks of sin and redemption and immortality and Christ and God"; but it is becoming more and more evident to the thinking members of the community that the night of ignorance and superstition is passing away never to return, because the day of truth and knowledge is breaking, and because with the day

shall come the reign of reason, justice, brotherhood, love, and service. In spite of all the efforts of the Churches and their priests to prevent it, Christianity is slowly but surely going out, while illuminated common sense and genuine philanthropy are as steadily and irresistibly coming in. When that consummation has been realised, humanity shall have been completely healed of the malady of Supernaturalism.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Sabbath.

BY ELIJAH GREENLEAF,

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SHALL I ever forget the Sabbaths of my youth spent in the quiet manse of that prim New England town? The children of to-day can hardly imagine what it meant to be a child then—especially on Sundays. Every Saturday night the food was cooked and the table set for all the meals of the morrow. Before ten o'clock the same evening, toys, newspapers, story-books, and exercises were carefully stowed out of sight, and for the next four-and-twenty hours not a dish or a spoon was washed, nor the ghost of a laugh heard throughout the house. It would be impossible to describe the effect of this custom upon my childish mind. The Sabbath became for me something awful and mysterious long before I was told anything about its institution. This knowledge, deemed too wonderful for me at that early age, was subsequently imparted by my mother in her clear, crisp, dogmatic way. I had tried to amuse myself one Sabbath by roasting chestnuts; and, on being sharply rebuked, demanded why one should have to keep so still every Sunday, to which she replied that it was because God, after spending six days in making the heavens and the earth, had rested Himself on the seventh day, and from thenceforth desired that everyone else should do the same.

That night, as I looked up at the stars which my mother said were all worlds as big as ours, I felt that God must have been very tired after doing so much work in six days, and found it quite natural that he had taken a rest on the seventh, though I could not see why he should have ordered us to follow his example as regards resting, nor perceive what objection he could have had to playing, or letting others play, on the day he had left off work. I brooded over the matter some time, and then asked mother to tell me about it. She said that Moses, whose sister hid him in the ark of bullrushes, went up into a mountain called Sinai to see God, and that there, amid a storm of thunder and lightning, accompanied by a great earthquake, he received from God two big stone tablets whereon was written all that God wanted men to do or keep from doing. He brought these tablets down to the people who were waiting for him—the children of Israel, for whom he had divided the Red Sea—and he told them that the things written thereon were God's commandments, which they and their children, and their children's children, and everybody else, no matter where or when they might live, must keep, or God would punish them terribly, even to the third and fourth generation. Now, she continued, one of the longest and clearest of these commandments is that about keeping the Sabbath, and keeping it for the reason that I told you of last Sunday—that is, because God rested on it after spending six days in making the world. At the same time, and on the same tablets, God gave commandments against lying, stealing, and murder, but these commandments are not one bit more binding than that about the observation of the Sabbath; in fact, they are not put in anything like such a striking way. You must keep these commandments because God gave them, not for any other reason; indeed, there is no other reason, and if you keep one you must keep all, because they all

rest upon the same ground—the word of the Lord given to His servant Moses on Mount Sinai amid lightning, thunder, and a terrible earthquake. Besides, this God punished the Israelites at different times for breaking the Sabbath. Moses had a man stoned to death for gathering sticks on that day, and long afterwards all the Israelites were sent captive to a foreign land for seventy years till they had kept the same number of Sabbaths as they had previously broken. Nor is this all. God has often declared through the mouths of certain holy men called His Prophets that He will bless and take care of all those who keep His Sabbath, doing no kind of work and seeking no kind of pleasure thereon; and you know that it is impossible for God to break His promise. Years later I thought of my mother's words as I read in one of the Variorum notes to Josephus that the City of Jerusalem, on three different occasions, fell into the hands of besieging foes because her citizens refused to break the Sabbath in her defence.

Upon the other hand, I must say that the indifference of the Christian world towards the Sabbath appears to me a thing pregnant with disastrous consequences for the theory of Christianity. For according to Christian teaching the will of God as expressed in his Word is the infallible guide of human conduct, and the rule whereby that conduct shall be punished or rewarded. Whether this august will constitutes the essence of moral obligation, or whether it only affords the supreme sanction of morality, is a speculative point beside the question at issue, since all acknowledge the perfect if not the sole truth of the latter doctrine, and this is enough for the present purpose. Now the Decalogue or Ten Commandments, whereof that concerning the observance of the Sabbath forms such an important part, is publicly and in the most solemn manner set forth by every Church in Christendom as being the authoritative standard of the Divine will, and as therefore possessing the most awful and binding control over human conduct. But to keep the other Commandments, and nevertheless to break with a clear conscience the one about the Sabbath, is to avow belief in the different validity of the precepts concerned, which in turn involves a flat denial of Divine authority as the ground and source of their obligation, or at least as their supreme sanction. For if I need not keep the Sabbath though God has commanded it, I need not avoid stealing because God has forbidden it. Besides this, although to make a distinction respectively to the obligatoriness of commands regarded as divine would in any case destroy the theocratic doctrine, that doctrine suffers peculiarly in the present instance. The command to keep the Sabbath is given with an emphasis specially detailed, and unlike the rest it is accompanied by an explanation for its enactment, namely, the repose of the Deity after the creative labors of the six days. To break it, then, with a clear conscience, must imply on the part of the breaker a disbelief in the facts of its institution, as recorded with such a graphic eloquence in the Pentateuch and the Epistle to the Hebrews, where nature in its most terrible manifestations is said to have accompanied the Divine voice dictating the tablets and making the solemn declaration of the six days' activity. But once admit this and it becomes impossible to rest any of the commandments in the Decalogue on Divine authority, for it is alleged that they were all given together by the same august legislator, under the same awful circumstances. This fact is no slight source of danger to those who, after accepting in simple faith the story of the Lawgiving on Sinai, discover the ridiculous character of the fiction, for the validity of that part of the Decalogue which relates to ethical principles of universal and abiding importance, is liable to appear weakened by its connection with fatuous enactments and its reference to an authority obviously false. Whether Moses took advantage of certain natural conditions to impose upon his credulous followers, as some imagine; or whether the whole story was invented by the priests

at a far later date, as others suppose, may be difficult to decide; but one thing is certain, namely, that the Wagneresque *mise en scene* which was invented to support the Decalogue and which may have had the desired effect at earlier times, exercises at the present day the opposite tendency, and that a terrible responsibility rests with those who seek to perpetuate it.

### Acid Drops.

Ex-President Roosevelt is going to be busier than ever. Besides shooting all the big game in Africa, he is to deliver the Romanes Lecture at Oxford, and two addresses at the University of Berlin and the Paris Sorbonne. Some day or other, perhaps, he will find time to correct his description of Thomas Paine as a "filthy little Atheist"—a description which contains three words and three falsehoods.

According to the *Manchester Examiner*, Ex-President Roosevelt is taking to Africa with him a volume of his favorite poet, and that poet is Shelley. We rather fancy there is a mistake about this. Theodore Roosevelt's favorite poet must surely bear another name. We understand that William of Germany has written verses.

Dr. Clifford led the Free Church Council at Swansea in voting down an amendment in favor of Secular Education. The reverend gentleman's foolish and fraudulent fetish of "Simple Bible teaching" is still the idol of official Nonconformity. Nevertheless, it is Secular Education which is steadily gaining ground. This year it appeared decisively at the great Nonconformist Congress, and it has evidently come to stay. The old gang are unteachable, but the younger men are learning the lesson of events.

Dr. Clifford told the Nonconformist Congress that he had been a Socialist seventy years. If this be true, he must have begun early. He also said that he would be a Socialist in the other world. Which is counting his chickens a good deal before they are hatched. The eggs are not in sight yet. One thing, however, is pretty certain. Dr. Clifford won't emigrate until he is obliged to. His admirers have made him too comfortable here. The £7,000 they raised for him lately will keep him here till he is fetched.

We suspect that Dr. Clifford is a Socialist as he was a Secular Educationist. When it came to the sticking place—that is, when the Secular Education League was started—he explained that his program was not Secular Education alone, but Secular Education plus the Bible. Which is like a teetotaler's saying that his program is filtered water plus Black-and-White.

The long series of hypocritical resolutions on the Education question passed by the Free Church Council were fitly moved by Dr. Clifford, who played the usual tune upon "civic education," abolition of tests, freedom from sectarian influence, etc., but still wanted Bible teaching at the expense of the community. All pure humbug, because Bible teaching is religious instruction, no matter how disguised, and there is no possibility of avoiding tests and sectarian influence so long as any religious instruction is given in State schools. We were almost saying that no one knows this better than does Dr. Clifford; but when we reflect for how long he has played this hypocritical game, it is just possible that, by this time, he has convinced himself of his own straightforwardness.

An amendment calling for purely Secular Education in State schools was moved by the Rev. J. M. Saunders, of Swansea, much to the disapproval of the meeting. Dr. Clifford came up with his usual question of whether it was intended to exclude the Bible from the schools as literature. Well, but the Bible is not used in elementary schools as literature. Indeed, the elementary schools in which any test-books of literature are used is a rare exception; and, secondly, it is the teaching of religion from the Bible—or from any other book—that the Secular educationist protests against. Neither Dr. Clifford, nor any other opponents to the amendment, wanted the Bible in the schools as literature, only they were not honest enough to say why they wished to retain it. In the end, only a few voted for the amendment. The *Christian World* says from sixty to eighty. The *Methodist Times* says fifty. The *Congregationalist* puts the number at less than thirty. Well, whatever the number was, we congratulate the Council on having

that number of men of principle taking part in its business. We can only hope they will manage to infect some of their brother preachers.

During the discussion on the Amendment, Sir George White, M.P., said that "Secularism would assist Romanism in every possible way, for Romanism had always resisted placing the Bible in the hands of the people." We leave Roman Catholics to speak for themselves; but the notion that Secularism wishes to stop people reading the Bible is really laughable. What Secularists have protested against is using the power of the State to place the Bible in the hands of either child or adult, and it has suggested that a wise appreciation of parental responsibility would prevent parents using *their* authority to force upon children views of a book that they could not understand, and which in after years they might have to painfully unlearn. Apart from this, no organisation has done more, in proportion to its opportunities, to set people studying the Bible than has Secularism. By all means let people read the Bible; but if they are to get any real benefit from their reading, let them do so free from the prejudices of a deliberately misdirected education.

The Churches have remained very quiet during the recent booming of militarism—very quiet, that is, so far as saying anything against it is concerned. But the Government is now going a little too far. Some of the newly-formed Territorial regiments have been drilling in Epping Forest on Sunday, and this has roused much religious indignation. To march the Territorials to church on Sunday is all right; that is as it should be. But to take them out to drill on Sunday is quite another question. And so (*vide the Christian World*) "the Secretary for War has been warned that the religious forces of the country will be arrayed against the movement if the many thousands of young men connected with our churches, chapels, and Sunday-schools are to be tempted to spend their Sundays in such a manner." So events are following their usual course. Church and Chapel will support anything, so long as their professional interests are safeguarded. But when these are affected there is a revolt. Against the growth of militarism and jingoism they remain silent; but when people are tempted to stay away from church the religious consciousness awakens. And yet, if the Territorials are necessary to the country, God Almighty might very well do without their worship for a few Sundays. Doubtless the situation would be met if a chaplain were appointed to every score of Territorials.

Rev. C. F. Maude, rector of Burwash, Sussex, fell dead in his church on Sunday morning, March 7, while celebrating Holy Communion. Death was due to syncope, so there is nothing wonderful about the case. It would have been wonderful, however, if a Freethought advocate had fallen dead while delivering a Freethought lecture. Christians would have shaken their heads, and what was in them; and pious journalists would have shed quarts of ink over it.

When the Rev. C. F. Maude fell down, a member of the congregation ran off to fetch Dr. Curtis. Medical aid was considered more effectual than prayer. They all rely on the doctor (these good Christians) rather than on God when they are ill.

The utter futility and folly of prayer has just been demonstrated at Hull. A little Hull girl, the adopted daughter of a carrier named Hewson, living at 39 Waller-street, was kneeling down with her foster sister in the bedroom saying her prayers; and, at the very moment the Lord was supposed to be listening to the poor child's supplication, her flannelette nightdress became ignited by the fire, and she was so terribly burnt that she died in the Infirmary the next morning. People who pray after that must have a mania for praying.

*The Last Persecution*, a fanciful story of the year 1967, by S. N. Sedgwick, depicts China as having overrun Europe, and finally decreed the abolition of the Christian religion in England—the decree being carried out by punishments, tortures, and public burnings. This writer must be very ignorant, or very reckless, to choose the Chinese as the villains of his story. The Chinese have never learnt the art of religious persecution. They are the most tolerant, as they are the most peaceful, people on earth.

The *Educational News*, or rather its London correspondent, has been congratulating Mr. Runciman on his denunciation of Secular Education, which it calls "the policy of despair." This tempts us to tell the teachers, whom, we suppose, this paper represents, that they are not at all fitted

to impart religious education to their pupils, and it ought to be no part of their business. Some of them, no doubt, feel very important when they are teaching children the mysteries of Kingdom-Come, but they would be much better occupied in teaching them subjects on which trustworthy information is obtainable.

Rev. Dr. Aitken, of Dundee, takes Dr. Sven Hedin, the famous explorer, to task for "lying." Dr. Hedin had to tell "white" lies in order to finish his travels in Tibet. Dr. Aitken considers this very wicked. Perhaps it is. But does the reverend gentleman mean that he has never told white lies, gray lies, and even black lies himself? Has he never professed to believe in a lot of Bible stories which no educated man really believes in outside a lunatic asylum? Does he tell the children the truth about these stories? If he does, we are prepared to say "sorry!" If he doesn't, he should let the subject of lying alone.

Dr. Harford, Principal of Livingstone College, has been telling a men's meeting that it is a mistake to suppose that Charles Darwin was not a Christian. Well, in that case, Darwin himself must have been mistaken, for he relates in his Autobiography how he ceased to be a Christian. Dr. Harford was also good enough to state that Darwin believed he had discovered the "missing link" in South America, but "when missionaries were sent out to them, he very soon found out his mistake." Dr. Harford is a very ignorant or a very reckless speaker. Darwin never believed that he had found the "missing link" in South America—or elsewhere.

We cut the following from the *Daily Telegraph* :—

"Missionaries sometimes have to come to prompt decisions on points of great perplexity. An illustration was afforded by the Rev. Dr. Pentland Mahaffy in the course of a sermon delivered in Dublin, in which he discussed the difficulty of discerning exactly when and where compromise becomes justifiable. He cited the case of a missionary of his acquaintance in Africa, to whom a deputation from a savage tribe announced that evangelisation would be permitted among them on the sole condition that a final cannibal feast should be allowed them on a certain day. The missionary reluctantly gave his assent. Three lives were sacrificed, but after that the practice of cannibalism was abandoned, and the district peaceably submitted itself to missionary effort. The missionary claims, said Dr. Mahaffy, that thousands of lives were probably spared by the course he took."

We wonder how that missionary, on the morning of the resurrection, will meet those three colored gentlemen who were killed, cooked, and eaten with his permission.

Mr. Joseph Hocking drove the Free Church Council nearly mad with his speech on the development of Catholicism in England and the growth of monastic institutions. He told the Council—and we have often said the same thing in the *Freethinker*—that Catholic influence is at work in most of the newspaper offices in this country. He stated that there were only 73 monasteries and nunneries in England and Wales in 1873, while there are 1,131 now. Of these institutions even the census gives no statistics. They are all shrouded in secrecy. And even Free Church leaders voted in the House of Commons against Mr. Corbett's resolution that such places should be subject to inspection. When that point of Mr. Hocking's speech was reached the Council went wild. A long struggle ensued between the platform and the delegates. "Names" were cried for, and Mr. Hocking had them, but the Chairman would not allow him to read them. Finally, the Chairman conquered, but the old Nonconformist passion against "Rome" was roused, and we may expect to see Free Church ministers on the warpath against their old enemy.

"After the excitement" of the Roman Catholic question, the *Daily News* report says, it was "difficult for Mr. Bissek to gain sufficient attention for his admirable paper on 'The Brotherhood Movement.'" Naturally. We know where Nonconformists' hearts really are.

The "alarming development of Romanism," as the Nonconformists call it, is a delicious expression. One body of Christians is alarmed and shriek that the country is in danger, because another body of Christians is growing. And straightway the same people proclaim the immense importance of making Christianity supreme. We quite agree that the increase of Roman Catholicism would be a serious thing—as would be an increase of any form of Christianity—if it were an absolute increase. But it is only a relative increase in relation to other Christian sects. Taking the community as a whole, we imagine that it would be found that it is non-Christians who are on the increase. And while this is the

case we can watch one Christian sect devouring another Christian sect with tolerable equanimity.

The Rev. John McNeil also dwelt upon the intolerance of Roman Catholics in Malta, and described how the Roman Catholics had compelled him to bring his mission to a close. Very wrong, of course, but it is only what Protestants would do if they had the power. Nay, it is only what they actually do to the exact extent of their opportunities. We have recently called attention to the exclusion of this journal from the Camberwell Libraries, with the Nonconformist endorsement of the Council's action. The same thing occurs all over the country whenever Christians feel strong enough to act in this manner. Freethinkers are also prevented enjoying the use of many public halls, and in many other ways the good Christians of England mete out to their intellectual opponents exactly the treatment that produced the "unparalleled excitement" at the Free Church Council. The truth is, that there does not exist, and never has existed, a Christian sect that could safely be trusted with power over the liberties of those who differed from them.

Researches into family history sometimes bring out very unpleasant results. Thus the Rev. F. B. Meyer has just confessed that his grandfathers and uncles played whist. We are shocked, but hope that their punishment in the next world will not be disproportionately heavy.

The Rev. F. B. Meyer has just gone to Turkey to convert that benighted land to Christ. If he really undertakes that job he will come back a humbler, if not a wiser, man. The Turk is much too intellectual to succumb to the spell of Christian emotionalism.

Canon Streatfeild, whose article on "The Challenge of Secularism" has just been reviewed at considerable length in our columns, seems to think—or does he only affect to think?—that the National Secular Society's advocates are very low-class persons. He mentions "the three chief lecturers" of another organisation—which does very little lecturing, by the way, in comparison with the N. S. S.—as "J. M. Robertson, Joseph McCabe, and Mrs. Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner." We believe it would puzzle anybody who has heard them to say in what respect these three lecturers are so superior to G. W. Foote, C. Cohen, and J. T. Lloyd. But the cream of the joke is to come. Mr. J. M. Robertson, a scholar and a gentleman, whom we have no desire to belittle, got all his best training on the N. S. S. press and platform during the last years of Bradlaugh's life, and for some time after his death. Mr. Joseph McCabe, some ten years ago, was lecturer and organiser to the Leicester Secular Society, and has often lectured on N. S. S. platforms since; in fact, he is regularly in the Glasgow Branch's program. Mrs. Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner is Charles Bradlaugh's daughter. Is there anything more to be said? On the whole, we incline to the opinion that Canon Streatfeild thought it would be impolitic to speak respectfully of one Freethought organisation without depreciating another.

The Rev. Dr. Brook, ex-President of the Free Church Council, severely condemns the people who minimise the arrest of progress in the Churches. He informs us that "the subject is far more candidly discussed in private gatherings than it is in meetings open to the public." Christianity is dying, but its champions wish to conceal the fact from the outside public as much as they can. They know it is true, but they pretend not to be aware of it before the world. It is easy to forgive them when we bear in mind that their conduct only hastens the consummation they so much dread.

Mr. Frederic Harrison complains that in the attempt to disseminate a knowledge of the laws of physical health, the "Eugenics Education Society" has not any conspicuous Churchman of any denomination giving assistance. We are not surprised. In the first place, the Society is not strong enough, nor the subject showy enough, to pay for their assistance. And next, as Mr. Harrison himself suggests, the unclean prudery of the Christian world stands in the way. The nearest the Churches come to touching the subject is to deliver lectures to "men only," the exclusiveness of which only strengthens that indecency of mind which is the great obstacle to the public discussion of such topics. Any attempt to discuss the matter scientifically is met with a charge of immorality. And, thanks to its Christian training, our public simply cannot approach the subject without a snigger that discloses the consciously indecent mind, or a typical moral outburst that indicates a mind no less unclean although not so conscious of its own uncleanness. Every-

one who has tried to educate the public mind in this direction has been faced with the same difficulty, and some have been clear sighted enough to realise that here, as in most other cases, it is the influence of organised opinion that must be beaten down if real advancement is to be effected.

The Bishop of London has a very poor opinion of religion's power to hold people. Speaking at Wood Green, his lordship said: "People seem to be quickly beyond Christian influence ere it can be fairly brought to bear upon them." The Bishop never said a truer thing; but what a left-handed compliment it was to the Holy Trinity! Father, Son, and Spirit, working in unison, are not strong enough to retain possession of their own offspring, even with the assistance of such favored ones as the Bishop of London.

"That it may please Thee that the police of London may be helped daily in their difficult work." This is one of the prayers suggested by the Bishop of London for this month. We suggest that "Thee" should attend to the detective department at Scotland Yard. Too many murders are committed in London with impunity. "Thee" should be able to correct this. We hope the Bishop of London will induce his distinguished friend to accept our suggestion.

According to the Rev. E. Lloyd Jones, who has been speaking at Darlington lately, the stronghold of the Kingdom of God lies in the country villages, while the playground of the Devil is in the big towns. What the reverend gentleman probably means is that people attend church more in the villages than in the big towns, because the former have few, and the latter many, counter attractions. Mr. Jones went on to say that John Wesley could not get the gospel to the level of the educated mind. "I say 'Amen' to that twenty thousand times," added the preacher. He declared that if he wanted an appreciative audience he should go to the unsophisticated country village. He might go a step further—to the lunatic asylum, where according to the late Bishop of Exeter, he would find an audience peculiarly susceptible to religious influences.

We cut the following press-news paragraph from an American exchange:—

"Dr. Persifer Fraser, of Philadelphia, a well-known scientist and handwriting expert, was barred as a witness in a case on trial here yesterday because he would not say there was a God. Dr. Fraser was called by the State in an attempt to identify a letter, but the witness declined to take the usual oath. At this point counsel for the defence asked him if he declined to take the oath because he did not believe in God. 'I do not know whether there is a God or not,' he replied. Counsel for the defence thereupon objected, and the court excused Dr. Fraser from testifying. He said afterwards that he had been testifying for more than twenty years as an expert in handwriting, and that never before had the court sustained such an objection."

Bigotry appears to be as bad in America as it is here, and sometimes worse. Dr. Fraser could not have been insulted in that way in England. Every witness (or juror) in this country has a legal right to make affirmation instead of taking the oath, either on the ground that he has no religious belief or on the ground that the taking of an oath is contrary to his religious belief. The Act from which this right is derived was drawn up and carried through the House of Commons by Charles Bradlaugh.

The Rev. Dr. Horton says that "when a man has gone wrong, Christ does not leap upon him and pronounce his condemnation," but "rushes towards him to save him." While the first clause in the statement is perfectly true, the second is as entirely false. Christ neither leaps upon a bad man to condemn him, nor rushes towards him to save him, because Christ exists only in the imagination of his deluded disciples. If Christ really existed, and possessed the character and the powers ascribed to him, Dr. Horton's present occupation would be both needless and offensive. An imaginary Christ affords lucrative employment to tens of thousands of men, most of whom would starve were it not for him.

In the *Manchester Guardian* for March 4, "Quartus," who is said to be Canon Hicks, while admitting that "there is less fear of God, less sense of sin, than formerly," that "religion in general has experienced a check and a chill," and that "churches are commonly less well attended, and fewer men press into Holy Orders," yet maintains that "there is an undoubted relaxation of unbelief," and that "there is a growing, though inarticulate, inquiry after God." Surely, Dr. Hick's admissions contradict his assertions; his negative statements give the lie to his positive. How does

the "relaxation of unbelief" manifest itself; and if "the inquiry after God" be "inarticulate," how on earth does "Quartus" know that it exists and is growing? Let our cleric pay some little heed to the logic of facts.

The *Methodist Times* is in rapture over the failure of the amendment in favor of Secular Education at the Swansea meeting of the Free Church Council. Because of the belief that the secular solution would injure the cause of religion, the fact that it would be a perfectly just and fair policy to all alike is utterly ignored by these sectarian bigots.

St. Peter's Church, Merchant-street, Peterhead, publishes a monthly *Church Record*, and the March number contains the following elegant "pome":—

"RAIN AND RELIGION.

Pitter-patter! How it rains!  
Dashing on the window-panes;  
In the Churches—vacant pews,  
Few to hear the Gospel news,  
Few their voice in prayer to raise,  
Few to sing the songs of praise,  
Few to kneel before the Throne  
And their secret needs make known.  
Pitter-patter on the panes.

And the wind howls round the steeple,  
Yet the Lord awaits His people,  
Though it rains."

Poor dear Lord! Waiting in church for the people who don't come! How are the mighty fallen!

Professor Dicey is not infallible. He was lecturing at Birmingham lately on the "Disintegration of Beliefs," and he remarked that there had never been a time in the history of the world when there was such a complete freedom of discussion as in England to-day. We beg to remind him that there were no Blasphemy Laws under the Roman Empire before Constantine.

At a British and Foreign Bible Society meeting in the Ramsey Palace, Isle of Man, the reverend chairman made a melancholy financial complaint. He said that he sometimes wondered how much of their Christianity was only veneer and show. "He thought it disgraceful," the *Isle of Man Times* reports, "that with a population of over 4,000, and with about twelve places of worship in the town, so little interest should be shown in the extension of Christ's Kingdom." And this is the stronghold of that enthusiastic Christian and successful novelist, Mr. Hall Caine. Shocking! Awful! Why don't they shell out more handsomely?

Rev. Asgill Horatio Colville, of Glenworth House, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, left £82,328. Quite a Dives! And we know where Dives went.

Rev. J. P. Maud, of Bristol, has been talking to "men only"—perhaps because women were not foolish enough to listen to it—about prayer being a "partnership with God." We quite understand that the clergy are in partnership with God, who is the sleeping partner in their business, and apparently lets them take all the profits. But where do the laity look in? They seem to be merely contributors.

Mr. Horace Tozer, Agent-General for North Queensland, speaking at a meeting in All Saints' Church Room, Margaret-street, dwelt on the necessity of "combating the dangers arising from the wave of secularism, which had spread over Australia through secular education." We are glad to hear of that wave.

Brinkley, a town of between 5,000 and 6,000 inhabitants in the centre of Arkansas, was struck by a tornado, and afterwards burnt by a fire. Many lives were lost, and the place was wiped off the map. "For his mercy endureth for ever."

Anderson Ellis, a negro who was identified as the man who attempted to assault a white woman, named Mrs. McKinney, was taken out of gaol at Rockwell, Texas, on March 7, by a band of white lynchers, tied to an iron stake and burnt to death before the eyes of a large crowd. No doubt the lynchers and the crowd were nearly all, if not quite all, professed Christians. Which shows the softening and refining influence of Christianity in the course of two thousand years.

Mr. Birrell is a Christian. Mr. Birrell lives in a Christian country. Mr. Birrell believes that Christ came nearly two thousand years ago to bring "peace on earth." Mr. Birrell confesses, however, that as he looks abroad—that is to say,

over the Christian world—he cannot see that "the desire for peace is widespread." "Wherever you go," he says, "you find armament, armament, armament." "It is enough," he adds, "to make angels weep." Which is all those creatures do, apparently, in the presence of evil and misery. Mr. Birrell declares that he can "see no cure for these terrible things except the fraternisation of nations." Christ and Christianity are played out, then.

Mr. P. Jordan, of Whitehouse, near Belfast, a rich retired merchant, who had spent many thousands of pounds on religious work, was attending early morning Mass in the Catholic church, and was in the act of blessing himself, when he fell forward from his seat, and a few minutes afterwards was dead. Another case of "Providence."

Earthquake shocks at Alicante, Spain, shook the church while Mass was being held. Although they ought to have been pretty sure of heaven if they had died there and then, the congregation rushed out into the street, trampling on several women and children on the way. There is nothing like religion to fill people with courage and dignity.

William Booth is doing two years' imprisonment. He was only nineteen years of age and a Sunday-school teacher, yet he was an expert thief. When arrested he tried to draw a revolver loaded in five chambers. In his pockets were cartridges and a red mask. The Harrow bench found his hypocrisy "shocking." We suppose it illustrates the value of religious education.

Rev. F. A. McCaul Smyth, lately curate of St. Mark's, Reigate, who was found guilty of immorality by the Consistory Court, has been practically drummed out of the Church of England. There is no moral to this. There would be one a mile long if the reverend gentleman had been a Freethought lecturer.

The *Christian Commonwealth* charges the *Baptist Times* with "mischievous recklessness" and declares that the editor's "fertile brain and powerful imagination might be worth a fortune to him on the Yellow Press." A sentence like this in the *Freethinker* would be regarded as "infidel manners."

Bishop Welldon, Dean of Manchester, having had a copy of last week's *Freethinker* sent to him, with a letter, by one of our Cottonopolis friends in the medical profession, has replied (to that gentleman) that he "did not tell the story" of the little Atheist lecturer who challenged God Almighty as "falling within his own personal experience." But the press reported him in that way, and we submit that he should correct the false report in the papers in which it appeared. Bishop Welldon asks his correspondent to "assure Mr. Foote" of this, and says: "I hope he will feel that I do not deserve to be described as 'a fluent liar.'" He adds that he is "sorry he told the story at all if it gives pain to himself [Mr. Foote] or other persons who call themselves Freethinkers." When a Christian dignitary says so much as that it would be ill-conditioned to press him farther than we have already done in the earlier part of this paragraph.

"When the soul finds its own certainty," the Rev. T. Rhondda Williams says, "it asks for no proof and it weighs no evidence." We understand now. Mr. Williams is not a Welshman for nothing.

The Rev. J. H. Jowett declares that "the Church of Christ lives by the achievement of the impossible," a declaration without an atom of truth in it. The achievements of the Church are commonplace, at best, while her failures are on a gigantic scale. The Church is a huge windbag, a stupendous boaster, everlastingly blowing her own trumpet, glorying in a falsely painted past and in an utterly impossible future. She lives not by achievement at all, but by bragging.

The only ride that Jesus Christ ever had, as far as we know, was on a donkey—if not on two donkeys. But the finances of the Christian cause have changed a great deal since the first century. Even a Nonconformist preacher like the Rev. R. J. Campbell rides about in an expensive motor-car. Bishops nearly all have one. They don't foot it like their Savior and his apostles, including Peter and Paul. Even the relatively poor Bishop of St. Asaph has just become possessed of a 22 horse-power Daimler, with silent engine and landaulette body. This right reverend father in God, having only £4,200 a year, couldn't afford such a luxury "on his own." It was purchased for him by the clergy and laity of the diocese.



## Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday, March 21, Co-operative Institute, Woolwich: at 7.30, "God's Message to Messina."

## To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—241 High-road, Leyton.—March 21, Forest Gate.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—March 28, Holloway; April 4, Forest Gate; 25, Greenwich.

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £150 4s. Received since.—John Cross, 5s.; J. M. McInnes, 10s.; Felix de Botton, 9s. 6d.; J. H., 2s. 6d.; A. E. Maddox, £1; R. Lancaster, £1; J. J. Hanks, 2s. 6d.

J. B. (Birmingham).—Cutting shall be dealt with later on. It will keep. The Chairman seemed to wait the usual time for questions after Mr. Foote's evening lecture. Glad you "look forward with great pleasure to the *Freethinker* each week" and have "introduced it with good results to more than one friend."

G. R. B.—Your ambition to write on Freethought topics is laudable enough, but you cannot expect to qualify for publication in five minutes. Good writing does not come by mere natural instinct, like a babe's drawing milk from its mother; it involves much study, careful thought, and a great deal of practice.

J. TOMKINS.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.

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

JOHN CROSS.—Thanks for your pleasant letter. We are fortunate in having so many well-wishers. No doubt we shall reach concert-pitch again when the weather is more genial.

J. M. McINNES.—You call your subscription "a long-standing debt to Brains and Courage." That is fine and pithy. We could desire no better epitaph, nor be happier in deserving it. Your description of religion as "the child of ignorance and the mother of lies" is new to us in that precise form, though long familiar in substance.

J. M. MOSLEY.—(1) We don't think the pamphlets you mention by the late Charles Watts are in print now. (2) The best critical Life of Jesus is Strauss's. Meredith's *Prophet of Nazareth* is a good book, but it is not exactly a Life of Jesus, in the sense that Strauss's is. (3) Mr. Cohen, not being a lady, will not mind our telling you that he is just turned forty. He has been writing on the *Freethinker* for many years. (4) We have not quite made up our mind whether what we have to say on Determinism, etc., shall take the form of a book or *Freethinker* articles, though it is more likely to be the latter. We note that you "would willingly give five shillings" for such a book from our pen.

FELIX DE BOTTON.—Year's subscription for the paper paid over to shop manager.

ROBERT STEVENSON.—(1) We spent nearly a week on the Isle of Arran with our dear old friend and sub-editor, J. M. Wheeler, twenty odd years ago, our head-quarters (or rather night-quarters) being a cottage near Brodick. It was then that we climbed Goat Fell together. It was late in August and we had the summit entirely to ourselves; a glorious and memorable experience. (2) Thanks for the extract from Alfred Milnes. It does, as you say, corroborate our "oft-repeated determination" to stick to one definite object in the *Freethinker*.

F. W. WALSH.—Pleased to have your interesting letter and enclosure. A man may be a clever and useful writer, but without practical judgment, and with no gift for real leadership. It may be true, as you say, that the association, of which you are a member, is not bound by what you regard as a temporary and unfortunate attitude; but the world at large never draws fine distinctions,—it goes by the obvious facts.

J. J. CLARKE.—See paragraph. Thanks.

A. ALLISON.—Glad to hear of Mr. Lloyd's great success with his audience at Woolwich.

H. J. HYETT.—Sorry to see that silly article in the *Labor Leader* also appearing in the *Clarion*. We begin to wonder if it was an advertisement of the periodical in which it was first published. Enclosures are too late to be dealt with this week.

G. ROLEFFS.—Thanks for cuttings, though Tuesday is too late for Thursday's issue.

R. H. PENNY.—If the Dean of Bristol is correctly reported in the *Daily Mercury* as stating that there is a letter in the British Museum, written by Pontius Pilate, about the trial and crucifixion of Christ, the reverend gentleman should offer his services to the *Daily Mail*. He would get a big salary as special correspondent, say at Pekin. There is no such letter in the British Museum—or elsewhere.

NORTH LONDON "SAINTS".—(1) Christian authority is not good enough for the "last days" of any *Freethinker*. Only a Christian would ever think it was. There is not a scrap of evidence that Robert Taylor "recanted," any more than Voltaire did, or Paine did, or Ingersoll did, or Bradlaugh did. In such matters, you may always regard "Christian" and

"liar" as convertible terms. (2) The writer of the letter in your cutting makes a great show of learning, and refers (at second-hand) to many books that he has certainly not read.

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

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

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

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## Special.

AFTER the Secular Education League's Demonstration in the beautiful new St. James's Hall I expressed a strong wish to Miss Vance, the N. S. S. general secretary, that I might be able to deliver some Sunday evening Freethought lectures there. For some time the idea seemed impossible, but by a great stroke of luck we have been able to secure it for the four Sunday evenings in April. Miss Vance often tells me that I am under the extra special care of Providence, or something, and I am just beginning to wonder if she is right. Seriously, this is an opportunity to be made the most of; and I am hoping it may lead to the Secular movement taking its place on a permanent equality of opportunity with other bodies, as far as the use of public halls and theatres is concerned. We can get the audiences, if we can only get the buildings. That has been demonstrated. But more of this next week. For the present, I want London Freethinkers to make a note of this most important fixture at St. James's Hall, and to make up their minds that it shall be a triumphant success. They often call upon me for effort. I call upon them now.

G. W. FOOTE.

## Sugar Plums.

The weather last Sunday was even worse than the Sunday before, and Mr. Foote's audience was naturally thinned a bit again; indeed, as the audience at Queen's Hall is gathered from all parts of the vast metropolis, it was a wonder that there was any decent meeting at all on such an evening after such a day. Several ladies had "braved the elements," and were a very interested part of the audience. Mr. Foote's lecture, for an hour and a quarter, was followed with the closest attention and warmly applauded. Mr. F. A. Davies, who gallantly came a long distance to take the chair, invited questions and opposition as usual, but none was forthcoming. No doubt the people were glad, when the lecture was over, to spare the rest and get back to their firesides.

After two such shocking Sundays in succession, it is to be hoped that the weather will be a little kinder this evening (March 21), when Mr. Foote closes the course of lectures at the Co-operative Institute, Woolwich. His subject, by request of the local "saints," is "God's Message to Messina." Admission to this lecture is free.

The terrible weather, of course, played havoc with the Woolwich meetings, under the auspices of the Secular

Society, Ltd. Mr. Cohen's lecture on March 7 was quite as well attended as anyone could expect on such a night. Mr. Lloyd's meeting last Sunday, no doubt as a result of the continued advertising, showed a slight improvement. "Saints" who come to Mr. Foote's lecture this evening (March 21) should contribute as liberally as possible to the collection, in order to make up to some extent for the Secular Society's heavy loss through the wretched weather on this course of lectures.

The *Searchlight*, Waco, Texas, reproduces Mr. Heaford's article on Servetus which appeared in our issue of December 27.

The special correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle* at the Free Church Congress, wrote: "The assembly for the first time is divided on the education question. At certain points in the discussion there were confusing cries of 'Yes' and 'No,' and quite a considerable number of the representatives voted in favor of secular education." This admission is all the more remarkable as the *Chronicle* is against secular education.

The Pioneer Press has just issued an extremely useful, because enlightening, little book called *Natural Religion: or the Secret of All the Creeds*, by F. J. B.—a writer who, for important business reasons, does not wish to disclose his identity. The writer is a personal friend of ours, and we have carefully read his proofs before publication, so that we really know the contents of this little book, which we strongly recommend to all our readers who would like to have a perfectly plain and satisfactory account of the astronomical origin of the Christian religion, including all the leading incidents in the gospel life of Christ. The author does not pretend to originality. The work of explanation was done once for all by Dupuis, in his magnificent *L'Origine de tous les Cultes*, first published, at enormous expense, in 1794. The author has made a careful, lucid summary in English of the part of Dupuis' work which bears specially on the alleged facts of Christianity. Every person of common apprehension will be able to understand this summary. When you have read this little book through you will see through Christianity (including Christ) as you never did before; in fact, you will see through it once for all. Three important plates have been reproduced from Dupuis' work. The reproduction has been a matter of great difficulty, very thin India paper having to be used in order to allow of the plates being folded without breaking. The book is well printed on good paper and bound in cloth. The price is two shillings.

We occasionally print in this column extracts from our readers' letters, which we think likely to interest other readers. Here is one from the letter of a reader who has for thirteen years been hopelessly bedridden. "May I say a word," he writes, "to express my deep indebtedness to you and your gifted colleagues for the pleasure and instruction I receive from the interesting articles in the *Freethinker*? My life has not been laid in pleasant places, but I can say with a full and thankful heart that Atheism has been in a very literal sense my salvation. It has not merely appealed to the intellect and satisfied the heart, it has also been a stimulant to my outlook on life and made me realise the greatness of humanity, and completely answered the inevitable questions that arise from time to time, on a sick bed. The so-called consolations of Christianity are an illusion and a snare; a mere drug to stifle reason and murder humanity's true life."

Another of our readers, who is a classical tutor, in the course of a long letter, suggested by our reply to Canon Streatfeild, writes: "Make your 'Acid Drops' as tart as you can. That portion of the paper stings, and penetrates the hides of many who have not sufficient grey matter to understand the more closely reasoned articles in the paper. The longer articles crush, the 'Acid Drops' stab, and different processes are required for different people."

#### ADAM.

Fit sire was he of a selfish race,  
Who first to temptation yielded,  
Then to mend his case tried to heap disgrace  
On the woman he should have shielded.  
Say! comrade mine, the forbidden fruit  
We'd have plucked, that I well believe,  
But I trust we'd rather have suffered, mate,  
Than have laid the blame upon Eve.

—Adam Lindsay Gordon.

## The Spirit-Mongers.—I.

BY J. P. BLAND,

Lecturer at Paine Memorial Hall, Boston.

OUR spirit-mongers may be very broadly and imperfectly divided into three classes, namely, the Protestant preacher, who aims to save men's spirits from hell; the Catholic priest, who engages to help these spirits to get into heaven, and the Spiritualist medium, who professes to bring them into communication with ourselves. The first of these bases his belief upon the teachings of the Bible and more especially upon those of the New Testament. He points to the words of Jesus, of Paul, and of the book of Revelation; and cites to us the return of Moses and Elias on the mount of transfiguration, as also the resurrection and ascension of Christ. But he usually neglects to state the Bible's other side of this question, and fails to quote those passages in it that as clearly and strongly teach that death is the end of man, as do others that it is not. Here are a few such: "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt upon the ground that cannot be gathered up." "As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more." "There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again. But man dieth and wasteth away. They shall not be waked nor be raised out of their sleep." "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath, so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast." "The dead know not anything.....For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest."

Now these Bible passages just as unmistakably teach man's mortality as do others his immortality; and our Scriptures are, therefore, completely out of the question as an authority on this matter; as, in point of fact, they are upon any matter.

What, then, of the Catholic priest and his commercialised purgatory? Well, for his doctrine there is no foundation whatever save the authoritative declarations of his Church, and of these there are only two, the first having been made at the council of Ferrara-Florence, and the second at that of Trent. This second declares that "there is a purgatory, and that the souls of those detained there are assisted by the suffrages of the faithful, but especially by the most acceptable sacrifice of the mass." And I scarce need remind you that this sacrifice of the mass is sold to the faithful for so much a sac or soak, the priest getting the ducats and his dupes getting the dope; while, as to these purgatorial declarations of the Church's councils, they are, of course, as evidentially valueless as the braying of a herd of asses or the barking of a "professor" at a country fair.

With the Spiritualist, however, the case is quite different; for he not only affirms on this matter, but he also brings forward more or less of seemingly palpable proof; he not only tells us that he has the goods, but he also essays to deliver them; and it is with the Spiritualists mainly in view that I shall speak, and as fairly and kindly as I possibly can, for I have always desired to be one with them.

Grappling, then, with this old question of man's post-earthly "to be or not to be," and with Spiritualism mainly in view, I begin by noting what man's soul or spirit really is as he experiences it. Now, this noting is a very simple matter, and is one about which there should be no variety of opinion; this soul, or spirit, as man is aware of it, being simply the sum of his mental experiences, the total of his conscious states; just that, and nothing else or other. How, then, in the next place, do these mental states arise? Now, the answer to that question seems to be equally clear and indisputable, for we certainly know that they originally arise from the relationship—that is, from the action and

reaction—between man as a physical organism and his surroundings. But in addition to that, we also know, definitely and demonstrably, not only the particular organic instrumentality by which our various forms of consciousness are produced, but also the particular parts of this instrumentality whose functioning produces our various and particular forms of psychical experience. We know that every form of consciousness that we experience is the immediate product of the functioning of the grey matter or cortex of our brain, and that it is just as much and as surely the function of this grey matter to produce thought and feeling as it is that of the liver to produce bile, or that of the stomach to generate gastric juice. For, while we commonly say, for example, that our eyes see and our ears hear, yet, as a matter of simple fact, our eyes no more see and our ears no more hear than our opera-glass sees or an ear-trumpet hears. The only human organ that either sees or hears or produces consciousness of any kind whatever is the brain of man; that, and that only, has the power to transmute a physical cause into a psychical effect. Hence, as a well-known writer puts it, "To the modern school of science the soul is but the outcome of cerebral forces." Or, as Dr. Osler states it in his Harvard-Ingersoll lecture, "Modern physiological science dispenses altogether with the soul." And he might have added, also, that modern psychological science, in so far as it is science and not superstition, does the same; and that in some of the psychological text-books now in use in our highest universities, the words "soul" and "spirit" do not even occur; but all is explained in terms of brain-cells, nerves and their various combinations and physiological or physical antecedents. But the implication of all this is irresistibly and unanswerably clear, and is to the effect that man's so-called spirit is wholly and entirely a bodily product; therefore, when the body dies the spirit dies also; and, scientifically viewed, to talk of bringing back one's spirit, without bringing back the living body which generated it, is simply to talk the merest and sheerest nonsense.

What, then, has Spiritualism to offer in reply? It first offers the counter statement that man is not, as science affirms, a physical organism, whose vital activities produce his psychical experiences; but that he is a spirit, meaning by that that he is a discrete, separable, and relatively immaterial entity, who dwells in his body while this body lives, and continues to consciously dwell elsewhere after its death. And in thus affirming the Spiritualist is at one with both the Protestant preacher and the Catholic priest. What, then, may fairly be said in reply? First this, that if a man is a spirit, temporarily dwelling in this earthly house of his tabernacle, he is certainly utterly unconscious of himself as thus existing; for he cannot see the interior of this physical organism in which he is said to dwell, cannot perceive the brain cells in which he must be imbedded, nor the activities they undergo every moment that he consciously exists. Not only that, but if, as our Spiritualist friends affirm, man's nature is dual, and he is a spirit entity, dwelling in a fleshly body, and not a fleshly body generating conscious or spirit experiences; then it is up to these friends to plainly and positively tell us where this spirit entity comes from, how and at what period it enters the body, in what particular part, if any, it dwells, and in what manner it is vitally connected therewith. Now, to these and kindred questions Spiritualism, I regret to say, is practically as dumb as a closed clam. But if Spiritualism were true, it should certainly be easily in its power to clearly and convincingly speak on these points. For it not only affirms that man is a spirit dwelling in his body, but it also affirms that this spirit so dwelling can come into communication with other and now incarnate spirits who formerly so dwelt; and, if so, then it is self-evident that all of the questions I have just named could be most easily answered; while the fact that they never are answered goes far towards discrediting Spiritualism's claims. And this objection,

which is valid against Spiritualism for its inexplicable silence on man's earthly beginning and bodily conditioning, is still further strengthened by a consideration of Spiritualism's equal failure to specifically tell us what happens to him after his earthly ending. For if man's supposed spirit survives his body's death, then must it somewhere and somehow live; and, if so, and if, also, we can get into communication with those that thus live, then should there be no difficulty in their clearly and harmoniously telling us the essential nature of their life. But, as a matter of fact, they are worlds apart on this question; Allan Kardec and some of the French Spiritualists telling us that these departed spirits have successive reincarnations here, with intervals of spirit life in the not here; while other Spiritualists tell us that man's spirit has no earthly reincarnation, but that at death it goes at once to the spirit land, and to its proper sphere there. If, however, we ask where this spirit land precisely is, and what manner of life the spirits lead there, such as, do they eat? do they drink? do they breathe? do they clothe? do they retain their sex desires? and so forth, then do "Bright Eyes" and the rest either usually evade or else talk even more trashily and less to the point than is their wont. One simply gets from them, as a rule, the vague and general impression that they are living, somehow, in our atmosphere, or in the space which lies beyond it. But if they are living in our atmosphere, then must this "land" of theirs consist of very highly sublimated soil; while in the space beyond it the medium is millions of times more tenuous and the temperature about 500 degrees below zero; neither place appearing to be very suitable for human habitations of any sort.

(To be concluded.)

### Mr. John Davidson.

"I would have all men come out of Christendom into the universe."—JOHN DAVIDSON, *Mammon and His Message*.

THE reproach has often been levelled against our insular art that it is Philistine. The French artistic sense lifts itself out of that rack. It may go to the dogs; but it is not Philistine. As a fact, art in France, in all its divisions, is Bohemian. There is no risk that the bulk of our English writers and artists will ever be Bohemian. Miss Correlli and Mr. Hall Caine are eminently respectable; and Mr. Alfred Austin is a good Tory. Nowadays with us James Thomsons are exceptional; but so is the genius of that gifted poet. If any foreigner shall throw this up in our faces we may take refuge behind the broad backs of Mr. Swinburne and Mr. John Davidson. Neither of these singers dwell beside the still waters. To think of their careers is to think of excursions and alarms, of the goddess Grundy in hysterics, of tabernacle calling unto conventicle, of manifold recriminations and vituperations.

We may wish that these two poets had not been compelled so often to exchange their pens for their swords; but on their careers all will look with pride to whom the glory of English literature is dear. The bright flame of their enthusiasm has always burned for right issues and noble causes. Their eagerness for battle has invariably been in the cause of Freedom against all conventions and traditions. Mr. Swinburne is already a classic, and his best work has passed into its permanent place in our literature; but Mr. John Davidson deserves our attention, as he so worthily carries on the splendid tradition of his illustrious predecessor.

Mr. Davidson won his separate place in the great literature of our country by his *Fleet-street Eclogues* and his *Ballads and Songs*. The appearance of the latter volume raised a storm. Exeter Hall could not stand his "Ballad of a Nun" and "Thirty Bob a Week." The respectable classes were indeed startled. Admirers of the placid and comfortable poems of

Lewis Morris were not accustomed to the beauty or the freedom of Mr. Davidson's poems. It was a very long way from the sugary "Epic of Hades" to Mr. Davidson's powerful muse.

Since that, the poet has published book after book, and proved conclusively that there is a considerable public for really high-class poetry. His latest trilogy, *God and Mammon*, is likely to make a noise in the world. In it Mr. Davidson emphasises his belief that Christianity is on its death-bed, and it is upon the enormous change that this belief involves that he bases his splendid visions. He substitutes for the Christian cosmogony the cosmogony of man and science. Being a poet of real and unmistakable genius, he breathes life into the terminology of science. Like Swinburne himself, he blows everything to melody through the golden trumpet of his genius.

Mr. Davidson is not a great dramatist. When you read *God and Mammon* you do not greatly care what befalls Prince Mammon or King Christian; what you care for is the beautiful language, oftentimes as resistless as the honeyed perfection of Kit Marlowe. When you think of a really great play you do not think of any single person or passage. The glory of that most perfect tragedy, *Othello*, is neither the Moor, nor Desdemona, nor Iago, but each and all. To recall Mr. Davidson's trilogy is simply to think of isolated passages which are very glories of charm and imagination:—

"Hush!  
The murmur of the seaboard: surges beat  
Their slow, uncertain, softly swelling fugue—  
The brooding surges, fingering the shore.  
Life's heavy fruitage and imperial nights  
When naked darkness gluts the sky with stars.  
And thunder of the thought shall seem to wait  
Upon the nimbler lightning of the deed."

Now listen to another passage. Mammon delivers his message:—

"The fanes are ruined, spent.  
The adoration that was only fond  
Expedient, frantic makeshift for delayed  
Self consciousness in men; the truest creed  
Dies like a mollusc when you crack the shell.  
Instead of temples I bring the universe;  
Instead of creeds I offer you yourselves,  
The greatness of the universe become self conscious  
In flames and crimson seas we shall advance  
Against the ancient immaterial reign  
Of spirit and our watchword shall be still  
'Get thee behind me, God; I follow Mammon.'"

Mammon's description of the world he would bring into being palpitates with passion:—

"I, Mammon, mean to make  
This mighty world a hundredfold itself.  
There shall be deeper depths of poverty,  
A more distressing toil, more warlike war,  
An agony of spirit deadlier  
Than that which drenched Gethsemane in blood;  
A rapture of dominion hitherto  
Unfelt by conquerors, kings, or priests; a power,  
A beauty, and a glory of the world  
Emerged from Christendom, like love's beloved  
With April from the wrinkled womb of death,  
Delivered fresh to Aphrodite's arms."

It is by means of passages such as this that we can see the genius of the poet who found inspiration in the rawness, hugeness, and noise of modern Babylon. Mr. Davidson strikes us as a poet of rich and puissant imagination. There can be no doubt as to the high distinction of his work. John Davidson is a pioneer as well as a poet. He has left the priests and their superstitions far behind. Beyond the fabled Eden, the iniquitous Hell, and the tawdry Heaven, the resplendent visions of the poet flood the sky and pours its splendor over the world.

M.

Society has the right to protect itself, even from honest murderers and conscientious thieves. The belief of a criminal does not disarm society; it protects itself from him as from a poisonous serpent, or from a beast that lives on human flesh. We are under no obligation to stand still and allow ourselves to be murdered by one who honestly thinks it is his duty to take our lives.—*Ingersoll*.

## God or Fiend?—An Echo of Reggio.

THE dogs howled in the night. And a dream came to me which was the mental distortion of a terrible happening.

The air was close, and there was an ominous stillness in nature; the birds circled low, and their strange chirrup oppressed and subdued my spirit.

I stood upon an eminence, with both the city and the sea in view. I was troubled and fearful, for this was the seismic zone, and the ground beneath my feet had trembled; therefore was it that I pondered of earth, of ocean, of "God," though God was with me but another name for fear. Yes, the ground shook! The waves lapped the shore with fitful impulse, and the beach seemed to babble in a new tongue.

More uneasy became the depths, and the spasm of Mother Earth more emphatic, while from the clouds came fitful gleams—

Then in a moment a tearing, rasping sound from the bowels of the world, an eerie darkness and copper sun. It was an *earthquake!* For I beheld in the distance the buildings of the city trembling, tottering—falling. A vast cloud of dust arose from the ruins, and I heard the screams of women and children, and the shouts and groans of men. I saw countless human beings destroyed by the falling beams and stones, and viewed with horror the struggles of the dying, and the torn and bloody features of the dead. The sea—now become impetuous and boiling—leapt with a new-found force, and then as rapidly receded, carrying back in remorseless grasp hundreds of writhing forms. But their cries were rapidly stifled in the swirl and rush of the waters, and the blast of an evil wind.

Stricken with horror, I shouted, in the words of Shelley: "Is there a God? Is there a God?" And I thought a voice came from out of the depths, seeming to say: "Is there a God! Ay, an almighty Fiend!"

Leaving the hill whereon I had stood, I approached the ruined city. Choked and blinded with the dust, my soul was now torn by the lamentations of those still living. Here was a father who had been vainly calling for his children. He was kneeling before the shattered remains of a church, and vainly supplicating the "Father of Heaven and Earth." I heard him chant—

"He plants his footsteps on the sea  
And rides upon the storm."

Round the bend of a great heap of fallen stonework I came upon a woman of deathly pallor and dishevelled hair. She was screaming, and between her screams repeating short prayers, during which time she held her dying child, crushed and mangled, high up to heaven. Then she laid it down tenderly and again screamed. And so she continued to implore and so she screamed. Truly, "When last I slept I heard Adherbal scream."

Further on was a little child bending in a pool of her own blood before a cross. Her tiny hands were uplifted. She was speaking in a tone low and earnest. Her words becoming ever weaker, I drew close to learn their import: "Do give me back my mother. And my father, too, if you can, dear God. You know we have trusted in you—they are gone—they are gone! Let them come back—let them come back—let them —." She ceased, and fell forward. Striving within myself to reconcile the action of an alleged Almighty Father with the death of that innocent, the air now seemed laden with the utterance.—

"Hath then the gloomy Power  
Seized on her sinless soul?"

Presently, from out the shadow of a tottering wall emerged a man shouting in wild laughter. His nearly naked body revealed torn and hanging flesh—the penalty of his escape with life. His face was the color of the dust, and in his eyes was an awful light. He passed, exclaiming: "Great God! It is a judgment! Great God! It is a judgment!"

Stumbling over prostrate bodies and uneven ground, I discovered at some distance a motley group around something which stood in their midst. This proved to be a marble obelisk from the Cathedral of Messina, surmounted with a Madonna and child. The child had been broken away, but the Madonna herself remained. She, the *Mother of the World!* But the figure hung now in perilous position, supported only by the iron core within. Every upturned face bore the imprint of profound adoration, on every lip there dwelt a prayer. For had not the impotence of man been exemplified by the earthquake? And was not the power of the hand behind the world infinitely stronger at the present moment? So to the emblem of divine motherhood they had flocked; to one who had shed burning tears for the sins of the world they had come now in this their hour of need. "Have not the buildings been destroyed? And is not *Our Lady* here to save? Surely, surely, or the priests have lied!" Thus they spoke and the men gave

themselves to her henceforth body and soul, and the women, with streaming eyes, supplicated for mercy.

They prayed to the Virgin to intercede with the Father to stay his angry hand, and their prayers bore fruit, though fruit that proved bitter as gall. *The answer came!* Even now, while they knelt, the answer came in the form of another shock of greater force than the last.

There was a humming sound from below—organ accompaniment to their prayers—then a terrific and vast upheaval, after which down, down, ever down. I, with them, was being sacrificed; I, with them, was engulfed, blinded, suffocated, held with irresistible force by ten thousand stony hands, bound immovable in the midst of solid, unyielding weight, absolute silence, and infinite darkness.

After a seemingly interminable period, out of a slowly striving mass—release!

Yes, release. And then two lights, like stars, gradually formed themselves into beaming eyes. A mouth pulsed in the movement of speech. A brow was disclosed so beautiful, it seemed crowned with eternal youth.

I stretched forth my hands and strove to speak, when the vision, with a cadence strangely powerful, uttered these words: "Is there a God? Is there a God? Ay, an almighty God, and vengeful as almighty. Here, by this now ravaged land, and before my life's task was done, the waves I loved choked my breath—Earth, Ocean, Air, over these—." The voice ceased, and the vision was torn from my gaze. But I fancied I heard from out the distance the cry:—

"Fiend! I defy thee! With a calm fixed mind  
All that thou canst inflict, I bid thee do!"

So I awoke—but awoke torn with anguish, and distressed beyond measure.

And now I think with Shelley, that if God there be, then he is—

"A vengeful, pitiless, and almighty Fiend!  
Whose mercy is a nickname for the rage  
Of tameless tigers hugging for blood."

A. F.

### The Preacher Puzzled.

For the conversion of the employees, the Rev. J. E. Snyder, an Episcopal minister of Chicago, has been going to workshops and factories during the noon hour and promulgating the Gospel. On the day he visited one Chicago company's establishment, a number of young women who had come to listen turned the tables and made the minister the target for an avalanche of questions. The queries which were fired at the pastor came so thick and fast that he found little opportunity for preaching and, in fact, had his own troubles getting a word in edgewise now and then. Rather indiscreetly, it would seem, the evangelist has related his experience, which, in his own words, was as follows:—

"One young woman asked me, 'Who made God?' and before I could start to speak another followed by asking me if God was responsible for sin. I said 'No, Satan is responsible for sin'; and before I had hardly finished that sentence another girl asked, 'Who made Satan?' They asked me whether God heard and answered prayer. I told them God did answer prayer, and then they wanted to know why God did not answer the prayer of the martyrs. One of the questions asked was, 'What are the benefits of the Church to the working man?' About the first question one of the young women asked me was whether I believed in the God of the Jews. The young woman seemed to have the prevailing idea that the God of the Jews was a cruel God because he countenanced wars in which much blood had been shed.

I was asked whether I did not think that Debs was a good man. I said I thought he was, when another member of the audience remarked that 'Debs is not a Christian.'

The questions denote that the girls have a better gospel—the gospel of common sense—than that of the Rev. Mr. Snyder, and that they stand in no need of his.

—Truthseeker (New York).

### NO PLACE FOR HER.

Wife: "Shall we take Aunt Backwoods to the Sunday night sacred concert?"

Husband: "No; she cares only for religious music."

### CONTRADICTING HIMSELF.

"A feller shouldn't stand in the middle of the street to talk pessimism," declared the Plunkville philosopher.

"Why not?"  
"Fust he says his life ain't worth living, and then jumps when he hears an automobile honk."

### Funeral Fee Touting.

#### ALLEGATIONS AGAINST MIDLAND MINISTERS.

A CURIOUS controversy has arisen between certain cemetery authorities in and around Birmingham regarding the services of ministers at funerals. Recently a Nonconformist minister complained of being prevented by a cemetery chaplain from conducting the funeral of a relative. In this case no question of fees arose, as his services were offered gratuitously; but the controversy has led to a complaint that certain persons are in the habit of touting for funeral engagements. Eighteenpence as chaplain's fee is charged for a public reading when several funerals are taken together, and five shillings for a private funeral.

A Birmingham undertaker states that cases have occurred of relatives having no wish for a private funeral being solicited by ministers to mark their form "own minister." He affirms that a certain number of Birmingham undenominational ministers and an equal number of laymen conduct funerals solely for the fees.

One minister told the undertaker he was not well paid by his congregation, and would be glad to take funerals for relatives who had a repugnance to the public reading which might have served for a number of interments. It is stated that the number of funerals by "own ministers" has greatly increased since the fee was raised from 1s. to 5s.

#### TRUE AND FALSE IMAGINATION.

Imagination is a valuable faculty when it is in the service of reality. See it in the work of a great painter whose masterpieces we wonder at and admire through ages. See it in the work of the great sculptor, like some of those glorious artists of antiquity whose statues have survived the ravages of time. See it in the epics of a Homer or the dramas of a Shakespeare. See it in the scientific genius of a Newton or a Darwin, which perceives subtle lines of evidence all running to one point, although other men, with little less knowledge, perceive nothing but chaos, because their vision is dim. Such imagination is grand indeed. But when the imagination, uninformed by knowledge and uncontrolled by reality, employs itself in the mere combination of its internal resources, joins one fact of memory to another, and fancies that the product must be real because the fancy is so vivid; when it revels in the creation of ghosts, and dreams of dead gods, and fantastic miracles, and heavens and hells, and all the foul or foolish things which are foisted on the minds of little children in their undiscerning youth; then it is fearfully debasing to the whole life. The corruption of the best is the worst; and that imagination, which is the noblest of all faculties in literature, science, and art, becomes infinitely degrading in the curse of religion.—G. W. Foote.

O glorious days,—when Church and State  
Were wedded by your spiritual fathers!  
And on submissive shoulders sat  
Your Wilsons and your Cotton Mathers.  
No vile "itinerant" then could mar  
The beauty of your tranquil Zion,  
But at his peril of the scar  
Of hangman's whip and branding-iron.  
Then wholesome laws relieved the Church  
Of heretic and mischief-maker;  
And priest and bailiff joined in search  
By turns, of Papist, witch, and Quaker!  
The stocks were at each church's door,  
The gallows stood on Boston Common,  
A Papist's ears the pillory bore,—  
The gallows-rope, a Quaker woman! —Whittier.

There is a pleasure in the wet, wet clay,  
When the artist's hand is potting it.  
There is a pleasure in the wet, wet lay,  
When the poet's pad is blotting it.  
There is a pleasure in the shine of your picture on the line  
At the Royal Academy!  
But the pleasure felt in these is as chalk to cheddar cheese  
When it comes to a well-made Lie,  
To a quite unwreckable Lie,  
To a most impeccable Lie!  
To a water-tight, fire-proof, angle-iron, sunk-hinge, time-  
lock, steel-faced Lie!  
Not a private hansom Lie,  
But a pair and brougham Lie!  
Not a little place at Tooting, but a country house with  
shooting, and a ring-fence, deer-park Lie!  
—Rudyard Kipling.

**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.**

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Forest Gate Public (Lower) Hall, Woodgrange-road): 7.30, C. Cohen, "The Necessity of Atheism." Selections by the Band before lecture.

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Alma Hall, 335 High-road, N., three doors from Commerce-road): 7, A. Hyatt, "There is Life in a Look at the Crucified One."

WOOLWICH (Co-operative Institute): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "God's Message to Messina."

**COUNTRY.**

EDINBURGH SECULAR SOCIETY (Rooms, 12 Hill-square): 6.30, A. Davis, "Peter Kropotkin: An Appreciation."

FAIRSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, Harry Snell, "Charles Bradlaugh as I Knew Him."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, Discussion Class; 6.30, Chamber Concert.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, Lecture or Impromptu Discussion.

NEWCASTLE (Rationalist Literary and Debating Society, Hedley's Café, corner of Clayton and Blackett streets): 7.30, R. Turnbull, "A Criticism of Socialism."

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Secretary—E. M. VANCE (Miss).

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The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of inquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularisation of the State, etc., etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

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