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Superstition, bigotry, hypocrisy, prejudice — these spectres, spectres though they be, are tenacious of life; they have teeth and claws in their smoke. We must grasp them, and assail them at close quarters, and wage a war without truce.—VICTOR HUGO.

Two "Infidels."

TENNYSON called Omar Khayyám a "large infidel," and spoke of Fitzgerald's translation as "done divinely well." Swinburne has said of Fitzgerald that "His daring genius gave Omar Khayyám a place for ever among the greatest English poets."

Omar Khayyám, the Persian poet and astronomer, who excelled in two opposite directions, was born in the latter half of the eleventh century, and died within the first quarter of the twelfth century. He was a very wise man. He saw through the masks and shows of things. He understood what the prizes of ambition, and the blessings of wealth, really are. He smiled at titles and office. He preferred a life of obscurity—and usefulness. "The greatest boon you can confer on me," he said to a friendly Vizier, "is to let me live in a corner under the shadow of your fortune, to spread the advantages of science, and pray for your long life and prosperity." And the friendly Vizier granted him a yearly pension from the treasury of Naishapur. Under the Sultanate of Malik Shah, he went to Merv, and was one of the eight learned men chosen by that potentate to reform the calendar; which was done in a way that won the praise of Gibbon, who declares that the Jalali era thus arranged was "a computation of time which surpasses the Julian, and approaches the accuracy of the Gregorian style." Omar was also the author of some astronomical tables, and a treatise of his on Algebra was translated into French in the nineteenth century.

"Khayyám" signifies a Tentmaker. Omar's original trade was therefore the same as St. Paul's. But what a difference between the two men! St. Paul would have been shocked at Omar's levity and profanity, and Omar would have laughed at St. Paul's fanaticism and solemnity.

Omar had the double brain of a man of science and a poet. He was master of all the learning of his time; and he also rejoiced in the sunshine and gazed with bent brows on the solemn mystery of the star-lit night,—he loved music, and flowers, and the beauty of woman, and all other loveliness—and while he could regale himself with simple bread-and-cheese, he would wash it down with draughts of the wine which the Prophet forbade, for the generous liquor gave him a finer exhilaration than he (or others) had ever gained from the disputes of all the religions of the world over the secrets of the Unknowable. With the orthodox he was therefore something of an outcast. But he lived his own life and was glad, and he thought of death without fear. "My tomb," he said, "shall be in a spot where the north wind may scatter roses over it." And so indeed it happened. For he was buried just outside a garden, the trees of which spread their boughs over the wall and dropped their flowers upon his tomb.

Omar's rich brain distilled hundreds of quatrains full of poetry, reflection, and scepticism. He sang a good deal of wine, but that was doubtless to some extent symbolic of the joy of life which religion challenged. The Persian poet, like the Scotch poet, probably sang far more than he drank of the forbidden stuff. Those who fancy Burns was nearly always drunk, forget his large output of verse, in addition to his daily work as farmer or exciseman; and also that he was dead at thirty-seven. Omar lived much longer, and he kept his head for his scientific labors. There is such a thing as taking a poet's utterances as if he spoke on affidavit. Even pious Martin Luther burst out with:—

"Who loves not wine, woman, and song,
He is a fool his whole life long."

But we must not infer that he spent his time in singing, drinking, and fornicating.

The scepticism of Omar was something more than negative. It was passionate and aggressive. He did not float luxuriously between this world and the next, as Fitzgerald says, on the wings of a poetical expression. He was too honest for that. "Having failed," as Fitzgerald says again, "of finding any Providence but Destiny, and any World but This, he set about making the most of it; preferring rather to soothe his Soul through the Senses into Acquiescence with Things as he saw them, than to perplex it with a vain disquietude after what they *might* be." Nothing could be finer than the way, for instance, in which Omar turns upon the God who demands man's absolute worship and obedience, and claims the right to punish him for the faults which result from the action of his Creator:—

"What! out of senseless Nothing to provoke
A conscious Something to resent the yoke
Of unpermitted Pleasure, under pain
Of Everlasting Penalties, if broke!

What! from his helpless Creature be repaid,
Pure gold for what he lent us dross-alloy'd—
Sue for a debt he never did contract,
And cannot answer—Oh the sorry trade!

Oh Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the Road I was to wander in,
Thou wilt not with Predestined Evil round
Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to Sin!

Oh Thou, who Man of baser earth didst make,
And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake;
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd—Man's forgiveness give—and take!

That last line is one of those superb audacities that bring light to the eyes and send the blood coursing swiftly through the veins. Only a Master could have written it. And it appears to be as much Fitzgerald's as Omar's.

Magnificent, also, is the quatrain in which the Persian poet, more than seven hundred years before Darwin, expressed the unalterable course of nature and the futility of prayer:—

"The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a word of it."

Things are what they are, and will be what they will be. Man may strut and boast, and talk of miracles, and believe, or affect to believe, that some power in nature or behind it will do his behests or fulfil his desires, but in the end he has to bow to the inevitable. Wiser are those who "let determined things to destiny hold unbewailed their way." And

yet—and yet—the human heart cries out against the cruelties of the world, and pictures something saner and sweeter. Omar himself exclaims:—

" Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!"

But this is only a dream, and Omar knew it perfectly well. Here on earth, not elsewhere, we must find our paradise, or at least our consolations; and the greatest of these is love—as the other Tent-maker said in a different connection:—

" With me along the strip of Herbage strown
That just divides the desert from the sown,
Where name of Slave and Sultan is forgot—
And Peace to Mahmud on his golden Throne!
A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!"

Food and shelter and love,—these, after all, are the great primary things of life. They take a thousand forms, but at bottom they are all of one substance. And nobody ever knew this better than Omar.

The quatrains of Omar Khayyâm, anticipating every phase of modern scepticism, were naturally never popular in his own country. They were translated into French in the first half of last century. Not long afterwards they were taken in hand by Edward Fitzgerald, who was a true poet, without initiative. His genius and Omar's may be said to have fused together. The hundreds of quatrains took final and perfect shape in English as a hundred and one; the more diffuse Omar was tightened up into the glorious terseness of Fitzgerald; and the result is a poem, only four hundred and four lines in length, but pure gold from first to last—a splendid and imperishable thing.

I have myself known Omar-Fitzgerald, or Fitzgerald-Omar, ever since 1877, when a scarce copy of the *Rubâiyât* was lent by Bertram Dobell the bookseller to James Thomson the poet, who copied the whole volume out in a notebook, which he in turn lent me so that I might copy it out too. I have my copy by me still. I would not change it for the most sumptuous book in the world.

I have called Omar and Fitzgerald two "infidels." It is abundantly clear to me that the Englishman was as sceptical as the Persian. I see it in the loving working workmanship of the so-called translation, as I see it in dozens of Fitzgerald's letters, which have taken their place already among the classics of English literature. And it is only a hundred years this thirty-first of March since Edward Fitzgerald was born.

G. W. FOOTE.

A Plea for Superstition.—I.

SPECIALISATION is one of the characteristics of an increased evolution. This holds true of all forms of life and of all branches of knowledge. In the last direction, however, it is not without certain disadvantages. Once upon a time a man could and did take the whole field of human knowledge as his province, and within the limits of contemporary acquisitions an interesting and profitable summary was sometimes the result. But as knowledge became more detailed and as the field of investigation widened, it became more and more difficult for one man to play the part of a universal instructor. An investigator was compelled to satisfy himself with a single department, often with the mere corner of a department, leaving it for some co-ordinating mind of the calibre of a Spencer to show the relation of his contribution to the whole structure of human knowledge. Specialisation thus tended to make our knowledge of facts more exact; but, on the other side, there developed the risk when specialists ventured on generalisations, of their overlooking or wrongly estimating the value of important considera-

tions arising from departments other than their own. If the phrase be permissible, we may say that nature—including human nature—functions as a single whole; all its parts are inter-related, however much we may divide and subdivide for purposes of convenience. This being the case, a right view of any one part can only be gained by studying its relation to the whole of which it is fundamentally an expression. Neglect of this consideration gave us in economics that impossible being, the economic man, just as it gave us in religion a man who was religious and little else.

If what has been said be granted, it follows that any attempt to explain the function of superstition in relation to such matters as marriage, property, government, and respect for human life, needs to be very carefully checked by the conclusions reached in other departments—particularly in those of sociology and biology. From internal evidence Mr. J. G. Frazer, the famous author of *The Golden Bough*, does not appear to have taken this necessary precaution in his last work,* with the result that he formulates a theory which I do not think can be sustained—certainly not without serious modifications. Mr. Frazer's thesis is that superstition has played a useful part in the evolution of society, inasmuch as it has strengthened the respect for government, for private property, for marriage and sexual morality, and the respect for human life. He admits that it has been responsible for much evil.

" It has sacrificed countless lives, wasted untold treasures, embroiled nations, severed friends, parted husbands and wives, parents and children, putting swords and worse than swords between them: it has filled goals and madhouses with its innocent and deluded victims; it has broken many hearts, embittered the whole of many a life, and not content with persecuting the living it has pursued the dead into the grave and beyond it, gloating over the horrors which its foul imagination has conjured up to appal and torture the survivors."

This is a lengthy indictment, but in spite of its length and severity Mr. Frazer hopes to make out "a plausible plea for a dubious client."

Before I come to Mr. Frazer's proofs of his thesis one or two minor observations may be made. In this instance it is instructive to note the author's use of a very common saying that man "from false premises often arrives at sound conclusions." Often as this statement is made, it seems to me quite devoid of justification. From false premises nothing but false conclusions can result, otherwise the superiority of sound premises would be a mere matter of accident. If a man starts with a false assumption, and follows out that assumption logically, how is it possible for him to reach anything but an erroneous conclusion? His false assumption must vitiate every subsequent step in his reasoning. If I start with the assumption that all men are thieves, I may, in seeking to prove this, discover that some men are honest, and so reach the conclusion that some men are honest and some are not. But the conclusion, although representing a closer approximation to the facts, does not follow from the premises. It is true I might never have reached the sounder conclusion if the false start had not been made, still reaching it has no logical connection with the point from which I set out. So, too, when Mr. Frazer says that useful institutions may sometimes be built on rotten foundations, the reply is that "rotten foundations" can only apply to the reasons given for these institutions, not to the real foundations. If they are useful institutions we have to look for their real origin in those biological and social forces that lie at the root of organised existence.

A second remark is that Mr. Frazer seems to draw a quite unjustifiable distinction between religion and superstition. He says, "Of religious or ecclesiastical institutions I shall say nothing"; and, again, "It might be possible to show that religion has not wholly escaped the taint or dispensed with the sup-

* *Psyche's Task. A Discourse Concerning the Influence of Superstition on the growth of Institutions.*

port of superstition." Now certainly, if Mr. Frazer is doing one thing more than another in this lecture, he is dealing with the very marrow of religion. Nay, towards the end of his great work, *The Golden Bough*, he very plainly indicates that Christianity itself is made up of just that class of beliefs outlined in *Psyche's Task*. When Mr. Frazer said:—

"It is indeed a melancholy and, in some respects, thankless task to strike at the foundations of beliefs in which, as in a strong tower, the hopes and aspirations of humanity through long ages have sought a refuge from the storm and stress of life. . . . Yet sooner or later it is inevitable that the battery of the comparative method should breach these venerable walls, mantled over with the ivy and mosses and wild flowers of a thousand tender and sacred associations. At present we are only dragging the guns into position; they have hardly yet begun to speak."

His readers could draw no other conclusion than that the reference here was to Christianity. Nay, the theory with which Mr. Frazer's name is so honorably associated demonstrates, if true, that Christian religious beliefs are nothing but a survival of primitive superstitions. Why, then, distinguish between religion and superstition? The only rational distinction is that made by Hobbes—it is the difference between that which is allowed and that which is not allowed.

In support of his proposition that superstition has tended to strengthen certain valuable institutions in civilisation, Mr. Frazer cites a large number of instances from savage races, all of which prove, not quite what the author sets out to prove, but that superstitious beliefs and customs have been associated with certain institutions. About this there can be no dispute. Even among ourselves it would not be very difficult to find many instances of the kind. But the real questions at issue are (1) Have certain institutions—marriage, property, government, etc.—their basis in superstition; or (2) Admitting that they have a non-superstitious basis, would they have developed as well as they have developed in the absence of superstition. Now, I do not see that Mr. Frazer proves either of these points. Indeed, the first is practically surrendered in the warning that even though certain institutions "have been based partly on superstitions, it by no means follows that even among these races they have never been based on anything else," and in the further statement that whenever an institution has proved itself stable and permanent, "there is a strong presumption that they rest mainly on something much more solid than superstition." These are timely warnings, only they seem to destroy all that Mr. Frazer sets out to prove.

Mr. Frazer's last instance of the supposed benefits of superstition, the respect for human life, may be taken as a crucial example. And here one might interpose with a query as to whether it was ever necessary to teach man, with superstition or without it, to respect human life within certain limits. Pre-evolutionary sociology, which sometimes gave us a picture of primitive man as one whose hand was against every man, and who fought the battle of life strictly "off his own bat," may have taught so. This, however, is quite a delusion. That humanity slowly emerged from a pre-human, gregarious stage, may be taken as a scientific truth. But even with those animals that live in groups, no restraint is necessary to prevent their killing each other. The condition of their living in groups is that their natures shall be normally devoid of the desire for mutual destruction. And if this is true of animals, it is none the less true of man. Primitive human society does not, and cannot, represent a group of human beings each one of which must be restrained from murdering the other, but a group in which the normal feelings are such that homicide by any one of its members excites a feeling of resentment among the rest.

In this case, then, we have to reckon with both sociology and biology. Mr. Frazer is doubtless as convinced of the truth of Natural Selection as I am;

and I do not see that it needs more than Natural Selection to explain the phenomenon under consideration. Human life is always associated life, and this means not only a basis of mutual forbearance and co-operation, it means a development of the sympathetic feelings, all of which increase in strength as society develops—they being, as a matter of fact, the condition of its development. Further we have to count, in the competition between tribes, of the eliminative action of Natural Selection which would rule out of existence those societies in which the bonds of co-operation were the weakest.

The question, then, of whether the anti-homicidal feeling rests upon a basis of religion is answered in the negative by the fact that this feeling ante-dates all forms of religion. The question of whether religion strengthens this feeling still remains, although even that has been answered by implication. The first thing to be noted here is, that whatever may be the superstitious safeguard against homicide it does not affect the people outside the limits of the tribe. In fact, when desiring to kill an enemy, the savage appeals to these superstitions as of the greatest assistance. Westermarck points out that "savages carefully distinguish between an act of homicide committed in their own community and one where the victim is a stranger. Whilst the former is under ordinary circumstances disapproved of, the latter is in most cases allowed and often regarded as praiseworthy."* This, I may add in passing, by no means prevents the right of hospitality to the stranger who demands it. The religious prohibitions against homicide do not, therefore, extend beyond the tribe, and even within its borders considerable qualifications have to be made.

C. COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

Unwarrantable Assumptions.

IN science many things are assumed which are insusceptible of formal proof. They are assumed not because they are known to exist, but because their existence seems to be demanded as the cause or explanation of some other things which are known to exist. The existence of the ether, for example, is assumed, because a medium is required for the propagation of the vibratory motions which are believed to constitute light. If light is an electro-magnetic phenomenon, as Clerk Maxwell holds, the ether is thought of as the medium for the transmission of electric and magnetic disturbances. But what the ether itself is, whether it is stationary or mobile, whether it has any chemical quality, or is composed of atoms or not, no physicist can tell. We are assured that it fills the whole of space not occupied by ponderable matter, that it cannot be weighed or measured, and that it is practically infinite; but nobody would ever have dreamed of the existence of such a substance had it not been for the conviction that solid bodies, separated by great distances, could not influence one another, as they undoubtedly do, without some connecting medium, such as the ether is supposed to be. We thus see that in science assumptions are both necessary and useful, in order that certain phenomena may be rationally accounted for. But in theology the case is entirely different. Here we have not assumptions to explain facts, but facts twisted and tortured into agreement with assumptions. The main business of theology is to expound history in terms of its own dogmas; and the object of the present article is to show what an atrocious business it is.

In a sermon on "Do not Quench the Spirit," which appears in the *Baptist Times and Freeman* for March 26, the Rev. Dr. Clifford supplies us with a brilliant example of the loose and irresponsible manner in

* *Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, vol. i., p. 331.

which that business is generally despatched in the modern pulpit. Dr. Clifford starts off on the back of the assumption that "God himself is at work for the redemption and regeneration of mankind." This assumption the preacher calls a "reassuring and all-inspiring fact." Here are his own words:—

"God is at work now; always at work; invisible, but at work; felt when not seen; pressing on when persistently resisted; burning up the evils and wrongs in man, and flooding him with the energies of righteousness and peace. That is the primary fact. The fires of God are burning on and on for the purification of our race."

That is a purely rhetorical assumption; and not a single historical verification of it is presented. Indeed, the reverend gentleman virtually admits that no such verification is possible:—

"It may seem to us who are in the very thick of the battle that the General has left the fight. He has not. It is true

'He hides himself so wondrously,
As though there were no God.
He is least seen when all the powers
Of ill are most abroad.'

But it is for us to secure the strength which comes from

'The instinct that can tell
That God is on the field when he
Is most invisible.'

That is rhetorical emotionalism run mad, with the logic of facts thrown to the winds. After admitting that the Divine General seems to have left the fight, Dr. Clifford shouts out, "He has not," as if the shout would settle the point. And yet it may be true that the General has not left the field, because there is no evidence that he was ever on it. Dr. Clifford falls back on the apostle Paul. This doctrine of God, he says, "is the fundamental working conviction of the apostle Paul." That is true, but what does it prove? The holding of the same assumption by two or more people is not equivalent to a verification of it, is not even an approach towards verification.

Let us gaze at the assumption for a second. It must have been a slip of the tongue to compare God to a military General. Even according to Dr. Clifford, the Divine Being is not an army officer, but a fire "burning up the evils and wrongs in man, and flooding him with the energies of righteousness and peace." But has the reverend gentleman never paused and reflected on the import of the language he employs? Has he never looked his words in the face and asked them whether or not they do justice to the God in whom he professes to believe? Does it never occur to him that had God been such a fire as he describes all the evils and wrongs in man would have been utterly consumed long ago? Is it not disrespectful to attribute to God a character he does not possess? Instead of heroically facing this difficulty, Dr. Clifford goes off at a tangent to elaborate a brief sketch of the evolution of the idea of God among the Jews. Of course, that evolution reaches its climax, for the preacher, in Jesus Christ, who, after his resurrection, is the Spirit we are warned not to quench, and, the preacher declares, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there are freedom, fruitfulness, overflowing energy, conquering faith, and triumphant joy, new men and new societies, a new literature, and a new world." Well, is not the Spirit omnipresent as well as omnipotent? If so, why are not those delightful transformations universally realised?

Here is an insuperable difficulty, upon which no God's advocate has ever been able to make the slightest impression. Dr. Clifford conveniently evades it. One would infer, however, that, if challenged, he would run for refuge to the theory of Free Will—a theory invented on purpose to account for the failure of God's fires to burn up the world's impurities and corruptions. Dr. Clifford would say: "Yes, God's fires are kindled within you, but you possess the power to prevent them from doing their appointed work." The ludicrousness of such a position is self-evident. Only a bad man is free to

be and do evil; but if man is the creature of the good God's hand, how do you account for the bad man? Can a good man, by a mere act of will, become bad? Dr. Peake frankly admits that "the first sinful act was the outcome and expression of a sinful nature"; and it necessarily follows that that sinful nature came from God, either directly by a special act of creation, or indirectly by way of evolution.

What we maintain is that the assumption upon which Dr. Clifford's sermon rests is belied both by logic and by ethics. The evils and wrongs in man are wholly inconsistent with the belief in the existence of an infinitely good and powerful Creator. Furthermore, on Dr. Clifford's assumption it is absolutely impossible to understand the *history of man*. "The key to our human history," Dr. Clifford informs us, "is that man has from the earliest time been in antagonism to God, to goodness and justice, to righteousness and mercy, to truth and progress." On the supposition that this is the right key to human history, all that can be said is that the entire blame is God's, not man's. Had God made man perfect, man could never have sinned. If God did not make man perfect, and man, in consequence, did that which is evil, surely the responsibility and the guilt must lie at the Creator's door, not at the creature's, in which event all the talk about God's goodness and love is sheer nonsense. But, as a matter of fact, Paul's and Dr. Clifford's reading of human history is radically wrong. It is a vile calumny to represent man as having been from the earliest times an enemy to goodness and justice, to righteousness and mercy, to truth and progress. Dr. Clifford knows as well as we do, though perhaps Paul did not, that in earliest times mankind were savages, with savage instincts and brutish passions. Were they savages by the act of a tender-hearted and compassionate Deity? Surely no one would go to savages, ancient or modern, for a certificate of character for the Creator. But if we wish to be in possession of a powerful and irrefutable argument for Atheism, let us study savage life, past or present, and the gradual growth and development of civilisation and morality. It will then become convincingly clear to us that human history is a record, not of unbroken and conscious wrong-doing and rebellion against higher powers, but of a blind, continuous and ruthless struggle for existence. The strong crushed the weak, and survived, not because they were wicked, but because they loved life and knew no better. Wickedness comes in only when a highly civilised nation subjugates a savage tribe and unjustly appropriates its territories, and this is a wickedness of which Christian Britain is by no means guiltless.

Dr. Clifford waxes specially eloquent in his denunciation of the Jews who did not see their way to accede to the claims which Jesus is reported to have made for himself. He tells us that the most painful proof of all of human depravity is seen in the life of Jesus. It looks as if this preacher takes the Gospels as true historical records, for he describes a triple miracle which Jesus is said to have performed—namely, the healing of a blind and dumb and insane man. But Dr. Clifford cannot be ignorant of the fact that there are thousands of Christians to-day who conscientiously reject the Christ whom he so zealously preaches every Sunday. Are they, too, like the Jews, guilty of "malicious prejudice" and sinful obstinacy? Are orthodox Christians the only people who have "rights"? Are they, of all the countless children of men, the only ones who know and follow the truth?

We hold that the existence of God, the Deity of Christ, and the sinfulness of the human race, are unwarrantable assumptions, being wholly incapable of verification. There have been many Gods or almost as many Christs. Whatever they may or may not have stood for at various stages in their history, it is beyond doubt that they are now obsolete, and that their dwindling devotees are perpetually apologising for their belief in them. As for humanity, it is learning slowly to throw off the

yoke of bondage to divinities, and semi-divinities, and God's men, and supernaturally organised and controlled churches, and to put its entire trust in the forces of growth and improvement resident within itself. At last our faces are towards the rising light of knowledge and reason and common sense. We have still many mighty lessons to master, many glorious truths to discover, and many obstinate tyrannies to shatter, as well as many weaknesses and follies and superstitions to get rid of; but if we have confidence in ourselves and one another, and are willing to be guided by the two bright stars of justice and love, we need not fear for the future of our race.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Lost Commander.

[George Macdonald's tribute to his dead brother, E. M. Macdonald, late editor of the *New York Truthseeker*.]

A NEW ENGLAND boy, born in the State of Maine, he was "American" on his mother's side, stem and flower. Generations ago three brothers came from England and settled on Nantucket Island. They were Sylvanus, Bachelor and Stephen Hussey. Two of these brothers disappear from the family tradition. The survivor, either Stephen or Bachelor, named a son after an uncle, and the son did the same, so that there was a line of those Nantucket settlers composed of Bachelors the sons of Stephens, and Stephens the sons of Bachelors, down to the Stephen Hussey, of Unity, Maine, who was the grandfather of E. M. Macdonald. The line ended with the uncle Bachelor of Oakfield, who had no sons. The Editor's paternal grandfather was Protestant Scotch-Irish, the grandmother being English. His father, Henry Macdonald, apparently orphaned in boyhood, fell to the care of the widow Waters of Jefferson and her two maiden daughters. A son of that family, Horace Waters, came to New York and succeeded in business. His name is known in the piano trade. Henry became a mechanic and worked at Togos, five miles from Chelsea, Kennebec county. Near-by, in Pittston, in 1851, he met Asenath Chase Hussey, daughter of Stephen. She had taught school at the age of thirteen, but found that work in the Chelsea mills was more remunerative at three dollars a week. They were married December 26, 1853. Eugene, the first son, was born in Chelsea, February 4, 1855. Henry fell in the second battle of Bull Run, 1862. Asenath survives and is in her seventy-ninth year. The son did not receive a religious education. In Keene, New Hampshire, just after the war, he attended the Unitarian Sunday-school, and the *Banner of Light* was read in the family.

His induction into Liberal thought came naturally. When he arrived in New York in his nineteenth year the Liberal Club had but recently been organised. The Spiritualists had a lyceum and Sunday-school, which he attended. The change from the orthodox atmosphere of New Hampshire to the living atmosphere of New York occurred as his mind was expanding with adolescence. Radical people flocked gathered at the house where he lodged, and when the printing of the *Truthseeker* was intrusted to him he got more out of it than the printer's profits. Ingersoll delivered his lecture on "The Gods" at this time. Its beauties of diction, its poetry, its facts and argument, appealed to the young Freethinker, who then and there became the "disciple" of Ingersoll and continued so to the end of his life. He read, with other works, Paine's *Age of Reason*, Draper's *Conflict*, Gibbon's *Rome*, Lecky's *European Morals*, and Motley's *Dutch Republic*. He also read the Bible. Years later General William Birney, of Washington, wrote to ask if the Editor had not been educated for the ministry—he had so much Scripture at his command. It was answered that he had been educated in the office of the *Truthseeker* to edit the *Truthseeker*. He began about 1875 to be a student of the land and labor problems, which he heard discussed by J. K. Ingalls and the group of reformers, grave-faced old sages, who met to listen and comment. He was secretary of a society, social and industrial, called the United Labor Vanguard, which appears soon to have been absorbed by larger organisations. He selected a very good working philosophy of life from the teachings of Stephen Pearl Andrews. In one of his last letters from Liberty he acknowledges his debt to Mr. Andrews and directed that the articles by Mr. Wakeman on the Liberal Club should be followed by an appreciation of that great and fruitful character. He was not equal to the effort. The philosophy of Andrews modified the rigid Positivism of Auguste Comte as interpreted by Henry Edgar and the coterie of Positivists who then domi-

nated the Club. The doctrine of individual sovereignty emphasised by Andrews enabled Eugene always to place himself on the right side of questions involving personal freedom. Fidelity to this principle sometimes cost him heavily.

The freedom of the mails he upheld instinctively. The superficial charged him with approving of sentiments he did not entertain. A man whose books he defended as mailable said to him, "I am glad you indorse my views." He replied, "I do not indorse your views. I am fighting for your right to differ with me." The man who wrote those words understood, and expressed as no other writer has done, the logic of Freethought. He who contends only for the right to voice his own opinion is not half-way up the heights of intellectual liberty.

He saw that freedom to worship was but the minor part, and he said:—

"A great many people, even some Freethinkers, think that the religious question is settled—that freedom of religion has been won. But they forget that freedom to worship is not all of liberty. Freedom to worship has been won. Freedom not to worship has not. Each one of the Demands of Liberalism is based upon some flagrant injustice upon unbelievers in what Colonel Ingersoll used to call 'our' religion, meaning the prevailing superstition. Because he believes, an African Christian in a Louisiana swamp has all the privileges of citizenship; but if one of England's greatest men, the Atheist Bradlaugh, had emigrated to this country, he could not have taken out naturalisation papers in some of our courts. Freedom of speech cannot be exercised with impunity as long as there is a blasphemy law upon the statute-books of any State. Freedom of action is forbidden by every Sunday law. In many of our States an Agnostic has no standing in the courts. Freedom in social life cannot be enjoyed so long as morality is measured by distinctively Christian standards instead of by the natural standard of human experience. The churches regard as immoral innumerable things which are the harmless pastimes of the social world. The most immoral doctrine that I know of is the vicarious atonement—one man suffering for what another does; yet the one who denies that doctrine is a legal outcast in many States, and a social outcast in more. The right not to worship is as sacred as the right to worship, and that right has yet to be won."

A clergyman with whom he debated the Sunday law in a newspaper, declared: "We have too much liberty." He asked the clergyman what liberty he enjoyed that he would be willing to forego, and there was no reply.

Sometimes he incurred criticism as a Conservative on what is agitated as the "sex" question. He stood simply for the liberty of discussion. If he did not exercise the liberty to discuss the question himself, that was his affair. He did not deny it to others.

There is so little difference in meaning between the word "God" as used by some, and the word "Nature" as employed by others, that he did not care to maintain without qualification that no "God" exists. It sufficed, generally speaking, to deny and disprove that sacred books were written or inspired by God, that ministers or priests or popes know anything about his will, or that prayer to him becomes of especial efficacy when transmitted through them. A deity was virtually eliminated from his philosophy and belief.

He hugged no fond delusion about life in a future apart from the physical form which manifests it. He knew life to be a phenomenon of matter, and not of "spirit." If a man had accomplished something which added to the intellectual or moral wealth of mankind, it must inevitably become the possession in perpetuity of the race. In it he would live, move, and have his being forever.

He made friends among the more silent, non-talkative men. The garrulous, the makers of conversation without ideas, soon found that they could not interest him. Much passes between reflective men in their silences—men who plant a suggestion with a word, a look, a gesture. Pathos, if genuine, touched him deeply. He fainted at tales of suffering. He did not demand response to his love, but would bestow it upon a flower, a kitten, a dog.

His nature was always that of the protector. His attitude was ever that of the elder brother and guardian. Who doubts that he knew the approach of the last guest when he wrote, February 16:—

"DEAR GEORGE,—I am sorry the double holiday (Sunday and Washington's birthday) delays your visit. As I told Charles Smith, you are the one on whose shoulder I must lean my head. So I miss your visit, having made up my mind you were coming. But the next will be all the more looked forward to.—GENE."

The self-reliant one, the support of others, might lean at last, but the head he would rest upon the shoulder of another was bowed alone by death.

It is more difficult and more meritorious to wean a man from his prejudices than to civilise barbarians.—*Voltaire*.

Acid Drops.

The Bishop of Liverpool, in his triennial charge, congratulates the city—including himself, we presume—on the fact that £306,000 has already been raised towards the cost of the new Cathedral which is "steadily rising" in St James's-mountain. It appears that £70,000 more will be wanted in the near future, and after that a further and larger sum before the building can be completed. This colossal expenditure on a new house of God seems shameful in such a city, with its poverty, destitution, vice and crime. We note on the same page of the *Liverpool Courier* which prints the Bishop's charge an article by one who has been sounding the "abysses" of Liverpool. He gives a frightful picture of the existence of the city's "outcasts" and states that "their number was never larger than it is to-day." So we see the good results that follow the financial investment in the new cathedral.

Mrs. Carrie Nation, the American gospel-temperance lady, with the hatchet—and the mouth, didn't catch on in this country. The suffragettes had taken the wind out of her sails. She was no novelty; and in a business like hers the novelty is nearly everything. She has gone back to her native land in a disappointed and soured condition. She has imparted to the reporters a pessimistic view of Great Britain. A country in which Carrie cannot carry-on successfully is doomed. She says that nobody in England ever had an original thought; and but for the Scotsmen (who make the whiskey for us, and drink a good deal of it themselves) England would have gone to the dogs long ago. Well, we are glad (for once in a way) to see that England is not original enough to stand a vulgar virago who, presuming on her sex, pulls cigars and cigarettes out of men's mouths, and fancies she is reforming the world by such impudence.

Mrs. Carrie Nation says that the Lord tells her what to do and what to say. The statement reminds us of an incident in the history of Thomas Paine's last days. A pious old lady evaded the vigilance of Paine's friends and gained access to his sick chamber. She rapidly informed him that she had been commissioned by the Lord to tell him that if he did not repent he would certainly go to hell. "Go away," said Paine from his sick bed, "God would never have sent a wizened little ugly old woman like you."

Mr. E. Tennison Smith, the English gospel-temperance advocate, seems a good companion for Mrs. Carrie Nation. He nearly matches her in manners and self-conceit. He has just been carrying on a Gospel Temperance Mission at Southend-on-Sea, and his opening speech is reported in the local *Standard*. It reeks with vulgar egotism. The printers must have had a terrible run on capital "I's." Here is a sample from bulk of Mr. Tennison Smith's eloquence:—

"If anyone, town councillor or Mayor, gets his head between my gun and the liquor traffic he will get hurt—and you may depend upon it that Alderman Brightwell won't want it twice."

Shortly afterwards this boastful "orator" gave the meeting the following information:—

"I am an extempore speaker. I don't know what I am going to say until I say it. Of course, I have a certain line of thought, but I rely on having a divine message from God."

We think it extremely probable that Mr. Tennison Smith never knows what he is going to say until he says it. We also think it is extremely impertinent, and even blasphemous, on his part, to throw the responsibility for his inchoate eloquence upon the Almighty.

The Rev. Dr. Ambrose Shepherd, of Glasgow, should be decorated with a special medal, in recognition of his inexhaustible ingenuity. Preaching against Spiritualism, the other Sunday, he profoundly observed, as reported in the *British Weekly*, that having a "spiritual vision" was infinitely more essential than "seeing a spirit." Pray, what do people see when they have "a spiritual vision"? Material forms? Bodies made of clay? We are dying to know the difference between "having a vision" and "seeing a spirit." Will Dr. Shepherd kindly enlighten us?

Dr. Mario Stopes, lecturer on Fossil Botany at Manchester University, has returned home after a long absence in the East in search of specimens. For eighteen months of the time she travelled from island to island in Japan. Her tour was fruitful scientifically, but "what impressed me most," she told a *Daily News* interviewer, "was the extreme respect and kindness shown me by the people. I visited places where no European ever set foot before, the unknown region

of Yezo and even the squalid villages of the superstitious, semi-civilised Ainus, and yet was always treated with the utmost deference. The Japanese are really an admirable race—more so, in many ways, than our own." Being asked "which?" she replied: "In their treatment of women. Not once did I feel that I was not allowed to do certain things on the ground that I was a woman. Directly I came back to England I found myself imprisoned in a net of prejudices, and the contrast between the free life I led during the last eighteen months and the present one is not flattering to the Occidental in general and the English in particular." This learned lady's tribute to the Japanese, especially in regard to their treatment of women, outweighs all the opposite accounts given by interested people, such as missionaries and other professional agents of Christianity.

Rev. Dr. W. T. Davison stated at Swansea that "what the world wants from the Christian upon moral, social, and high political questions is a distinctive, higher kind of light, such as never was on sea or land." Dr. Davison was simply mistaken. The world "wants" nothing of the kind; and if it did it would never get it. No "higher kind of light" on any questions ever issued from that quarter.

We are told that the believer's union with Christ is "initiated on his (Christ's) side and sustained at every point by his power." Then Christ is either an inveterate respecter of persons, or a pure myth; and it makes very little difference which. If the former, union with him is bound to exert an injurious influence on character; if the latter, fellowship with him is a culpable waste of time and energy.

With the air of a high-and-mighty person, Dr. Warschauer says to the unbeliever: "If Christianity is not true, leave it alone." That is just like the conceit of a parson. But surely the reverend gentleman does not seriously mean that if Christianity is false the fact should be kept a profound secret from credulous church-and-chapel-goers. And yet that is the only signification his words can legitimately bear. But what a shocking sentiment!

To show how inaccurate a guide in these matters Dr. Warschauer is, we need only quote his assertion that "the fount and origin" of all grand ideals is Christianity. To see the ineffable absurdity of such an assertion, compare to-day's Christian London with Pagan Athens in the fifth century B.C., when "the tree of human life burst suddenly into flower."

A lay preacher, who has won a first prize of 20s. for a sermonette, declares in the course of it, "God will not satisfy your intellect, but he will satisfy your soul." God must be a most eccentric being if he cannot satisfy a faculty he himself has supplied. Why on earth did he make a creature who is divided against himself? And how does this preacher know that "intellect" and "soul" are two different and antagonistic things?

Seventy-five students of the Princeton Theological Seminary recently presented a petition to the trustees asking that the theological instruction should be made "more intelligible." Needless to say the trustees have ignored the request. It would probably be too dangerous an experiment. To make theology intelligible would be to bring it down to the level of ordinary subjects. And how could students be expected to believe in a theology that they quite understood?

At the present rate of progress China will be converted to Christianity in the course of a hundred thousand years or so—that is, provided nothing happens to Christianity in the meantime. But although it is hard enough to get the Chinaman to accept Christianity, he is not finished with, so far as the missionaries are concerned, even when converted. We see, for instance, that a party of sixteen evangelists is to visit the treaty ports of China for missionary work among the native Christians! So that we first of all send out missionaries to convert the natives (and get landed in international complications as one of the results); then we receive glowing accounts of how eager the Chinese are to receive the Gospel, and what fine Christians they make; and then we have to send out evangelists to keep these native converts up to the mark. The next move will be to send out some missionaries to look after the evangelists. Still, it is all good for trade—the missionary trade, we mean.

We see that a cheap edition of Sir Oliver Lodge's *Life and Matter* has just been issued. Perhaps the justification for much of Sir Oliver's religious writings lies in a sentence

in that work to the effect that the Deity undoubtedly possesses a sense of humor. This being granted, they are doing God a service who provide him with so fine an occasion for the exercise of this "saving grace."

The Rev. A. T. Guttery explains that why he does not support Secular Education is that, while doctrinal Bible teaching may be Protestant, simple Bible teaching is outside all "isms." Presumably what Mr. Guttery means is that simple Bible teaching ought to satisfy all *Christian* sects; and in the eyes of these gentlemen who are so passionately devoted to "civic" freedom and justice, the rights of non-Christian members of the community are not worth consideration.

Rev. C. Daley, writing to the *British Weekly*, regards it "as a very serious state of things when the Jesuits and the Roman Catholic Church can flout, oppose, vilify, slander, and curse a body of men known as Nonconformists." We do not know what Mr. Daley would like to do to these same Roman Catholics—probably something in the boiling oil or molten lead way. Roman Catholics, however, may thank the saints that the people known as Nonconformists are not in power, or their shrift would be a short one. The love of Christians for one another is most interesting—and characteristic.

Rev. Frank Ballard has a grievance. He is a Protestant and a Methodist, but he considers himself a Catholic. "I am doing all I can," he says, "with brain and nerve, week by week, to advance Catholicism." But there are people who call the "Roman Church" the "Catholic Church." He declares that this is "an insult to Christian truth"—whatever that is—and to "every Protestant throughout the world." We sympathise with Mr. Ballard, but we are afraid he has a grievance without a remedy. The Catholic Church existed before Protestantism was heard of, it exists still while Protestantism is fast breaking up, and it is likely to go on existing when Protestantism has disappeared. Behind all the squabbles of sects there stands the historian, and the historian knows of but one Catholic Church. For, after all, as Michelet said, Protestantism is but an estuary of the sea, while Catholicism is the ocean.

The Rev. Dr. Warschauer endorses Lowell's reputed challenge to Freethinkers to find a piece of land ten miles square "where age is revered, infancy respected, woman honored, and human life held in due regard," and where "the Gospel of Christ has not gone, and cleared the way, and laid the foundations." We assume that it would be useless to reply that reverence for age, respect for infancy, etc., are by no means peculiar to Christians, and that in some places these qualities are much better manifested than amongst Christians. A recent traveller among the Eskimoes, for instance, said that these people hardly realised what was meant by beating a child, and among the Japanese it is said that the cries of children are seldom heard. With some savages, too, the care of the aged is one of the most sacred duties of the tribe. Still, we do not labor this, because it is difficult to convince an English Christian that any form morality takes at Clapham or Hackney. We prefer to ask Dr. Warschauer, or anybody else, whether he can point to any ten square miles of territory called Christian where old age, infancy, or womanhood is universally treated as it should be treated? He may find the search much more instructive than repeating such pieces of cheap bravado as the one ostensibly quoted from John Russell Lowell.

To begin with, for one must assume that Dr. Warschauer has overlooked or forgotten various things, he would find that in this most Christian country there exists a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The existence of this Society does, it is true, witness to the kindly zeal of those who established it; but it bears no less clear testimony to the ill-usage of children in a country where "the Gospel of Christ" has had it pretty well its own way for about fifteen centuries. This Society deals with many thousands of cases annually, and it asserts that much more could be done if it only had funds. And certainly behind the wrongs to children, of which the law can take cognisance, there are the thousands of cases of neglect of which the law cannot take heed. So far as womanhood and old age are concerned, we imagine that a casual walk over any one square mile of London, Manchester, Liverpool, or any other great city, would furnish Dr. Warschauer with enough cases to prove that there is still much to be done before it can be said that everywhere within that small area human life, in all its stages and phases, is treated as it should be treated.

Finally, we may point out that the increased respect for human life, for womanhood, old age, and infancy is not due to Christianity, but to Freethought humanitarianism. Christianity did not prevent the development of the English factory system, with its ruthless exploitation of little children. It did not prevent women working underground, yoked to trucks like cattle, nor did it prevent the exploitation of women in the chain and nail-making districts of the midlands. One might challenge Dr. Warschauer to show any country in the world, where Christianity is not, in which women and children were so barbarously treated for the mere greed of gain, as they were in pious Britain. The forces that made for improvement were certainly non-Christian, even anti-Christian, in origin. Christians only came in when the work had been commenced by others. It may be noted that the growth of the doctrine of evolution, which indicated so clearly the importance of child study, had a far more powerful influence in developing a sense of the importance of child life than all the Christian sermons on the subject that were ever delivered. To claim credit for a system establishing agencies for alleviating misery while there has developed under this same system all the evils against which it fights, is a form of self-praise peculiarly Christian.

Some time ago Mr. Runciman—who later held out to the Government the awful threat of his retirement should it adopt the policy of Secular Education—said that in Australia the name of the Deity had been blotted out from Shakespeare and Milton, and implied that education was virulently hostile to religion. We are glad to see the *Sydney Morning Herald* calling Mr. Runciman to account for his remarks, and it suggests that the cause of his outburst was that Australia is a very inconvenient argument against the advocates of religion in State schools. The *Herald* points out that the State, as an educator, simply stands outside the field of religion, as that is the only way of ending the strife. It adds: "There is little doubt that in the long run Great Britain, and quite possibly the Liberal administration to which Mr. Runciman belongs, will have to follow our lead. So far, every attempt to solve the problem in other ways has been an ignominious failure. But the educational storm in England is largely kept raging by artificial means, and there is a growing majority that cares nothing at all for the invectives of Churchmen and Nonconformists, and in the end this majority will settle things in its own way." We believe it will, even though it has to pay the awful price of the loss of Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Lloyd George telegraphed to the great national convention at Cardiff in support of Welsh Disestablishment: "Wish gathering all success. Government means business. Let Welshmen show that they are as resolved as ever to establish complete religious equality on Welsh style." This message was hailed with enthusiasm. But what does it mean? Why is "Welsh style" introduced to qualify "religious equality"? We incline to believe that Mr. Lloyd George means by "complete religious equality" merely religious equality between the various Christian denominations. Non-Christians are still to be treated with insult and oppression. The Christians' cry is not "Liberty for all!" but "Liberty for us!"

Mr. Keir Hardie has long been patting Jesus Christ on the back, and in consideration of that fact, no doubt, the Rev. R. J. Campbell pats Mr. Keir Hardie on the back. Mr. Campbell has just been saying that he expects to see a Labor Government at Westminster before he dies,—which, of course, it will have to be if he sees it at all. And in that case he "hopes nature will be equally merciful and spare the life of the only man worth thinking of as our Prime Minister—Keir Hardie." This is a poor compliment to the Labor Party. We thought it had several leaders as good as the member for Merthyr Tydvil.

We wonder what post Mr. Campbell will fill when Mr. Hardie becomes Prime Minister. A good many Socialists talk of having a Church under Socialism. Perhaps the reverend gentleman will be the head of that institution. Mr. Campbell will then teach us all what to believe, and Mr. Hardie will tell us all what to do. A perfect paradise!

Mr. R. J. Campbell has often complained of the boycott which official Congregationalism has seen fit to put into force against him, and no-v official Congregationalism, as represented by the *British Congregationalist*, retaliates in a truly Christian spirit, saying, in effect: "Tit for tat, you know, is fair. You have often wounded us by branding us as ignorant, destitute of spiritual vision, or unable to discern the signs of the times, and by speaking in terms of contempt and ridicule

about many things we hold dear, and, surely, you cannot expect us to repay contempt by love, although our Master told us to love our enemies; and so we are in duty bound to wound you in return by leaving you severely alone." This is quite natural, no doubt, and so very Christlike.

The Rev. Glyn Davies holds that "the Free Churches are eminently fitted to bring the democracy to Christ." We have heard that statement a thousand times before; but instead of coming to Christ, the democracy is steadily drifting farther and farther away from him. Pulpit confidence is cheap—and groundless.

The Flood never took place. On that point the testimony of the ancient monuments and of geology is conclusive. But still, according to the Rev. John Murphy, M.A., we need not part with the story in Genesis. Treat it as a poem, a parable, or a fairy tale; but do not forget its great lesson, namely, "that sin against God ends in disaster." As it happens, however, what is called sin against God does not end in disaster. It never did; it doesn't now. The writer of the story regarded it as a fact. Criticism has shattered the fact, and at the same time the lesson the alleged fact was intended to convey.

"Can the pre-existence of Jesus be proved?" asked a perplexed inquirer. "Yes," replied the Doctor of Divinity; "Phil. ii. 1-11 alone proves it. Then there is John viii. 58, which is also fairly conclusive. But Jesus himself treated the mysteries of the unseen world as if he had always known them." Who can doubt it after that?

A man of God could not be consistent, even if he tried ever so hard. His whole creed is a mass of contradictions. He tells us that God loves man much more than man ever can love himself, and that he desires nothing quite so passionately as man's salvation. Yet, the other day, one of these Divine messengers preached an eloquent sermon, in which he again and again urged his hearers to give God "no rest." Do not let him alone one moment, he pleaded, beg of him, and keep on begging of him to stretch forth his arm and save lost sinners. What a funny sort of being the Christian Heavenly Father is, to be sure. He is intensely anxious to do the work, and yet he won't do it until his servants have defended him with their impotency; and even then he won't do it. He never does do it.

Rev. Walter Howe, vicar of St. Mary, Ilford, Essex, left £29,994. "Blessed be ye poor."

Another poor apostle has gone—the Lord knows where. Rev. Robert Duke, of Birlingham Rectory, Pershore, Worcester, left £20,959. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth," and half-a-dozen similar sweet Gospel texts will suggest themselves to the reader's mind.

How they love one another! It is reported that Mr. Frank Hall, of the Y. M. C. A. at Hastings, has been expelled for coquetting with the New Theology and occupying a seat on the platform at the Rev. R. J. Campbell's meeting. Such an action is not very brotherly. But it is scriptural,—for St. Paul says: "Hold no fellowship with unbelievers." This fact is overlooked by Mr. Campbell's weekly organ, which calls the action "astounding."

"Churches as Spreaders of Germ Disease" was the heading of a column—which turned out to be an advertisement—in last week's *Christian Commonwealth*. Amongst the diseases enumerated further down there was no mention of "superstition." That is, after all, the worst disease spread by the Churches. The cure for it is to be found in the *Freethinker*.

A writer in the aforesaid religious weekly declares that—"The sceptical spirit, in the sense of refusal to accept the old theology, saturates the most earnest and religious literature of the age and pervades the very atmosphere of our social and religious life." The same writer also says that—"The educated classes have long since outgrown the theology of the official Churches of Christendom, and now the masses of the people are throwing it aside like a worn out garment." True. But this is the work of Freethought, not of the New Theology. The latter merely steps in at the eleventh hour and claims the credit.

Prayers by preachers before their sermons are ostensibly addressed to God but are really addressed to the congregation. This fact gives point to the remark of a Wesleyan

preacher, who objects to politics in the pulpit, that the other day he heard a preacher "grossly misinform the Almighty regarding the political situation."

Bishop Gore, of Birmingham, has been maintaining that the Church of England has the gift of apostolic succession, and that its clergy are therefore endowed with the Holy Ghost. We are far from disputing this. Some of them look it. They are full, at any rate, of something which is not merely human and rational. But when the Bishop proceeds to talk about the coming reunion of Christendom, he invites a very broad smile. The reunion of Christendom has always been "coming," but it never comes, and it is obviously as far off as ever. Bishop Gore appears to think it will come in some way through the Church of England. The Catholic Church believes it will come, in Christ's good time, by his own Church (the Catholic, to wit) lying down peacefully, with all the other Churches *inside*. And if it came to betting we should put our money on the Catholic Church.

Rev. Dr. Robert Laws, Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland, in delivering the closing address of the session of the New College in the Rainy Hall, Edinburgh, solemnly warned the students against the evils of doubt. Here is a beautiful passage from his address:—

"If they had doubts and difficulties about certain things that occurred in Scripture they ought to keep them to themselves until they could solve them. They should not parade them in their congregations and upset all their lives if they could not find a solution. Any fool on earth could scatter doubts in that direction easily enough, or any demon in hell either. It was the first plan our arch-enemy took to bring doubt into the world. They must not follow that example."

What a grandiose way of warning students intended for the ministry against intellectual honesty as a hindrance to clerical business!

Mr. Francis Hill, President of the New Church Society at Radcliffe, was delivering an address at the New Jerusalem Sunday School on Sunday afternoon, when he exclaimed, "I cannot go on any longer," and died immediately. The unfortunate incident was, of course, due to natural causes. It would have been due to something else if the speaker had been delivering a Freethought address.

John Wilson, who was struck by lightning while ploughing, claimed compensation in the Nottingham County Court from his employer. The employer pleaded that it was "an act of God," and judgment was reserved. We wonder if the judge was going to see whether an action would lie against the party indicated by the defendant.

Rev. G. B. Berry, of Emmanuel Church, Plymouth, has been dealing with Bible prophecy; which old Bishop South said was a subject that generally found a man cracked or left him so. The reverend gentleman's treatment of the predictions of Holy Moses and Jonah the Whaler seems to show that he is pretty far gone. Those old Hebrew prophets all point, in Mr. Berry's opinion, to the necessity of Great Britain's sending Germany an ultimatum. They would support Mr. Balfour if they were alive now. We gather that Prophet Balaam would do the same. And we suppose we ought to include his sagacious ass.

A friendly reader has sent us an official card of admission to a Common Hall Public meeting (non-party) convened by the Mayor of Canterbury on Friday, March 26, at which the following resolution was to be proposed by his Worship:—"That it is the duty of the Government to maintain our permanent naval supremacy by at once laying down more ships of the 'Dreadnought' class." This warlike resolution was to be seconded by the Very Rev. the Dean of Canterbury. This gentleman evidently thinks that preaching peace in the pulpit, and clamoring for more big battleships on political platforms, are only two different sides of his holy function. And, on the whole, we incline to think he is right.

Mr. Philip Snowden, M.P., in an "exclusive" article to a religious weekly, speaks of the policy of Great Britain's having a friendly understanding with Germany as "that which reason, prudence, economy, humanity, and religion dictate." But why religion? Mr. Snowden has too great a fondness for imagining himself in the pulpit. Besides, if a policy is dictated by "humanity" the introduction of "religion" is quite superfluous.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday, April 4, St. James's Hall, Great Portland-street, W.; at 7.30, "The Moral Failure of Christianity."

April 11, 18, 25, St. James's Hall, London.

To Correspondents.

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

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £162 14s. 6d. Received since.—E. Raggett, 4s.; W. Ellis, 1s.; Robert Stirton and Friends (quarterly), £1 11s. 6d.; H. E. (quarterly), £1 1s.

C. A. BRIGG writes: "I have to regale myself with the *Freethinker* every week, but would like to hear your rousing lectures often. Will you be coming soon again to Liverpool?" Yes, probably in early May. This correspondent is thanked for the newspaper enclosure.

J. H. GASTRELL, sending twenty shillings for Shilling Month, wishes "it was twenty thousand shillings." So do we.

G. PHILLIPS.—See paragraph. Thanks.

F. C. COMERFORD.—Your view of Christianity is an old one; some would call it, not simply old, but old-fashioned. But you write in a liberal and tolerant tone, and we have no personal quarrel with anyone who allows others the same liberty that they enjoy themselves.

KATHERINA FITZHUGH, forwarding subscription, says: "I think it is a delightful idea to have a *Freethinker* Easter collection. That sort of thing has hitherto been so distinctively Christian."

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

GEORGE JACOB.—Rather off our beat.

E. CHIVERS.—In the Affirmation form you "solemnly affirm and declare" instead of swearing, with the adjuration of "So help me God." Order passed over to shop manager.

G. ROLEFFS.—You say your donation is "for the *Freethinker*," but we have put it to the common fund of Shilling Month.

W. A.—We notice all cuttings sent us when we can.

VIVIAN PHELIPS writes: "Your article 'Peace on Earth' hits off one phase of this German Bogey agitation to a T."

E. RICHMOND.—We quite agree with you that the *Freethinker* ought to be well-advertised. We note that you became acquainted with it in 1899 through an advertisement in *Reynolds*.

H. B. DODDS.—We keep telling Branch secretaries that Tuesday morning is too late for paragraphs. We strain a point for Mr. Cohen's sake, but we shall have to print a standing notice—and stick to it.

M. RINGROSE.—Much pleased to receive your letter. May we make an extract from it next week? Order executed.

SYDNEY J. OSBOURN.—Thanks for the cutting *re* the Shelley and Keats Memorial House at Rome. Glad you remember "the great pleasure" you had in reading what you are good enough to call our "beautiful article" on our visit to the graves of Shelley and Keats at Rome a few years ago.

A. WEBBER.—See paragraph. Thanks.

T. W. (Birmingham).—We prefer to acknowledge what we receive, but we print only your initials, which will not give you away. We note you are "delighted" with the Shilling Month idea, and that you hope to forward a subscription each week during April.

ROBERT STIRTON.—Pleased to hear your friend, to whom specimen copies were sent, has become a subscriber. Subscription acknowledged elsewhere. Thanks.

S. WARD.—Tuesday morning is too late. Next week.

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

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

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

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

The St. James's Hall Meetings.

I beg to remind London Freethinkers that this evening (April 4) sees the opening of the course of Sunday Lectures at the beautiful new St. James's Hall. Our party has never attempted—and never had the opportunity of attempting—anything of this size before in the West-end of London. I invite all metropolitan Freethinkers to co-operate to the very best of their power in making this effort thoroughly successful. The occasion is one of the utmost importance, and I beg them to recognise it.

G. W. FOOTE.

Shilling Month.

UNDER the heading of "Easter Eggs for Freethought," I announced last week that I was starting a new SHILLING MONTH in April, and I asked the readers of this journal to mark the Eastertide by doing something for their own cause. Easter offerings, I said, will be taken up in the churches; and let us, I added, take up one in the *Freethinker*. I invited its readers to send me any number of shillings, from one to a million, between April 1 and April 30—for Freethought. With regard to the disposition of the fund thus raised, I stated that I proposed to pay over one half the total to the National Secular Society, which is really in want of the sinews of war; and that I proposed to devote the other half to the *Freethinker*, in advertising it, and pushing its circulation in other ways requiring the expenditure of money, which I am not able to find myself in addition to my weekly loss on the paper and its adjuncts, now that the sole responsibility for both rests upon me.

It is my opinion that five thousand shillings could easily be raised in this way. There would be no difficulty if the rank and file only did their part. A certain number of Freethinkers respond to every appeal; they give often, and give generously. But we do not seem to reach—or is it that we do not touch?—the great general body of readers. Hundreds of them, and perhaps thousands, could spare at least one shilling for the cause,—perhaps even a few shillings, or several shillings, if they only bucked-up and showed a more coming-on disposition towards the collection plate. They cannot call it "supporting the cause" if they merely take the *Freethinker*, for I confidently, and not at all humbly, suggest that they get good value for their weekly twopence in this direction. What is wanted of them is a voluntary offering now and then. It would cost them a good deal more, if they were Christians, to escape the lusty beggars who beset the faithful at every turn. Of course, it is good to be economical, but economy ought not to be carried to the point of meanness. You can't expect to save the last penny by becoming a Freethinker. You must shell out sometime or other. And why not do it with a good grace? Come up smiling, as if you were receiving a favor, rather than bestowing one. You have heard of the old saying—"It is more blessed to give than to receive." Well now, you are to give, and I am to receive; so you see how you will get the best of the bargain.

Go to, then; pull the shillings out of your pockets, convert them into postal orders, and send them on. Cheques will do just as well. The great thing is to send on something. Never mind if it is a little more than you would decide upon in moments of cool (or cold) circumspection. A little enthusiasm will do you no harm; on the contrary, it will do you good. And I assure you it takes a lot of enthusiasm, as well as circumspection, to fight for Freethought year after year as I and my colleagues do. Don't let the enthusiasm be all on one side. Show that you also are alive, and sympathetic, and generous.

G. W. FOOTE.

First List of Subscriptions.

Figures after the names of subscribers indicate the number of shillings they send. No number means one shilling.

Major John C. Harris, R.E., 100; Katharina FitzHugh, 42; J. H. Gartrell, 20; A. J. Young, 5; E. Richmond, 2½; A. Webber; E. Chivers; G. Roleffs, 10; Vivian Phelips, 5; L. Himmell, 5; G. Davey, 2; M. Ringrose, 18; T. Dobson; Robert Yates; E. Parker.

Sugar Plums.

London "saints" will be wending their ways from all parts of the Metropolis this evening (April 4) to St. James's Hall, and we trust they will also be bringing some of their more orthodox friends and acquaintances along with them. The first of Mr. Foote's special course of lectures will be on "The Moral Failure of Christianity"—which is a particularly apposite subject just now when the air is full of warlike sounds and rumors. Mr. Foote intends to lay himself out (as the saying is) on this course of lectures; he will try to make them worthy of his subjects, his audiences, and

himself. Altogether, there is every reason why St. James's Hall should be crowded on these four occasions.

London friends are earnestly requested to help in advertising these St. James's Hall meetings. They can do so by a very moderate expenditure of energy, and no expenditure of anything else. They are asked to apply to Miss E. M. Vance, at 2, Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.—secretary of the Secular Society, Ltd., under whose auspices the meetings are organised—for printed matter announcing the four lectures; and, having obtained a supply of these announcements, to circulate them promptly as well as judiciously. It is really time to suggest to London friends that they ought to be a little more active in this direction. All who can do anything should do it. Nobody should hold back. The feeling of "Oh, there are plenty without me" is absolutely ruinous. Let everyone do his or her share, and the car of progress will go ahead rapidly. On the other hand, this is certain, that it will never move of itself.

St. James's Hall is the latest up-to-date public hall in London. It forms an island in Great Portland-street, which runs into Oxford-street at the south, and into Euston-road at the north. Portland-road Station is the nearest on the Metropolitan Railway. The nearest "Tube" Station is Oxford-street, opposite Peter Robinson's. Buses run to Regent-circus from various parts of London. The North London tramcars run to the corner of Euston-road and Tottenham-court-road, from which the Hall is about five minutes' walk. There is no need to ask where the Hall is when you are once in Great Portland-street. St. James's Hall is a block by itself on the west side of the street—that is, on the right as you go down from Euston-road, on the left as you go up from Oxford-street.

We hope the weather will be fine for these St. James's Hall lectures, especially for the ladies' sake. We hope to see as large a proportion of them as possible at the meetings.

Freethinkers in the Bishop Auckland district are invited to send their names and address to the secretary of the Newcastle N.S.S. Branch. Mr. H. B. Dodds, 243, Harbottle-street, Byker, Newcastle-on-Tyne, with a view to arrangements in connection with the proposed debate between Mr. C. Cohen and the Rev. A. Graham-Barton.

Subscriptions for *Shilling Month* were invited between April 1 and April 30. But some good hearts can't wait when they hear the collection whistle blow. They must start at once. Our veteran friend, Major John C. Harris, R.E., is one of this sort. He takes time by the forelock, and nearly always gets in first with his donation. He got in first again this time. The *Freethinker* was published on Thursday morning, and his cheque reached us in the evening. The next cheque came all the way from Cornwall, and the third was a lady's from the opposite side of England; both by Friday morning.

We announced last week that the Boston bigots had got Mr. Joseph Bates discharged from his employment, in the hope, and belief, that he would thus be driven from the town, and that the Freethought movement there would collapse. These good Christians, however, overlooked the fact that there is a Freethought movement outside Boston. Mr. Foote brought the matter before the Board of the Secular Society, Ltd., at its last meeting, and the Board agreed to make the experiment of engaging Mr. Bates as a Freethought missionary and organiser in Boston and the surrounding district. Thus the bigots are foiled, and just at the very point where they calculated on being completely successful. We believe they will soon see that they made the worst possible move in the game.

The Pioneer Press has just published, in the form of a novel entitled *Ralph Cricklewood*, a scathing criticism of Christianity by Stephen Fitz-Stephen. He calls it "A Twentieth Century Critical and Rational Exposé of Christian Mythology." The book is written throughout with great vigor and bold sincerity. We shall have more to say about it next week. Meanwhile we may state that it runs to nearly 300 closely-printed pages, and is bound in cloth, the price being 3s. 6d., for which copies will be forwarded post-free.

We ought to add that the author of *Ralph Cricklewood* has been for many years a Christian clergyman. He has retired from the ministry, but private reasons make him assume the name of Stephen Fitz-Stephen.

Evolution and Evil.

THE Editor's very pointed and lucid remarks in the concluding chapter of his recent articles on "Darwin," on the new light in which Evolution presents the problem of evil, are in marked contrast to the uncertain apologetic attitude of those who seek to reconcile its existence with the beneficence of a Creator. The theory of Evolution has, of course, affected every question of theology, but none more disastrously perhaps than the theological problem of evil. Compelled to accept the findings of modern science, the ancient landmarks of the theologian have been removed, and he finds himself in a region of thought, bewildering and perplexing, without a finger-post to point a road of safety.

The numberless volumes of the orthodox type on the "origin" and "mystery" of evil that were penned before the catastrophe of Evolution played havoc with their assumptions, shed not a single ray of light on this appalling aspect of nature; and so long as evil was regarded as something incidental—some physical or moral disturbance that had somehow been introduced into a universe intended to be perfect and harmonious—the point of view was bound to be misleading. From the older standpoint it was most difficult for the theologian to satisfy the popular mind, especially when his attempted solutions of the difficulty were enforced by the power of ecclesiastical authority. When the Devil was believed to be going about like a roaring lion, it was easy to make him the scapegoat of all the maladjustments of nature, and thus leave the mind free to accept the comforting doctrine of the providence and goodness of God. The prior question of why the Devil was permitted belonged to those inscrutable mysteries which it was impious for the vulgar to meddle with. But this theological scapegoat of universal evil has been banished by science to the wilderness inhabited by the spectres of the past, and the man of God has been obliged to acquiesce rather reluctantly in the dismissal. "It is now being seen," says a scientific theologian (if one may use that term to describe an apologist seeking to reconcile science and religion), "by all earnest and independent thinkers that the theory of the Devil must take its place with Alchemy, the Ptolemaic theory of the universe, and other beliefs that the knowledge of the world has outgrown." And, unfortunately for the theologian, this scapegoat has not carried away with him the sins of creation, but has left his omnipotent antagonist to bear the burden alone, and settle the obligation as best he may.

The newer apologists, with Satan "relegated to the realms of myth," and only a beneficent Creator remaining, have a much more difficult task to reconcile the anomalies of nature with his wisdom and goodness. Indeed, the task is an impossible one, if they but realised the full extent of the situation; because the "dropping" of the Devil has very serious logical consequences to the theologian—and his God—which cannot be reasoned away. The fact which he has got to face is very forcibly put by Mr. Foote in the article referred to, when, in reference to the brutal revelations of Evolution, he says: "Place a Deity behind this process, and you create a greater and viler Devil than any theologian of the past was capable of inventing." This theological blunder in letting the Devil slip through their fingers is fully realised by at least one writer—viz., the author of *Evil and Evolution*, a somewhat remarkable book which may be worthy of a brief notice in this connection, if only for its futile attempt to reinstate the discarded Satan as the author of evil and the cause of humanity's troubles. Those religious teachers, says this writer, who have unreservedly accepted the doctrine of evolution, "have not as yet fully realised all that is involved in evolution as held by the majority of scientific men"; and he gives it as his firm conviction that faith in an over-ruling Providence can be permanently sustained "only by assuming an evil power in antagonism to the good." "The

belief in the Devil is, to my mind, the only condition upon which it is possible to believe in a beneficent God." It appears to this writer that, "for a belief in a Devil" we have very much the same ground that we have for a belief in God—an observation that is as logical as it is candid. Our author, therefore, makes a heroic attempt, by observations of a scientific nature, to bring the erring theologian back to the oldest and most orthodox—the only rational and satisfactory explanation of the existence of evil, namely, the existence of Satan.

The re-installation of Satan, however, is a somewhat difficult matter, because, as in the proverbial recipe, you have first of all to "catch your Satan." And our author resolutely refuses to look for him in his old haunts—old mother Eve and the patriarch Job—Satan's one-time familiar acquaintances, who might afford some information as to his likeness and whereabouts, are not even questioned. The pinnacle of the Temple, too, a point of vantage from which he might possibly have been able to put salt on the arch-fiend's tail, he quietly ignores. As one reviewer said, "the author does not quote the Bible from first to last." He realises, evidently, that the Devil of the Bible and of mythology is not a fit and proper person to occupy the responsible position of the author of universal evil. "The Devil with horns and tail and cloven hoof, brandishing a pitchfork, may be relegated to the realms of myth." Satan as "the petty and contemptible being depicted in medieval pictures, and represented in medieval pagents" is altogether too inadequate. What is wanted is a grand, majestic, almost Omnipotent Satan, if he is to commend himself to the modern mind affected by the teaching of evolutionary science. And so our author devotes a chapter to "Satan from a Scientific Point of View." The "science" of the chapter, however, consists mostly of poetical quotations. It is "Milton and Goethe" who have "afforded us considerable assistance in approximating to some extent to a more rational conception of Satan than has generally prevailed among those who have believed in such a being." Which statement, like that innocent "heathen Chinese," is peculiar, in view of the fact that the Bible has always been the authoritative source of information as to the Devil's characteristics and personality. But even Milton's grand conception does not satisfy our author. It "probably falls far short of the real Satan"; and "even his majestic creation would appear puny and insignificant by comparison with any adequate representation of the awful and mysterious entity" to whom all good is lost. But the "adequate representation" not being forthcoming, he is obliged to content himself with the Satan of Milton, who with all his failings is still "a figure of stupendous grandeur and majesty—a god-like being with creative and administrative powers, with intellectual resources, with knowledge and foreknowledge probably inferior only to those of the Creator Himself."

The author of *Evil and Evolution* may somewhat resemble the figure of this grand conception in the possession of "intellectual resources," but he certainly errs in his estimate of the psychological possibilities of such a conception ever taking root in the popular imagination. To begin with, such a Satan has no Biblical or theological sanction, and the acceptance of ready-made Satans in an age of intellectual development is contrary to all that we know of evolutionary progress. "It was perfectly natural," says a writer, "that the ignorance of primitive man should invent the Devil as a part of his mythology"; but his invention was of an evil being that corresponded to his crude notions of the play of natural forces. As his knowledge of nature increased, his notions of gods and devils necessarily underwent a corresponding change or modification. But such modification was only the beginning of the end, and the end, so far as Satan is concerned, has already come; for the theologian has relegated him to "the realms of myth." And our author's desperate and heroic attempt to rehabilitate him in modern scientific clothing must be pronounced as altogether abortive

The real object of this strange apology is, of course, the exoneration of the Deity from the responsibility of the existence of evil. Because, as this apologist clearly sees, the belief in a beneficent God is not logically tenable, apart from a belief in an evil power on whom to father the ills of creation and of life. It is because "much of the difficulty that men experience in realising the goodness of the Creator is attributable to this abandonment of a belief in Satan," that this bold defence of his Satanic Majesty is undertaken. He is of the opinion, which all Free-thinkers will cordially endorse, that there is "no reason for holding on to the one idea which is not a reason equally strong for keeping fast to the other." We might put the matter in another form and say that the reasons which have led men to reject the Devil apply with equal force to the Deity—both are equally untenable from the standpoint of modern knowledge. On the author's own showing, therefore, the God-idea is doomed, and will ultimately be relegated to the "realms of myth," there to keep company with the Satans and evil spirits which were the invention of the ignorance of primitive man.

Our author is very severe in his strictures on the theories of those theological apologists who seek to harmonise the evil of the world with the goodness of God, and says in no uncertain language, "It can't be done. But even if he succeeded in establishing his own thesis of an evil power, the responsibility of the Creator would not be removed; "there would be blood upon the hand still."

The strange thing to the rational mind is that an independent thinker like the writer of *Evil and Evolution* should exert his intellectual powers to bolster up the decaying and unnecessary belief in a Heavenly Father. The God-idea has never been such a valuable moral asset that mankind should shed tears at its loss. However it may have satisfied the human intellect in an uncritical age, it is now no longer a source of strength or a solution of the world's mysteries. And, as Winwood Reade says, "Not only the Syrian superstition must be attacked, but also the belief in a personal God; for the reason that it engenders a slavish and oriental condition of the mind; is injurious to human nature,—lowering its dignity, arresting its development, and isolating its affections." The very logical contradiction which the assumption of a beneficent Creator imposes upon the human mind, is itself a serious hindrance to its expansion. Evolution may not "explain" evil any more than theories of gods and devils explain it to the thinking mind; but by emphasising the fact that it is inseparable from Nature's methods, and by eliminating the superstitious element from man's mental outlook, it enables him to form a truer and juster estimate of his relation to those cosmic forces, the knowledge and utilisation of which constitute in large measure the crown and glory of his being.

JOSEPH BRYCE.

"Which is the Most Magnificent Passage in the Bible?"

UNDER the above heading in the *Sunday at Home* is an effusion taking front rank, and illustrated with portraits of bishops, canons, and reverends. These contribute their various testimonies on the subject by special request. There are other notabilities also who reply to the question: Mr. William Watson, Professor Flinders Petrie, Mr. A. C. Benson, Professor R. G. Moulton, etc.

Many of them declare that the question is a difficult one to answer. But some notion can be formed of their ideas of literary magnificence when we find several of them voting for passages from the Book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine, otherwise St. John's nightmare. Certainly there are here references to very important events and very big things—if they ever happened—including the passing away of the heavens and the earth in the twinkling

of an eye, entirely dwarfing the recent mere local seismic disturbance in Reggio. The actual references to this book are: Rev. x. 1—6, xi. 15, xxii. 5, and xx. 11—13, which is an example:—

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”

All the dead, small and great, standing on the nothing that was left after the earth had fled away, can only be a matter of individual literary taste in the impossible. The book-keeping was magnificent because on such a large scale; recording, as it must have done, every detail in the lives of countless millions of men, women, and children since the dawn of life. The giving up of the dead by hell was magnificent numerically, having in view the “broad is the way” doctrine. Any suggestion of magnificence otherwise must be largely discounted by improbability.

But other portions of the Bible are singled out by some of the contributors. For instance, Job xxxviii. and xxxix., by Canon Driver. Yet this is simply a series of questions addressed to poor Job by God. They appear as though uttered with gatling-gun rapidity, and there is little wonder Job was dazed. The Almighty convinced Job of his ignorance without telling him that he (God), being the cause of all things small or great, made him a fool. It is difficult to see where the magnificence comes in, although the questions are unanswerable and issue from an alleged omniscient source.

Dr. Alex. Whyte chooses the whole of the Song of Solomon. This is only magnificent *business*—the Church upholding Christ, and Christ upholding the Church; a kind of tit for tat arrangement to hood-wink and bamboozle.

Sir Oliver Lodge actually gives Matthew vi. 10—“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” If this is magnificent we give it up!

Then the Bishop of Truro chooses out of the divine lucky-tub John i. 1-15. He picks out a big parcel of fifteen verses; but it passes comprehension how any educated man can call them magnificent. One verse is sufficient to show their general inanity—“And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not.” This may be allegorical, it may be figurative, it may be catachrestical; but it isn't magnificent. If it is to be taken literally, the situation is worse; for as the light was shining it was not dark—in which case there was no darkness to comprehend, even if darkness *could* comprehend. The Bishop may have had in mind that Egyptian darkness which was really so dark that you could cut a square out of it with a knife. If darkness here means a physical or intellectual state or condition, what, then, can have been the value of the light? And where, therefore, is the magnificence? Actual darkness, of course, is not in existence, *per se*; it is only a possible condition in the absence of light.

One wonders what can be the standard of excellence in the magnificent line of these gentry outside Holy Writ. Are they blind to so much of the generally magnificent in poetry and prose? Why, Poe's *Descent into the Maelstrom* is far more *sensibly* magnificent than any part of Revelation. Still, they were asked to give what they considered the most magnificent passage in the Bible, and from what they have chosen we can only exclaim, “Good Lord deliver us!” There seems small hope for them in other literary pastures.

A. F.

The Centre of the Battle.

BY JOHN PECK.

FREETHINKERS must train their guns on the idea of a soul and the existence of a god. Those are the central ideas around which all the other superstitions cluster. No god, no holy books. No soul, no fear of hell, no hope of heaven. Then we can turn all our attention to bettering conditions in this life.

As to the existence of a god, is it not time for some Christian to prove that such a being exists? The Christian sees the hand of God everywhere, but why can't I see it? Some animals devour other animals, insects annoy the animals, and then birds devour the insects. Foul weeds spring up to choke the crops we cultivate. Death, destruction and annoyance seem to be the order of the world we live in. And this is God's work, and this is the god that the Christian sees and worships. Summon the wisest Christian that can be found, and what evidence can he bring to prove the existence of a god? Simply this, “I believe.”

It is preposterous to believe that a benevolent, merciful god is the author of all the misery, unhappiness, and discomfort in this world.

If the Christian is right, God is the author of all that exists; nothing can take place otherwise than according to his plans. He is tender and merciful, and yet the world is full of disaster, misery, disappointment, and unhappiness. These ideas are out of harmony. They can never be made to agree any more than truth and falsehood, happiness and misery. Shelley was right when he said, “There is no God.” Eliminate the God idea and then we will begin to study the blind forces of nature and better understand her evolutionary processes. What cannot survive must perish, but nature knows no pity.

As to the soul.

An oak grows up, comes to maturity, sheds its acorns, dies and decays. The acorns will produce other oaks, but the mother oak can never reappear. It is dead—gone forever. Birth, life, death, and decay is a law which is stamped upon the entire vegetable kingdom. Few will deny that this law applies as truly to the animal as to the vegetable kingdom, with the exception of man. The only question is whether there is an exception or whether the law is universal.

Most will admit that the lower brutes, like the oak, die, never to be identified as the same animals that lived before. But the Christian argues that man is the only animal that is endowed with reason, and therefore the only animal that has an immortal part, or soul.

But there can be no soul where there is no thought, and no thought where there is no brain to produce it. A dead brain can no more produce a thought than a block of wood. Therefore there can be no immortal part, no soul. But the Christian says the soul, the immortal part which the brain has already produced, will leave the body before death takes place. That is to say that a man is alive after he is dead; that musical sounds can be continued after the instrument is destroyed which produced them.

I may quote a passage of scripture to prove a point, because it contains a truth, but never because I believe it to be inspired. But with the Christian it is different. He believes that every word emanated from a divine power, and is without the shadow of error. Let him consider the passages of scripture before quoted, which prove as clearly as anything can prove that the “dead know not anything,” and then ask himself whether God made a mistake, or whether death ends all.

If it has ever been demonstrated that man has a soul, it has not come to my knowledge. The whole theory depends upon belief, and more belief proves nothing. The whole world believed the world to be flat, but that did not make it flat. I defy the most learned Christian to bring positive proof that man has a soul. The universally conceded fact that all

animated nature is without a soul comes pretty near to proof that man is in the same predicament. If man is an exception, it would be a good deal like an exception to the law of gravitation. If man is not possessed of a soul, it is a fact, and the Christian's belief cannot change it, and I shall fare no worse and the Christian will fare no better. All are subject to the same general laws, all born alike, all die alike, and all will sleep the same endless sleep.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Buddhism.

When from the thundercloud falls the red thunder—
Is there a Thunderer Acroceraunian? [bolt
When the red madness of war in an avalanche
Hurls—is Deity imminent?

There is no deity shrined in the thunderbolt,
There is no Ego behind the red mask of war.
Agony, misery, frenzy, ineptitude,
Howl in a gulf of vacuity.

Linked in a chain of eternal vicissitude
Suffering is; but there is not a sufferer.
Cause and effect eddy round in eternity,
Nor have ending or origin.

Forest and fruit in unending antithesis
One from the other emerge in a colligate
Order as out of emotion arises
Action, emotion of action.

So from eternity unto eternity
Cause and effect eddy round everlastingly—
Churn personality out of inanity,
Then back into its elements.

Those who elusively deem personality's
Phantom a permanent immanent entity
Build upon emptiness and in a fanatic
Host reel on for all ages.

Fasting, austerity, rosary, sacrifice [goats,
Moan in a charnel house, black with the blood of
Black with the guillotine, black with the battle- [field,
All to save what exists not.

Down the red river of passion and heresy
Swept in a cataract, hark! how they imprecate
Egos idealised into an infinite
God, to cancel an agony.

By the delusion itself that created him
Puffed to an infamy, cannibal, horrible,
Stretched on a cross, and adorned as affiliate
To self's God of voracity.

Who, as they drivel, begot the Thyestean
Sacrifice all for himself, and is eating it,
Eating a son or on pyre or battlefield
Dupe of his own fatuity.

Eating him, beating him, munching him, crunching [him
Through all eternity, where everlastingly
Glower his altar lights,—cannon and flaring saint
Red in his orgy Neronian.

Happiness is but there is not a happy one;
If in the hyaline maelstrom of misery
Pull some frail shaft of light, from pure nonentity
It but reflects not creates it.

Where on the window-pane winter in arabesque
Leafage a wonderworld wreathes and illumines it,
Or on its icefloe a crystalline edelweiss
Glints and melts in the midday.

Nothingness, shall we ascribe to the perishing
Crystal the source of the light and the happiness
That in exuberant ecstacy, unopposed,
Only revels ubiquitous.

When from the window-pane trickles its arabesque
Dimness, evaporate icefloe and edelweiss
Crystalline, and the thin cirrus erases it—
Self from the azure and sunlight?

No God of heaven or Javeh or Jupiter
Causes the endless succession of birth and death;
Matter and force, as they blend and unblend, alone
Wreathes the vain phantom we feign that we are.

THELGAR VANICORO.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON MARCH 25.
The President, Mr. G. W. Foote, in the chair. There were also present: Messrs. J. Barry, W. H. Baker, G. Bowman, C. Cohen, W. Leat, Dr. Nichols, J. Neate, C. Quinton, F. Schaller, S. Samuels, H. Silverstien, T. J. Thurlow, F. Wood, V. Roger, R. Rossetti, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed. Cash statement adopted. Permission was granted for the formation of a Branch at Blackburn. Members were admitted for the parent Society. Permission was also granted for a new Branch at Liverpool, and fifty-two members were admitted.

Invitations for the Annual Conference were received from Birmingham and Liverpool. On being put to the vote it was decided to hold the Conference in Liverpool.

The President reported that, in consequence of the bigotry displayed towards Mr. Joseph Bates, of the Boston Branch, which had ended in Mr. Bates being discharged from his employment, the Secular Society, Ltd., had engaged him for some organising work that would keep him in and near the town.

It was unanimously resolved that a Public Meeting should be held in London on June 8, that being the hundredth anniversary of the death of Thomas Paine.

The meeting then adjourned.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

N.B.—Secretaries are reminded that all notices for the Agenda must reach the office by April 30, also all members' subscriptions and Branch collections, on which date the books will be made up.—E. M. V.

THE ORTHODOX GOD.

The God of the ordinary church-goer, and of the man who is supposed to teach him from the study and pulpit, is an antiquated theologian who made his universe so badly that it went wrong in spite of him, and has remained wrong ever since. Why he should ever have created it is not clear. Why he should be the injured party in all the miseries that have ensued is still less clear. The poor crippled child who has been maimed by a falling rock, and the white-faced match-box maker who works eighteen hours out of the twenty-four to keep body and soul together, have surely some sort of a claim upon God, apart from being miserable sinners who must account themselves fortunate to be forgiven for Christ's sake. Faugh! it is all so unreal and so stupid. This kind of God is no God at all. The theologian may call him infinite, but in practice he is finite. He may call him a God of love, but in practice he is spiteful and silly.
—*Rev. R. J. Campbell.*

As man advances, as his intellect enlarges, as his knowledge increases, as his ideals become nobler, the Bibles and creeds will lose their authority—the miraculous will be classed with the impossible, and the idea of special providence will be discarded. Thousands of religions have perished, innumerable gods have died, and why should the religion of our time be exempt from the common fate?—*Ingersoll*

How many fashionable women at the end of a long season would be ready to welcome heaven itself as a relief from the desperate monotony of dressing, dawdling, and driving?—*Oliver Wendell Holmes.*

Argument is, with fools, passion, vociferation, or violence; with statesmen, a majority; with kings, the sword; with fanatics, denunciation; with men of sense, a sound reason.—*Chatfield.*

A wise man feels grieved at his powerlessness to do the good which he desires to do, but he does not feel grieved because people do not know or because they judge him wrongly.—*Chinese Wisdom.*

The National Secular Society's Executive has resolved to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the death of Thomas Paine by a great public meeting in London. The secretary is trying to engage a large hall in the West-end for the evening of June 8, and we hope to be able to make a gratifying announcement next week. A list of speakers, as representative as possible, will be arranged. There should be, and no doubt there will be, a great rally of the admirers of Thomas Paine on this occasion. None of them will see the second centenary of Paine's death; they should all, therefore, make the most of the first.

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.

ST. JAMES'S HALL (Great Portland-street, W.). 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The Moral Failure of Christianity."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Forest Gate Public (Lower) Hall, Woodgrange-road): 7.30, J. T. Lloyd, "Christianity or Science: Which?" Selections by the Band before lecture.

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Alma Hall, 335 High-road, N., three doors from Commerce-road): 7, E. Burke, "Christianity, Insanity, and Science."

COUNTRY.

EDINBURGH SECULAR SOCIETY (Rooms, 12 Hill-square); 6.30, P. Stuart, "Was Christ a Socialist?"

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): J. M. Robertson, Comte and Comtism, 12 noon, "Comte's Political Doctrine"; 6.30, "Comte's Religious Doctrine."

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, H. Percy Ward, "Sky-Pilots." Special members' meeting after lecture.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, W. R. Bradley, "Education, Literary and Scientific."

JOSEPH BATES' EAST ANGLIAN MISSION.

BOSTON: Bargate Green, Sunday, April 4, at 3, "The World, Society, and Christianity."

KIRTON: Market Place, Tuesday, April 6, at 7, "Man's Soul and the Great Beyond."

SPALDING: Market Place, Thursday, April 8, at 3, "Ancient Myth and Modern Science."

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