

THE Freethinker

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The great difficulty is always to open people's eyes: to touch their feelings, and break their hearts, is easy; the difficult thing is to break their heads.—RUSKIN.

The Betrayal of George Meredith.

I AM sick with disgust. George Meredith has been betrayed. Those who surrounded his dead body have acted as though he were a mere public entertainer. They have ignored his ideas and convictions. He sacrificed all the world's prizes that he might easily have secured if he had stooped to win them, and lived a retired life in order to be true to himself as well as his genius. He stood aloof from the crowd, with its follies and credulities. His mind was like a firm beacon throwing its steady light over tossing seas. This was his attitude to the very last. Yet the moment the breath was out of his body a capitulation was made, as if on his behalf, to the enemy he had been fighting all his life. The outrage committed at the burial of Swinburne was repeated, and repeated more outrageously, at the funeral of Meredith. It is enough to make one shudderingly believe that the Master was right in wondering whether the English nation had not entered upon the downward course to its doom, beyond the possibility of retrieval. I scarcely think this outrage would have happened fifty years ago. Certainly it would not have happened without protests. But nobody sees anything wrong in it now, except a few heretics who still refuse to bow the knees in the house of Rimmon.

This outrage imposes on me a duty. I was looking forward to the pleasure of writing calmly, though with a steady vital enthusiasm, on the writings of George Meredith. But that pleasure must be deferred. I have a sterner task to fulfil now. I have to vindicate the soul of George Meredith (if I may use the term in a natural sense) against those who desecrated his body.

Genius itself is but dust in the balance in comparison with honor and courage. No man ever knew this better than George Meredith did. To be a shuffler and a coward would sink Shakespeare himself below any rough fellow who stands by his word and sticks to his "pal." George Meredith had honor and courage enough for whole regiments of Bayards. Every sentence he penned had in it a challenge to the mental laziness, the hypocrisy, and the moral cowardice of his countrymen. And that gallant flag of his should not be lowered over his grave. I, at least, am bent on doing my share, however humble it may be, in running up that flag and letting it stream out proudly on the wind.

Let us see what really happened at Meredith's funeral. The actual funeral was, of course, at Dorking Cemetery. The body had been cremated and the ashes, in a sarcophagus adorned with many weeping angels, were laid in the grave purchased years ago by Meredith when he buried his wife. So far so good—except for the weeping angels. What followed was *not* good. John (Lord) Morley and John Burns were present. Either of them might have said a few appropriate words at the Master's graveside. Instead of that, they stood respectfully

listening to the mouthings of two clergymen—for one was apparently deemed unequal to the occasion. Meredith himself had not been to church for any number of years. He told Mr. Nevinson, in an interview, two or three years back, that he left off going to church long ago because he was ashamed of what he heard there. Yet a brace of the black birds, that he would not listen to when he was living, were brought to whistle their nonsense over his ashes. The first part of the ceremony was perpetrated, according to custom, in the chapel; the concluding part at the head of the grave. They buried the Master's "remains" in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection. Yet they knew, if they knew anything, that he would have laughed at the idea. And they also knew, if they knew anything, that Meredith did not believe in a personal future life, but flatly rejected it as a whim of man's vanity. John Morley and John Burns knew this, anyhow; and why did they "assist" at that monstrous farce?

Simultaneously with the burial at Dorking a memorial service was performed at Westminster Abbey. Dean Robinson had refused to allow Meredith's ashes to be buried there, but he agreed to the ceremonial part of such a burial; which looks like confusion worse confounded. Many "distinguished" men and women were present, who ought to have known better, and the Dean himself was the principal showman. Various Psalms were sung or read, including the thirteenth, twenty-third, fifty-first, and hundred and thirtieth. Let any sensible admirer of Meredith read them and see how beautifully they suited his case. The lesson was the last three verses of 2 Corinthians iv. And sensible admirers of Meredith will see how suitable that was too.

Now I am going to prick this hypocritical bubble in two ways. First of all, I shall show how Meredith stood towards me; secondly, I shall show from Meredith's poems, where he speaks far more in person than he does in his novels, that he was a non-supernatural Humanist, without a shred of belief in the doctrines of Christianity.

I did not intend to say anything more at present about the relations between Meredith and myself, whatever I might have said at some future time. It would have looked too much like trading on his great name, and I hope I have nothing in common with the swarm of second-rate notabilities who grind their little axes on the Master's tombstone. But there is a time to speak, as well as a time to keep silence; and the double outrage at Dorking and at Westminster Abbey more than excuses my utterance; it calls upon me to let the truth be known.

The first thing to be said is this. George Meredith knew me for more than thirty years; we corresponded occasionally during that time, but we never met. I am the opposite of a tuft-hunter; if I may say so, I am as proud as Lucifer; I never cared to occupy the Master's time and attention for my own enjoyment; moreover, I preferred that any word of encouragement he might send me should be based upon my public work, in which case there could be no doubt whatever as to its value. Only once did I write to Meredith first; on every other occasion he opened the correspondence; and this again is a fact of the utmost importance.

I wrote to Meredith first in the middle seventies. The letter contained nothing about myself. I wrote

as one of his readers remonstrating with him for what I thought gratuitous difficulties in the way of people finding him out. He thanked me in his reply, but put all that gently aside. He staggered me by referring to what he said was more important. He was sorry that, in my case, the public was "neglectful of a brave man," which he said was "worse than neglect of a man of letters." He had watched me fighting for Freethought, and I never knew it. I was proud of his recognition, but I did not blazon it to the world, I kept it in my heart.

When I started the *Liberal*, a few years later, Meredith wrote congratulating me on the prospectus, and stating that he would write for the magazine if anything occurred to him. An article from Meredith would have been a feather in my cap, but I loved the Master more than my own fame, and I begged him to keep to his own work and leave me to fight my own battle as I could.

In 1883 I was a prisoner for "blasphemy." One day the Governor kindly brought into my cell a book that had been sent for me. It was a special favor, and I thanked him—as I thank him still. In the story I wrote of my imprisonment I alluded to that book. After relating how Gerald Massey sent me his *Natural Genesis*, I continued:—

"I was also favored with a presentation copy of verses by the one writer I most admire, whose genius I revered long before the public and the critics discovered it. It would gratify my vanity rather than my prudence to reveal his name."

The much-prized volume was Meredith's *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*, with an autograph inscription inside. Of course I have it still.

Meredith wrote me now and then, but I am not printing all his letters. That is not my object. I hurry on to another special fact. In the early nineties, the treasurer of a testimonial fund that was being raised for me received a cheque from George Meredith. I declined to print his subscription in the list until he authorised its publication. Meredith replied that the name should go with the subscription when it was "in recognition of high and constant courage." Now there were other courageous men in England. Why did Meredith go out of his way to say that of me? It was because of the object for which I was fighting.

I take a big leap forward to the early part of last year. Meredith had not written to me for a considerable time. But he had not forgotten me. Far from it. The new "blasphemy" battle was over, and I was settling down to routine work again, when another letter came from the Master. The opening sentences were a delicate invention. He did not wish to fling the letter at me after such a long silence, so he made me the medium of conveying his subscription to the secretary of the Secular Education League. The second half of the letter was what he wanted to say to me. And now I print this letter *in extenso*:—

DEAR MR. FOOTE,—

"Box Hill, Dorking,
February 24, 1908.

The enclosed imposes on your good nature an act to make amends for my heedlessness with papers that come to me. It is for the funds of the Secular Education movement—no more than a movement at present, but inspiring us with one of the certainties of the proximate future. In which latter point it does not resemble the object of your valiant fight, though that is destined for victory. But it demands a combination of ardor and patience rarely to be found. You will have the credit of it when the day ripens for biography.

Accept my compliments, with the regret for troubling you.

GEORGE MEREDITH."

That letter is explicit enough. It places Meredith's attitude beyond all doubt. Finally, a few days after Swinburne's death, Meredith sent me a cheque, with his name for publication, in support of the *Freethinker*. He had not been solicited in any way. I had not written to him since replying to his letter of February 24, 1908. It was a perfectly spontaneous act on his part.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

The Crucial Test.

IN some circles of society it is the fashion of the moment to sing, with amazing gusto, the praises of what is proudly called the "new science." Exactly what this "new science" is only a few "initiates" know, and these are pledged to eternal secrecy; but we are confidently assured that it infallibly establishes the accuracy of the spiritual interpretation of life. The curious thing is, however, that the people who furnish us with this assurance are not themselves scientists, but merely the champions of some religious cult or other, with whom the wish is doubtless father to the thought. The scientists know better, and laugh to scorn the arrogant pretensions of theological fanatics. In reality the "new science" is only another name for the old superstition. The old science, it is admitted, did good in its day, but at last it has come to the end of its powers, and its chief service has consisted in preparing the way for the "new science," with its wiser methods and swifter results. The fact is, we are told, that at present there is a deadlock in everything except Theosophy. Twenty years ago Mr. Samuel Butler wrote his famous essay on "The Deadlock in Darwinism." Mr. Butler *imagined* the deadlock in the interest of his own belief in the presence of design in evolution. But that great thinker was laboring under a delusion. Darwinism was not at a deadlock twenty years ago, while to-day it is employed as a working hypothesis by practically all scientific students. Equally erroneous is the assertion now being made by certain Western representatives of Oriental Occultism that there is a deadlock in science and art. The truth is that scientists were never so unanimous on essentials, and never so confident of ultimate triumph as they are just now. But science holds out no helping hand to any theology whatsoever, and this is the reason why New Theologians and Theosophists falsely declare that the science of thirty years ago is now extinct while the science of to-day is entirely on their side.

Fanatics never take the trouble to consult the facts and face their message. They prefer to be guided by their intuitions, or the light within, and so they arrive at conclusions which are contradicted by every article in the scientific creed. They believe dogmas handed down to them from antiquity, the truth of which they have never subjected to any real test. Indeed, many dogmas cannot be tested. They are pure inventions which it is impossible to take seriously. The statement that there exists a Supreme Being, out of whom all other beings have sprung, can neither be proved nor yet disproved. Hence the existence of such a Being cannot be an object of knowledge. God himself being unknown and unknowable, how infinitely absurd is the doctrine of the Trinity. Equally ridiculous is the belief in the Incarnation, for the very word implies that something became flesh which previously was not flesh. Virgin births are facts among some very low organisms; but the births of God-men, as recorded in mythologies, were not virgin. There were always two parents, a human mother and a Divine father. According to the Gospels Jesus had both father and mother, and so was not virgin-born. But the very idea of a Divine incarnation is unthinkable, quite as unthinkable as the existence of a Divine Being. All theologies are irrational, nor is it possible ever to rationalise them. Divines often speak of God as Infinite Intelligence; but Infinite Intelligence is an unintelligible concept. Finite intelligences are practically innumerable; but the whole of them combined would not constitute Infinite Intelligence. Hence Infinite Intelligence is inconceivable. The belief in a Divine Being and in a God-man is common; but it is a belief for which no justification whatever can be offered at the bar of reason.

Now, Christianity is a religion rooted and grounded in theology. Without its doctrines of God, the God-man, the Atonement, and Immortality, it would be nothing. The reality of supernatural power, the

efficacy of Divine blood shed in atoning sacrifice, the active presence of the Holy Ghost in human hearts and lives for the elimination of all evil, these constitute the essence of the Christian religion. Such a religion, if true, would speedily put an end to everything in human life that makes for evil and misery, and fill it to overflowing with purifying, sweetening and elevating influences. This is a point, then, at which the truth of Christianity can be definitely tested. Has it cleansed humanity of all its impurities and charged it with ideal virtues? We must bear in mind that the Deliverer, the Savior, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier is God the Son acting through the Holy Ghost. Jesus is reported to have said that if he died on the Cross he would draw all men unto himself, and in the Epistles it was predicted that he would reign as King over the whole earth. Preaching in St. Paul's the other Sunday, Canon Scott-Holland, while claiming, in general terms, that Christianity has transformed the world, was bound to admit that appearances are dead against such a contention. He said:—

"We look back, look round on this bad, corrupt civilisation of to-day, very ignominious, very base, very shame-stricken. We think it convicted. Yes; but that old civilisation not yet touched for Christianity! that civilisation of which St. Paul wrote so vehemently; do we know at all what it meant? Have we ever sounded its abysses, its infamies, its despairs? We know how exaggerated often St. Paul's language seems in its unqualified horror and condemnation and wrath. But was it exaggerated? He knew."

That whole extract is in the usual, careless, irresponsible style of the pulpit. In the first place, what a poor compliment to the Divine efficacy of the Christian Gospel it is to speak of "this bad, corrupt civilisation of to-day, very ignominious, very base, very shame-stricken," and then to be able only to affirm that, on the whole, it is somewhat purer and nobler than was the Pagan civilisation before Christianity touched it! Is not that tantamount to confessing that the Gospel of Divine grace has not been the power of God unto the world's salvation? Again, the comparison between the two civilisations is by no means fair and just. The Canon accepts Paul's picture of the Pagan world as literally true. "He knew," he says. "He went in and out; he touched; he tasted; he smelt it; it stunk in his nostrils." But were there not others who knew, and knew much better, such as Plutarch and Pliny, who went in and out much more abundantly than Paul had ever done when he wrote his indictment? And yet their picture of life, because on the whole favorable, is utterly ignored by the reverend gentleman. He has not one good word to say of the Roman world prior to the introduction of Christianity. He makes a list of some of the worst vices, and says: "These things may be common enough now, but then they constituted their very life; they were the very atmosphere in which people passed their days, and they were powerless to struggle against it." Dr. Holland has no excuse whatever for so grossly misrepresenting the Pagan world, because there is now no lack of reliable information on the subject, carefully collected by first-class scholars.

But even on Canon Scott-Holland's own showing, even on the assumption that Paul's portraiture is correct, Christianity is proved to have been a signal failure from the very commencement. However, degraded and vile Pagan Rome may have been, it could not have been worse, to say the least, than the Christian Rome in the tenth century. Surely the reverend gentleman cannot be proud of the eloquent excuses for all the abominations of Christian civilisation. Our deeds are wicked, he says, but our atmosphere is pure. Is it? The Canon's object in this sermon is to plead for the cause of purity, and this is what he says:—

"Here is the old, old weary sin of the wicked world that Paul knew so well, and it is with us still. It renews its ancient power; it occupies the old ground; it has terrible resources; and all its old cruelties and

sufferings and iniquities and pains are with us still. The old Pagan world! until we can hardly believe that there has been any change at all. Why is that true?"

Yes, that is the point: *Why is that true?* It would not, it could not, have been true had the Christ preached by Canon Scott-Holland ever existed otherwise than as a creation of the imagination. Adopting the preacher's own words, we ask, "If God can win, why does he lose? If sin has been beaten, why does it win? That is the dreadful inquiry." The Canon endeavors to account for the strange situation by shifting all the blame from God to the Church. He forgets, however, that God is in Christ, and Christ in the Church. To the Church Christ said: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"; and he definitely promised that it should be clothed "with power from on high." If this be true, the failure of the Church is equally God's and Christ's failure. If the reverend gentleman believes the New Testament description of the Church, he is logically driven to the same conclusion. His faith must break down somewhere. If the failure of Christianity is the Church's fault, then the Risen Lord must have broken his solemn covenant with the Church; and, had there ever been a crucified and Risen Lord, he could not have gone back upon his own words. Therefore, the failure of Christianity is the strongest possible proof of the non-existence of the God of Love, said to have become incarnate for the world's purification and ennoblement in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christian theology is a house built upon the shifting sand of superstition, and doomed to fall.

Thus the crucial test is always a practical one. Life is the supreme referee, from whose verdict there is no appeal. History affords a veritable demonstration of the non-existence of the Christian God. Those who believe in him, in spite of the facts, are under the necessity of easing their consciences by constructing a fresh theodicy every day; and every theodicy collapses when confronted with the facts. It is often said that no Atheist is such a fool as to declare that there is no God; but every consistent Atheist *does* deny the existence of all the deities ever constructed and recommended by theologians, because they have all proved their non-existence by their persistent silence and quiescence.

J. T. LLOYD.

Christianity and Psychology.—III.

(Continued from p. 323.)

BEARING in mind what has been said of the principles governing the psychology of crowds, there does not seem much difficulty in accounting for the epidemics of revivalism to which certain localities are from time to time subject. Dr. Catten says that because we cannot analyse the "divine element" in conversion, it does not follow that it is unreasonable to believe in it. But surely if we are able to see how, even on general lines only, all the phenomena of conversion and the sense of divine influence may be accounted for by known physiological and psychological laws, there is no need to assume the operation of the supernatural. When a nation is suddenly overcome by a war fever, when large numbers of people yield to a delusion on some topic that is brought vividly before them, we do not invoke the supernatural as an explanation. We seek, and usually find, an explanation in the existence of a peculiar set of circumstances. Why, then, should we proceed on totally different lines because, instead of a political orator or social charlatan, we have a preacher of religion; and because, instead of the audience being gathered in a public hall, it meets in a chapel?

To commence with, there is no doubt that, whatever else the phenomena of revivalistic conversions exhibits, it certainly supplies us with all the conditions of a contagious suggestion. Notoriously such things occur among the most emotionally unstable, and the more primitively intellectual part of the

population. The weeping, shouting, dancing, etc., common at revivalistic gatherings is proof of this. Moreover, it is fairly well known that revivals are largely patronised by a class of people who look forward to such meetings with all the eagerness with which a village youngster awaits the coming of a travelling circus. But in any case the audiences represent a selected portion of the population who go with a more or less clear anticipation of what is before them, and to that extent are prepared to act in the old and familiar manner. The monotonous uniformity of the records of these meetings, even to the way in which the "sins" of the converts are described, is, again, ample proof of this. People go prepared to see certain things, and as a natural consequence see them. The number of reports flowing into the public press, at the time of writing, of mysterious German air-ships seen in all parts of the kingdom, shows how powerful is this element of suggestion in other directions as well as in the sphere of religion. One might as sensibly invoke the supernatural in the one case as in the other.

Dr. Cutten gives several examples of the manner in which the professional revivalist works. I select an instance from America, where, in some parts, the conditions are more favorable for seeing the real machinery than is the case in this country. The date is 1908; district, Illinois; subject, a sermon on "Booze." The preacher

"began with his coat, vest, tie, and collar off. In a few moments his shirt and undershirt were gaping open to the waist and the muscles of his neck and chest were seen working like those in the arm of a blacksmith, while perspiration poured from every pore.....He strained, and twisted, and reached up and down. Once he was on the floor for just a second, in the attitude of crawling, to show that all crime crawled out of the saloon.....At the end of forty-five minutes, he mounted a chair, reached high, as he shouted, then again was on the floor and dropped prostrate to illustrate the story of a drunken man.....He generally breaks a common kitchen chair in this sermon, and this came after a terrible effort, with eyes flashing, face scowling, the picture of hate. He whirled the chair over his head, smashed the chair to the platform floor, whirled the shattered wreck in the air again, then threw it to the ground in front of the pulpit. In two minutes men from the front row were tearing the wreck to pieces and dividing it up, a round here, a leg there, a piece of the back to another, and so on. Later men carried away in cheering could be seen in the audience waving those chair fragments in the air."

Such meetings are naturally enough a serious rival to the public-house or the theatre, for a time; although whether the evils that result therefrom are lesser than those resulting from alcohol may well be a matter for dispute. Dr. Cutten properly says that in writing up the gains from revivals, "those physically, mentally, and spiritually injured have not been reckoned."

Suggestion, imitation, the power of human sympathy, the formation of new associates, the being kept under surveillance by these new friends who are interested in the convert's welfare, are thus among the most normal of the phenomena connected with revivals that are accepted as proofs of the working of the religious forces. Other phenomena intermingle the normal and the abnormal so closely that it is almost impossible to separate them. All that can be done is to indicate their character, leaving the reader to determine when one glides into the other.

Perhaps the most distressing form assumed by professional revivalism is that which operates upon very young children. To see young men and young women behaving in a semi-insane manner under the stimulative antics of a revivalist, is bad enough, but it becomes infinitely worse when the subjects are children of under twelve years of age. When the notorious Torrey was in England his method of getting young children to publicly confess themselves "sinners" and mimic their elders in accusing themselves of all sorts of offences, was so objectionable, that in one place, at least—Dundee, I think—certain ministers of religion made a public protest against

the practice. I gave a number of instances at the time Torrey was conducting his meetings, and here is a similar confession from a child of eight, cited by Dr. Cutten, and given at an "Inquiry Meeting." Said this hardened sinner of eight years of age, sobbing all the while:—

"Oh, dear! I'm lost! I can't find Jesus! Oh, my wicked heart! How can I get a new heart? I have been so wicked! I have never loved Jesus at all! I thought I loved him, but now I know I never did. Will he take me?"

This case is by no means singular, and it is almost impossible to overrate the evil consequences to a child subjected to such influences. To accustom even the adult mind to dwelling upon the thought of its own "sinfulness" is always productive of harm, but to allow children to do so, is to fling them into the world with the seeds of mental and moral disease well planted within them. The evil influence of Christian teaching on generation after generation of young children has yet to be told; but when it is it will certainly not rank lowest in the list of its offences against the better life of the race.

It is when we come to deal with the period of life during which nearly all conversions take place that we see the importance of the question of age. In an interesting inquiry carried out with reference to a very large number of conversions, Dr. Starbuck established the fact that conversion "belongs almost exclusively to the ages between ten and twenty-five," and thus is distinctly a phenomenon of adolescence. Dr. Starbuck's figures have never been questioned, although they have been before the public for over ten years. Now this coincidence cannot be due to there being no people above twenty-five years of age who need religious conversion (I am speaking from the religious point of view, of course) nor can it be due to people not being troubled by doubts on religion after reaching twenty-five years of age. I have no figures to go upon, but from experience I should be inclined to say that quite as many people outgrow their religious beliefs between twenty and thirty-five years of age than before, nor does the decline of religious conviction cease at the later age.

For an explanation one is inevitably thrown back upon purely physiological data. And this explanation has already been indicated in calling conversion a phenomenon of adolescence. Both Dr. Cutten and Dr. Starbuck realise this, but neither, I think, see all its implications. The phenomenon, while perfectly normal from one point of view, yet, as will be seen, easily glides into the abnormal or morbid. In the first place, we are dealing with a period of life when the organism is undergoing its most important transformation, and when, as a condition of this transformation it is peculiarly mobile or unstable. New organs are developing, and of necessity, as this development is accompanied by emotional and intellectual states, new to the individual. As Dr. Maudsley points out, at puberty—

"the individual is transformed; his entire sensibility is changed, and he becomes susceptible to impressions which before were completely indifferent to him; a look, a tone, an odor, a touch arouses emotions that are quite new to him, and sympathetic ideas that come to him knows not whence or how. Strange and vague feelings, aimless longings, obscure impulses, and novel ideas witness to the commotion which the newly developed function is making by its inception into the mental life."^{*}

From both a biological and sociological point of view we are dealing with a period when the individual acquires, in the fullest sense of the word, deep and permanent relations with the world. The sex feelings that are aroused, the regard for others that develops, are both indications of this. And this furnishes a very sufficient explanation of what is so often told us by religious preachers—namely,

* *Physiology of Mind*, p. 372. See also Dr. Mercier's *Sanity and Insanity*, p. 281, who also points out that at puberty, among women, "more or less decided manifestations of hysteria are the rule" (p. 212).

that conversion coincides with a keener sense of concern for others, and that young people, instead of leading a selfish life, are led to take a deeper interest in other's welfare. This need not be questioned; only it must be pointed out that we have nothing peculiarly religious in the phenomenon. We are merely observing the normal development of the social feelings expressed in terms of religion. These are being exploited, not developed, by religious agencies. If, as Dr. Mercier points out in dealing with the feelings that develop during this period, "the circumstances are appropriate for the natural outlet and expression of the activities, they are expended to affection and are a source of health and strength to their possessor. But if no such natural outlet exists, the vague, voluminous, formless feelings are referred to an occasion that is vague, voluminous, and wanting in definite form—they are ascribed directly to the Deity, and assume a place as religious emotion."*

One other thing needs pointing out. Conversions are limited, with rare exceptions, to the period of adolescence. It is also a danger period in many directions. It is the period when epilepsy is most likely to occur. The same is true of insanity and also of alcoholism. According to Sir J. Crichton-Browne, in 90 per cent. of the cases of confirmed inebriety the addiction to drink began between 15 and 25 years of age.† Various nervous disorders are also more likely to occur during this period than at any other time. And there is one general explanation that covers all these cases, including, of course, conversion. This is that the organism being during this period in a state of unstable equilibrium, undergoing marked functional modifications, and exhibiting great emotional instability, is likely to be influenced by any existing cause with which it comes in contact. It is the period when it needs to be carefully shielded and wisely guided. And it is the period when it is almost criminally exposed to the assaults of ignorant and unscrupulous professional revivalists.

(To be continued.)

C. COHEN.

An Israelite Agricultural Calendar.

THERE is an amusing set of people who profess to be able to support the Bible by means of monuments. But these monuments have nothing to do with the Jews; they come to us from the Assyrians and Egyptians, the people who are continually being abused in the Old Testament as wicked, godless heathens. Jewish monuments do not exist, for the ancient Hebrews were far too poverty-stricken and too uncivilised to leave any notable relics behind them. It is especially to be noticed that there is practically a complete dearth of ancient Jewish inscriptions. In fact, until a few months ago only one was known—namely, the Siloam inscription found in a water channel just outside Jerusalem. It bears no date, though it has been supposed on very slender grounds to belong to the time of Hezekiah; and all it tells us is that the workmen employed in cutting the channel commenced at both ends and met in the middle.

Such being the absolute rarity of ancient Hebrew records, it is not surprising that considerable excitement was displayed last October when it was announced that the English Palestine Exploration Fund had actually disinterred a second inscription; this time from the ruins of Gezer, about twenty miles west of Jerusalem. One enthusiastic gentleman declared that the new discovery was calculated to "faire la joie des Bibliistes"; but up to the present it has not given them much joy. It has rather caused them a great deal of trouble; for although the letters are large and plain, the meaning of the words is not at all clear. Several attempts have been made to read it, and the most important study

that has yet appeared is that contained in the last number of *La Revue Biblique Internationale*, by Père Hugues Vincent, a learned Roman Catholic attached to the Dominican Convent at Jerusalem, who is a recognised Oriental scholar, has passed some years in the East, and has had the advantage of seeing the inscription for himself, whereas the other parties who have discussed it had nothing but photographs to work upon.

In itself the new "monument" is quite insignificant; it gives us no information of any value; and were it not that ancient Hebrew antiquities are very, very scarce, it would hardly be worth while to mention it; though it will probably figure in Bible manuals as one of the rare examples of the writing of the Jews of the Old Testament. It is an irregular piece of soft limestone, about four inches long, three inches wide, and an inch thick; and it bears on one face several lines of writing which are rendered by Père Vincent as follows:—

"Two months: late crops.
Two months: seed-time.
Two months: spring vegetation.
One month: flax crop.
One month: barley harvest.
One month: complete harvests.
Two months: special fruits, and vintage.
One month: summer fruit, and figs."

There is nothing here of startling interest. It merely reveals to us that at some past period there were people in Southern Palestine who spoke Hebrew, or Chaldee, and who were particularly concerned with agriculture; all of which we knew very well before. It is not quite certain what language the inscription is composed in; for, although all the words in it can be found in the Hebrew Bible, yet the plural terminations are Aramean, or, as it is sometimes called, Chaldee. In Hebrew, plurals are usually formed in *im*; but in Chaldee (which is a very closely allied language) the plural form is *in*. Thus the word "cherub" in the singular would be alike in both languages; but the plural "cherubs" would be *cherubim* in Hebrew, and *cherubin* in Chaldee. There are some Chaldee passages in the Old Testament, chiefly in Ezra and Daniel; and it is usually accepted that the use of Chaldee forms of grammar is a proof of late date. Père Vincent is at some pains to assure us that the new Gezer inscription cannot be earlier than shortly before the Babylonian Exile, say about 600 B.C. This date is a trifle too late to be of much use to the Biblicist.

Although all the words in the new inscription appear to be found in the old Testament, that does not help very much, because it happens that they are mostly words that are difficult of interpretation. They have some relation to agriculture; but the Bible is not a book of agriculture, but a book of religion, and the allusions in it to fruits and vegetation are mere side issues. Therefore a translation of the Gezer tablet has to be rather vague; and even if it were quite certain, the subject-matter is of no importance to us, whatever it may have meant to the people for whom it was written.

There is still the problem to explain what it was written for. An agricultural community would not need an inscription to tell it the order of succession of the different seasons. It will be noted that the tablet divides the time into months; or perhaps we might more properly say "moons," for the Hebrew calendar is strictly lunar. It therefore seems that we have here an attempt to regulate the time to be occupied in the various operations of the farmer. To most of us this would look a far-fetched idea; but Père Vincent appeals to the social organisation of the country districts of Palestine as he observes them around him to day. The people are still in the tribal, or patriarchal, state, for all practical purposes, and most of the affairs of life are controlled for them, partly by the dictates of custom and partly by the authority of the village sheikh. In many cases it is absolutely necessary to have some rule or regulation, because certain undertakings of the farmer have to be done at a time or place to be adjusted between

* *Sanity and Insanity*, p. 281.

† Report of lecture in *Times* of October 3, 1905.

him and his neighbors. For instance, it is the custom there for the threshing and winnowing of corn and barley to be conducted upon some windy height, so that the wind may blow away the chaff and leave the grain. Where there is only one suitable height in the locality, it is, of course, necessary to decide the order in which the different farmers should winnow their grain there, and how long each man shall be allowed to occupy the site. But this same control and regulation extends into other matters. A frequent source of friction is the question of taking crops to market. The farmer who could forestall his neighbors by a few days might spoil their chances of making sales at a good price, and secure all the profit to himself. As a consequence, each cultivator is jealously watched by the others, and the chief labors of the farm are regulated by the village sheikh, ostensibly for the good of the community, but, of course (as invariably happens in such cases), for the real benefit of the sheikh and his relations. No farmer dare reap his harvest or pick his grapes for market before permission is given, and it is likewise the duty of the sheikh to see that no one sows his crops too early, and so gains an unfair advantage over the rest.

Assuming that in antiquity the village organisation was very similar to what it is to-day, we may perceive the meaning of this Gezer inscription. It was designed as an official marking out of the year, for the guidance of the district; and in support of such a view it may be mentioned that in one corner of the tablet there are two or three letters which appear to be the remains of some such proper name as Abihu, or Abiah, and this may have been the official signature of the sheikh or chieftain for the time being.

We will give every credit to Père Vincent for his ability and learning in unravelling the meaning and significance of this little text, and our readers may be pleased to know about this latest Biblical discovery; but it is more interesting to the antiquary, and to the people who display a superstitious enthusiasm for anything that brings them nearer the oriental people of whom they have read in the Old Testament, than to anybody else. It will require "monuments" of a very different character to sustain the tottering credit of the Hebrew Bible.

C. E.

Take Heart.

(To the Liverpool N. S. S. Conference, 1909.)

ALL ye who hate the Church and love the truth,
Despise the priest and love your fellow men,
Take heart, and forth to battle go again:
Your cause is throbbing with triumphant youth.
The cause of them ye fight is weak, uncouth;
They dare not ask a simple how or when,
They dare not face the sun of truth, for then
Their cause would perish, and the priest, forsooth.

Take heart, be bold, the last fight is begun.
See on your side brave Science take her stand,
While proud Philosophy is choosing too;
History comes next: the battle is half-won;
Art, Freedom, Labor, are coming hand-in-hand.
Fight on, for all the Powers fight with you.

JULIAN ST. OREY.

Barricaded behind the brazen lips of cannon and the ranks of soldiery, Christianity cut and carved its way to power with never a thought for reason, truth, or fact. And this is the same blood-stained religion that is trampling upon the American Constitution, overthrowing liberty, that it may gain a few more years of power. But the end will come, and it is not so far distant. A rumbling is heard. Christian advocates know what it means.

—Blue Grass Blade.

Acid Drops.

What a sloppy thing is English journalism where religion is concerned! The dear *Daily News* had a leading article of course, on the death of George Meredith. At the top of the article it placed the following words, "from a recent interview" with the great poet and novelist:—

"Doctors and parsons are doing a lot of harm by increasing the fear of death. No one should consider death or think of it as worse than going from one room to another.I hope I shall die with a good laugh."

Only fifteen lines further down the article "writer went on as follows on his own account:—

"How he thought of death the words which we have set at the head of this article serve to show. It was for him but the going from one room to another."

Now that is not what Meredith said. His own view was not expressed at all. He did not say that death was going from one room to another. He said that nobody should think of it as worse than that. He was merely seeking to rob it of its terrors—not to clothe it with blessings. Meredith's poems, as a matter of fact, show that he had no belief whatever in a future life, and that he regarded the common craving for it as a display of human egotism. But, in any case, the *Daily News* makes Meredith say what he clearly did not say; the leaving out of two words altering the whole meaning of the sentence.

Mrs. Besant, as a religionist, is a good deal like other religionists. She is trying to establish a new University in India. The Government Universities are all secular, and that fact would have been very pleasing to Mrs. Besant once, but it does not please her now. The University she seeks to establish is to "affiliate only colleges in which religious and moral education is made an integral part of education." But it cannot exist without a Royal Charter, and if the Charter be granted "it is proposed to ask the King-Emperor to be Protector." "Nothing would more appeal to Indian loyalty," Mrs. Besant says, "than the gracious consent of his Majesty to protect an indigenous institution in which the building up of character would be the dominant ideal, and all the great religions of his Indian subjects would be honored." Mrs. Besant is quite willing that the King-Emperor should patronise her religious University. That, of course, doesn't violate any principle of equal citizenship. But perhaps the King-Emperor won't take the bait.

A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind. That is why the newspapers now give so much attention to Mrs. Besant. When she was an Atheist she was a nobody. Now that she has a religion—any religion will do—she is an important personage. Previously, her arguments were of no account; now, her very dreams are highly significant. The other morning she had a bold-headed paragraph in the first column of the *Daily Chronicle*, announcing that she had "startled a large and fashionable audience at Sunderland" by stating that Jesus Christ and the other great world-teachers were all one and the same soul reincarnated in different bodies. From the nature of the case, this can only be a fancy on the lady's part; yet it is jumped at by the press as if it were a great scientific discovery. By the press, that is to say, which gives itself the most high and mighty airs, and yet, by its ignorance, sensationalism, and dishonesty, is doing its best to corrupt, degrade, and destroy the English people.

Professor J. W. Buckham, being a Christian, is perfectly certain that Christianity is the coming world-religion. Buddhism, Brahmanism, Mohammedanism, etc., have all failed, and Christianity is the winning faith. But leaders of other religions regard Christianity itself as a failure. This was the substance of the report (for instance) of the Commission sent by Japan to Europe. The Commission advised Japan not to embrace Christianity, as it was such a moral failure in the countries where it was professed.

Law is a beautiful thing. Mr. Justice Darling and Mr. Justice Laurence hold that a Church of England parson may not refuse the sacrament to persons who have married under the Deceased Wife's Sister Act. Mr. Justice Bray holds that he may refuse. This looks as if another Act of Parliament will be necessary to explain those already existing. And very likely another will be necessary to explain whether a parson administers the sacrament or not.

"The Anglo-American movement for the use of individual Communion Cups," we read, "is arousing much sympathy."

on the Continent." It is being generally recognised that the common Communion cup is a great danger, all sorts of diseases—including unmentionable ones—being spread by it. The Blood of Christ works wonders, but it doesn't interfere with the laws of hygiene. You drink your sip, and take your chance.

Rev. Frederick Hamilton Lovibond, rector of How Caple, having been tried on certain charges before the Hereford Consistory Court, under the Clergy Discipline Act, the Chancellor read the finding of the five assessors, namely, that he had been proved guilty of immoral relations with females, one of whom had borne him a child. There is nothing very uncommon in this. Clerical misbehavior is too frequent to excite surprise.

"Prophet" Dowie, the founder of Zion City, had a devoted follower in Mr. E. M. Brook. He was a man of great age, and perhaps his second childhood was upon him. Anyhow, he was mightily captivated by the story of Elijah, of whom old Dowie was supposed to be a reincarnation. Wandering away from home, the other day, without food or money, he took up his station under a tree, in full belief that he would be miraculously fed by ravens. For four days he remained there, drenched with rain and frozen with cold. No ravens came, but his faith held out. A search party found him at the end of the fourth day. He was then in *extremis*, and shortly afterwards died of exposure. The ravens have not been heard of yet.

A Stepney boy, called Albert Rust, being run in for throwing bricks, with accurate aim, at borough gas-lamps, was fined a shilling and seven-and-sixpence costs. It was argued that he "could not be set down as wholly bad, for he had just come out of Sunday-school." We will not spoil this with any comment. It is too good as it stands.

Mr. Keir Hardie administers a rather sharp rap on the knuckles of Socialist clergymen when he informs them that they have "not brought any special accession of moral conviction to the Socialist movement." As it happens this is precisely the point upon which Socialist clergymen pride themselves. The ordinary Christian is nothing if he is not striking a lofty moral attitude, even when he is indulging in peculiarly non-moral, or immoral, practice. And this is true to a much larger degree of the professional Christian. As it happened that clerical converts to Socialism have never wearied of pointing out that what Socialism lacked was a moral and religious fervor that only their particular brand of religion could supply. And now they are informed that the Socialist movement has not gained in moral strength by their accession. It is too cruel! And if the movement has not gained in moral strength by the clergy joining it, it has certainly not benefited intellectually. No one looks for intellectual strength from the clergy. Their function is to mouth moral platitudes, and leave the thinking to be done by others. In the intellectual life of the nation the clergy are a quite negligible quantity, except in so far as they obstruct development by glossing over a number of beliefs that educated, civilised people ought to be ashamed to entertain.

Mr. Keir Hardie may understand Socialism; on this we refrain from expressing an opinion; but his remark that "there can be no Christianity apart from Socialism" shows that he certainly does not understand Christianity—which may account for his carrying on a kind of platonic flirtation with it. He appears to be under the impression that the aim of Christianity is an organising of social life. But this is not and never was its aim. Christianity, it is true, did touch social life, as every system is bound to do that deals with human nature. But its interest in social life was never fundamental, and it only sought to influence social organisation so that its own other-worldliness might be promoted. No one can honestly read the New Testament and then say that its aim was the bringing about of a social revolution. Certainly the early Christians never read it in that light, and with equal certainty, as a statement of mere historic fact, no other book in the world has been so relied on by reactionaries to sanction their aims as the New Testament. It is good to see Mr. Hardie denying that the clergy have brought either moral or mental strength into the Socialist movement; it would be better still to find him recognising that their obtaining any influence in the Socialist camp means destruction to anything useful it may contain.

Professor Inge says, in a sermon preached at St. Margaret's, Westminster, that Christianity is true only to faith. That is exactly what the *Freethinker* has been saying for so many years. And we affirm, further, that the reality which faith

gives to its objects is purely subjective. That is why God never speaks to, nor takes any notice of, unbelievers. That is why Christ is known only to the Church, and why, apart from the Church, he can do nothing. And that is also why Christianity is dying. Such faith can live only in the soil of superstition.

The Rev. Principal Adeney says that there is "a mystical element" in the ministry of the Gospel; but we think he is entirely mistaken. What is mystical is beyond human comprehension; but the clerical profession is as easy to understand as any other. A preacher *pretends* to be God's spokesman, heaven's messenger, Christ's ambassador, and often a ludicrously poor one at that. He may be superstitious enough, in all conscience; but there is no "mystical element" about him. And he is being found out at last.

Principal Forsyth assured the Congregational Union that the Word of God is "the trust of the Church through its ministry." That is to say, God has deposited the revelation of himself in the Church, and the world will never know anything about it unless the Church employs competent preachers to proclaim it. We are firmly convinced, however, that had there been a God, he would never have acted so insanely. He would have made himself immediately known to all alike. Fortunately, Dr. Forsyth is as ignorant of God as ourselves; and, unfortunately, tens of thousands secure a fine livelihood out of the Principal's superstitious dogma.

The Baptist churches are about to be rent asunder by another down-grade controversy. It is the Old Testament that forms the bone of contention this time. Even at this time of day there are those who regard that strange, mixed document as the infallible Word of God and insist upon its being so treated both in the theological class-room and in the pulpit. Blind faith dies hard. There are still people to whom superstition is the very bread of life.

The Rev. Mr. Collins, of the *Baptist Times*, is a great believer in prayer. He exhorts everybody to pray, even though, apparently, no one either hears or answers. Some day, perhaps, the Lord will meet you at the throne of grace, and richly recompense you for all your disappointments. On one point, however, Mr. Collins is quite right. Praying is a habit, the most difficult habit to get into and the easiest to get out of; which proves that it is a habit, and nothing more.

A very pious person composed a fine prayer for a religious journal, in which the Lord is informed what mankind might have been and done, had they been other than they are. "We might have sat with Christ upon his throne, judging tribes and nations; we might have had eyes that wander through eternity; we might have been enjoying our citizenship in heaven." What ineffable twaddle! It is quite certain that if there were a God he would put a speedy end to such silly praying. Otherwise, his life would be an intolerable burden to him.

At Limarsol, Cyprus, many of the churches have had to be closed to prevent Christians fighting. An Archbishop was appointed to whom some exception was taken by a section of the people, hence the quarrels. Christianity is much the same wherever it is found, and the love and brotherhood it develops cannot be suppressed—except by the aid of the military.

The same lesson is enforced by the discussion over the Roman Catholic Disabilities Bill, both in the House of Commons and in the religious press. The two solid facts that emerge are, that neither Catholics nor Protestants can trust one another, and that each one admits that religion furnishes the ground of distrust. The Protestant says that the Catholic would be a very decent fellow were it not for his religion, and the Catholic retorts in the same vein. And this is precisely what the *Freethinker* has been telling both of them all along. Leave men alone, as men, and they will worry along in a more or less amiable manner. Introduce religion, and this becomes a practical impossibility. So we have Protestants asserting that the Roman Catholic religion will prevent those who believe it doing their duty as citizens, while Catholics reply that Protestantism prevents its followers acting with justice towards their neighbor. And the *Freethinker* smiles grimly, and agrees with both.

The London Missionary Society has a deficit of £50,000, and a religious contemporary suggests that, instead of giving £70,000 for the Duke of Norfolk's picture, the money ought to be used to wipe off this deficit. Either way it seems a questionable expenditure of £70,000, but on the whole we should prefer to see the money go for the picture.

Another proof that unbelief is quite extinct. "During the whole twelve months of visiting in my district I have not met with one infidel," writes one of the agents of the London City Mission. This is quite decisive. We are not told where this district is situated. Perhaps in a secluded part of "Zumerzet."

The Ironmongers' Federated Association has passed a strong resolution against the system of bazaar trading carried on by churches of all denominations. Mr. Heathcote Meakin (Birmingham), who moved the resolution, said he had no objection to sales of work pure and simple, but bazaars usually ranged from goods supplied by manufacturers on sale or return to those blackmailed from local tradesmen and often sold at cost or below by people comparatively ignorant of business principles.

Saint Winefride's Well, from which the town of Holywell derives its name, is a place of pilgrimage, and wonderful cures are reported to have taken place there. The water is warranted to cure people of pretty well everything—except stupidity. We see that some enterprising manufacturers have arranged with the pious custodians of the well for a supply of the holy water for commercial purposes. Saint Winefride's Soap Company boasts that its tablets "contain a suitable proportion of water from the famous well." Such is disinterested piety in the twentieth century. Christians are the most religious and self-denying people on earth.

The April number of the *Humane Review* (quarterly) contains a very good article by Mr. H. J. B. Montgomery on "Sir Robert Anderson's Theological Penology." It is a very good article in the sense that it is written with power and animated by fine feeling. But the writer must surely see, on reflection, that this part of his discussion with Sir Robert Anderson is rather futile. Each of the disputants makes the Bible in general, and the New Testament in particular, yield a different teaching and a different spirit. What is the use of appealing to a standard which can be applied so variously? Is there any real good in considering what would have been Christ's views on the proper treatment of criminals. Have we not reason and humanity to guide us to our own views on the subject?

Mr. Rattenbury, the reverend gentleman who carries on the late Rev. Hugh Price Hughes's old West London Mission, has one message to deliver to a waiting world. According to the Rev. J. Scott Lidgett, President of the Methodist Conference, "Mr. Rattenbury is here to proclaim that you can never get social reform upon a secular basis." Of course he is! Just in the same way, certain gentlemen cried out "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." And just in the same way, another gentleman proclaimed, "There is nothing like leather."

We have just been reading a long article in the *British Weekly* on "Gipsy Smith in America." It is written by Gipsy Smith himself, and is therefore all true (of course!); for, if he doesn't know what Gipsy Smith is doing, who does? The gentleman states that he is making no end of converts, churches are filling up in the wake of his mission, and America seems fairly on the road to final salvation at last. Such is the glorious result of putting a gipsy on the soul-saving job. Christian Churches all over the world should please note. And if they cannot all find gipsies for the job, they can eke out the supply with black-looking horse-thieves.

The Christianity that Gipsy Smith is converting the Americans to bears very little resemblance to the Christianity of Christ. He alleges, for instance, as one result of his mission, that "the deposits in the savings departments" of the "banks of St. Paul" have "increased enormously" during the month he was singing and exhorting in the neighborhood. But did not Christ say "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth"? Gipsy Smith's flag of Christianity is a bank-book.

"From Socialism to the Kingdom of God" is the title of a penny pamphlet by H. Musgrave Reade. This gentleman's portrait is on the title-page. We cannot congratulate him on its accuracy. It is something like him, and would perhaps be more so if he were only twenty years younger. Neither is he accurate in other matters. He describes himself—also on the title-page—as having been "for twenty years a prominent Atheist and Socialist leader." But he was so prominent an Atheist that, when his name was first mentioned a few years ago by Evangelist Torrey, we had to confess that we had never heard of him. He appears to have been connected with the Freethought movement in Salford

for a year or so in the early eighties; then he drifted, on his own showing, into all sorts of fantastic movements, and finally became a Christian again. The *Sunday Circle* actually hails this member of what Shelley called "the illustrious obscure" as "a Modern Saul"—meaning Saul, who was afterwards called Paul. Poor Paul! "This was the most unkindest cut of all."

We are not going to discuss Mr. Musgrave Reade's views on Socialism. He had better get the matter settled with the Christian Socialists. Meanwhile, we merely observe that Christianity is obviously understood in opposite ways.

"The most determined opponent of the Roman Catholic Disabilities Bill would hardly be prepared to defend the Irish penal code of William III. Yet its repeal raised a perfect hurricane of Protestant opposition, and it was confidently asserted that the British Constitution had been undermined. Under the provisions of this code a Catholic was compelled to sell his house for £5 to any Protestant who wanted it. If the child of a Catholic turned Protestant he was taken away from his parents and placed under Protestant control. A Catholic could not purchase a freehold, nor could he inherit from an intestate Protestant or Catholic. He was forbidden to live in Limerick or Galway. The price paid for the discovery of a Catholic archbishop was £50, for a priest £10, and for a schoolmaster 10s. At a later stage all Catholic priests convicted of celebrating marriages in accordance with the rites of their own Church were condemned to be hanged."—*Daily Chronicle*.

The above paragraph is creditable to the *Daily Chronicle*. Some day or other it will find that "Blasphemy" Laws against Freethinkers are just as indefensible as "Disability" Laws against Catholics.

Mrs. Sutton Page, of the Baptist Missionary Society, informed an audience the other day that in India the natives crowded to hear the lectures that were delivered in English. Unfortunately, this good lady let the cat out of the bag by remarking that those who attended were "so eager to pick up the familiar idioms," and they "complainingly urged, 'whatever the subject, the lecturer always finishes by talking about Jesus Christ.'" So it was not the "glorious gospel" the natives wanted, but free lessons in English elocution.

A correspondence has been going on in the *Bath Journal* concerning the undesirable habits of young men and women in the streets on Sunday evenings. Most of the correspondents suggest that efforts ought to be made to attract them to church or chapel—advice which, needless to say, is warmly endorsed by the clergy. A more thorough knowledge of the problem would teach these correspondents that it is precisely the church and chapel that is largely responsible for the evil deplored. For many generations the Christianity of this country has given people the choice of public-house, church, or street-corner on their day of rest. Opportunities for really healthy and educative occupation have been denied them. The result has been that, shut off from really refining occupations, lounging about the streets has really been the only thing left to do for all who did not care to go to church, and had little taste for the public-house. Thanks to Christian influences, people have grown up ignorant of how to spend their weekly day of rest in an intelligent manner. Their need is to be educated in the right direction, and this will be best done when all Sabbatarian restrictions and regulations have been swept away. To multiply religious places of meeting is merely to aggravate the evil—if only by way of a reaction.

"After thirteen years of work in Sidney I have come to the conclusion that I have been a miserable failure," said the Rev. W. L. Carr-Smith, rector of St. James's Church. He has left Australia since, never to return. The men of his congregation were apathetic. He could do nothing with them. There appears to be a frightful dry-rot in religious enterprise at the antipodes.

Rev. Henry Sandham, of St. John's College, Oxford, left £16,413. Not a millionaire, but still a rich man—for an apostle of the poor carpenter. "And in hell he lifted up his eyes."

Rev. Lewis Theodore Pennington, of Salisbury-road, Hove, Brighton, left £291,625. How he must be sweating!

There really ought to be a special missionary society to rescue the clergy from this horrible fate.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

Whit-Sunday, May 30, Alexandra Hall, Islington-square, Liverpool: N. S. S. Annual Conference.

To Correspondents.

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £197 12s. Received since.—R. H. Side, £2; Erle Douglas Side, £2; W. H. Jackson, 10s.; J. A. and B. B., 5s.;

W. B. DODD.—We respect your good motive, but we are not at all likely to canvas our readers as to whether the name of this journal should be altered. You think we should attract more readers with a less "repellant" name. We doubt it. "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," and the *Freethinker* by any other name would be just as "offensive"—when it was found out. Meanwhile, it is a definite flag, which attracts a definite support. If this journal is hated bitterly, it is also loved intensely. On the whole, we incline to the view that the number of people who can be reached by a mere intellectual appeal, such as we make, is very limited. All we can do is to reach them. That we are doing gradually, and we should do it rapidly if the trade boycott were entirely broken down. If the *Freethinker* were sold on bookstalls, etc., just like other papers, our circulation would soon double and triple, and all our financial troubles would be at an end.

W. P. BALL.—Much obliged for your valuable batches of cuttings. G. L. SIMMONDS.—Nothing new in it. The Church of England is a creation of the State from top to bottom.

W. H. JACKSON.—Glad to have your interesting and encouraging letter. If you do come over to England from Australia, be sure you do give us a call. Write, meanwhile, whenever the spirit moves you.

R. Y. R.—Pleased to hear of your making the acquaintance of this journal through a friend's introduction. We share your wish that more Freethought propaganda could be carried on in Newcastle-on-Tyne.

J. WILLIAMS (Pontycymmer).—You will realise, on second thoughts, how impossible it is for Mr. Foote to find time to answer such letters through the post, and to help readers to prepare papers for local debating societies.

J. ASHTON.—Glad you always find the *Freethinker* "new and entertaining" after reading it for many years.

A. D. LEWIS.—Tuesday is too late; next week.

D. FRASER.—What is your anxiety? Every quotation from Swinburne in the Rev. R. Nichol Cross's lecture is Atheistic. Some of them appeared in our own articles.

W. LANE.—You will find the answer in our articles.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS: Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. Displayed Advertisements:—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

Sugar Plums.

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference takes place to-day (Whit-Sunday) at Liverpool. The business sittings will take place in the Alexandra Hall, Islington-square; in the morning from 10.30 to 12.30, and in the afternoon from 2.30 to 4.30. There will be a luncheon for delegates and visitors at 1 o'clock at the Bee Hotel, St. John's-lane, just off Lime-street, and near the great St. George's Hall. Those who desire hotel or other accommodation should communicate promptly with the Liverpool Branch secretary, Mr. Clas. Daw, 57 Sunbury-road, Anfield. Trains will be met as far as possible, but "saints" who are missed by the stewards should go on to the Bee Hotel—only two or three minutes' walk from the North Western and Midland Stations—where the Conference

Committee Room will be: *not* at the Alexandra Hall, as previously stated.

The evening public meeting in connection with the Conference will be held in the Picton Hall, instead of in the Tivoli Theatre. The reason of this will be explained in the Annual Report when the President reads it on Sunday morning. Suffice it to say now that a very difficult situation was created by the bigotry of the licensing magistrates. It was overcome just in the nick of time, after a bit of hard work behind the scenes—thanks very largely to Mr. J. Hammond, the Branch President.

Whit-Monday ought to be fine, for an excursion is arranged for the delegates and visitors who can stop for it. Local "saints" will also be very welcome. The excursion is to be by train to Llangollen, a special corridor coach being reserved for the party. The ticket—including train fare, dinner, and tea—will be about 6s. 6d. Those who want tickets should apply at once to Mr. J. Hammond, 90 Belmont-road, Liverpool. Mr. Foote has promised to join the excursion party this time.

Dinner and tea at Llangollen will take place at the Eivion Hotel. Excursionists will please note.

Birmingham Branch members and friends who propose to join the party to meet the Conference excursion at Llangollen on Whit-Monday are requested to be at Snow Hill Station by 5.20. Late risers are reminded that this means a.m.

Local "saints" wishing to assist the propaganda of Free-thought at Dalkeith are invited to write to Mr. N. Levy, Secularist Club, 12 Hill-square, Edinburgh. Mr. Levy was brutally treated by Christians on his last lecturing visit to Dalkeith. He hopes to be better supported on June 9.

Our veteran friend, Mr. W. H. Morrish, of Bristol, who was actually a colleague of Charles Southwell in the old heroic days, writes us: "I still read my 'beloved *Freethinker*' every week from the title to the imprint." We are really glad to know it.

"Abracadabra" is beginning in next week's *Freethinker* a series of articles on "The Narratives in Genesis." We hoped to start the series this week, the first article being in type, but it has been impossible to do so.

Shilling Month.

NINTH LIST OF SUBSCRIPTIONS.

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

Horace W. Parsons, 5; S. Hudson, 10; Robert Yates; Felix Herrmann, 5; W. Kay, 2; H. Walsh, 5.

This Fund is now Closed.

AN UNINTENTIONAL JOKE.

At that time it was proposed to rebuild the English Church at Grindelwald, and the successive chaplains were each of them anxious to secure contributions to that end. My aunt, having become interested in the place, determined to give a donation to the church, but was also interested in Alpine plants, and wished to secure the seeds of some of them for planting in her Alpine garden on her Devonshire property. As it was late in September, she was very successful in her search for seeds, and some of them were sent off to her gardener; but the lighter sorts were retained and put in an envelope. On the day when they were leaving she was somewhat hurried, and mistook the envelope in which she had put the seeds for that in which she had put a five pound note to be handed to the chaplain. Unfortunately, this particular individual was devoid of a sense of humor, and came to me an hour or two after my relations had left, enquiring indignantly whether these people really were possessed of the name and style they had assumed; for, said he, they had perpetrated a practical joke on him which was in exceeding bad taste; they had handed him some thistle seeds in the envelope alleging it was a donation towards the rebuilding of the church. I guessed what had happened, and tried to soothe him, but it was of no avail; eventually, however, the five pound note for the church duly reached him; but I have always understood that the great difficulty in the matter was to get back the five pound note from the gardener to whom it had been sent in error.—*Fifty Years of Failure* (London: Smith, Elder & Co.; 1905; p. 135).

The Early Life of Thomas Paine.—III.

Social, Political, and Religious Reformer.

BY W. G. CLARKE.

(Continued from p. 332.)

CHAPTER V.

HIS QUAKER TRAINING.

The greatest factor in moulding Paine's character during his youthful days appears not to have been his schoolmasters or his schoolfellows, or the general public life of the small borough in which he resided, but rather the Quaker beliefs of his parents, the atmosphere of the meeting-house of the Society of Friends in Cage-lane, and the persecution to which they had been subject. For the early history of the Friends in Thetford was a record of tyrannous persecution on the part of their enemies, and unwavering adherence to their convictions on the part of these early Nonconformists.

The Society of Friends was founded by George Fox in 1647, and on February 20, 1660, thirteen persons were committed to Thetford Gaol, most of them having been taken out of their meeting at Kilverstone—a small parish adjoining Thetford on the north-east—by a captain and ten armed men, who came in upon them with their swords drawn. The names of those thus committed to prison were Henry Kettle, junr.—probably a son of the Henry Kettle who was Mayor in 1640, and possibly a descendant of a Danish Ketel—Anne Kettle, Elizabeth Winter, Mary Goddard, John Cockerill, Edward Rack, Susan Taylor, Robert Elding, Margaret Elding, Elizabeth Day, Joseph Whitlock, Edmund Burnham, and Andrew Bucknam. Their sole offence was "meeting together." Of the punishment on this occasion I have no record, but it did not act as a deterrent, for on March 20, 1666, at the Norwich Quarter Session, Henry Kettle, junr., and Robert Eden, of Thetford, Richard Cockerill, of Snareshill, and Edmund Rack, of Kilverstone, were convicted of meeting together for religious worship. It was the third offence of each of them, and they were sentenced to be carried to Yarmouth and thence to be transported for seven years to the Barbadoes. Cory, the Recorder of Norwich, Dean Crofts, and other justices tried the case, and the sentences evoked considerable outcry. Dean Crofts, answering the appeal that these men had met to worship God, observed that "the Common Prayer doth not allow people to worship God but by it." The prisoners memorialised the Judge of Assize, but all in vain.

In 1660, some three months after the Kilverstone raid, Thetford was visited by an itinerant preacher of the Society of Friends, one Henry Fell, a member of the Lancashire family of Fells, one of whom George Fox married. He was taken before the Mayor, who had him imprisoned, whipped, and expelled from the borough bounds. The document, which was subsequently passed from hand to hand from Norfolk to Lancashire, was worded as follows:—

"Burrow of Thetford.—Henry Ffell, an idle vagrant person, and a seducer of the people, a very suspicious Jesuited deluder, and one who denyeth ye Oathe of Alleageance and Supremacy, a man of middle statur, of thirty yeares of age, with browne curled haire, was this 28 day of May, in ye twelwe yeare of his Maties. reigne of England, openly whipped in Thetford aforesd. according to law, for a wandering rogue, and is assigned to pass from psh. to psh. by ye officers hereof, straight-way to Olnestone, in Lancashire, where as he confesseth he last dwelt, and he is lymited to be at Olnestone aforesd. with in 20 dayes next ensuing the date hereof at his p'il. Given under my hand and scale of office the date of above sd.—John Kendall, Mayor.—To the Constables of Croxton, and to all other Constables and other Officers whom these prescuts may concerne, for the due execution thereof."

This ill-treatment did not deter Henry Fell from doing what he believed to be his duty, for in a sub-

sequent letter written from Aldeburgh to his sister he says that he will "next First-day be again at Thetford."

The Toleration Act of 1689 relaxed the severities of the Clarendon Code, and the Society of Friends apparently increased in influence in Thetford. From a Trust Book preserved at Norwich it appears that "a message or tenement in Thetford called Chandlers was purchased, in order to form a meeting-house, of William Clark, as appears by a deed bearing date the 1st of the 1st Month in the year 1696." That building is the present "Quaker Chapel" in Cage-lane—by far the oldest Nonconformist building in the town—and the first Trustees were William Hawes, Thos. Hawes, Geo. Gibson, Abraham Howse, Jacob Howse, and Jacob Miller. Mr. John Paul, of Thetford, asserts that his great-great-grandfather, who was a Friend, first allowed the meeting-house to be used for worship. He was a miller, and previously used the building for the purposes of his trade. That may account for its being termed "Chandlers" in the Trust Deed.

It is improbable that its appearance changed much between 1696 and 1906, when it was partially demolished on account of the dangerous condition of the roof, and now consists only of the walls. It was an insignificant, single-chambered building of brick, flint, and chalk, and thatched roof springing from the walls at a height of ten feet above the ground, with two tie-beams in the interior. Freestone blocks and worked fragments from some of the ruined churches and monastic establishments in the town were built into the walls, an eloquent commentary on the vicissitudes of religious sects. Three windows abutting on the street were blocked with chalk, probably at the time it was made into a meeting-house. The entrance was first into a small porch, and by a door in the south-westerly gable, each door being 1½ inches thick. The building was 42 feet in length and 25 in breadth, lighted by three windows by day and eight gas jets by night; there was no pulpit, and the platform at the Guildhall end was nine feet wide. Two small sliding windows provided ventilation. Forms only were used, and there was seating accommodation for between 150 and 160. The fact that ingress was purposely made difficult indicates the disadvantages under which Nonconformists had to labor until quite recently. It may, perhaps, be mentioned as a curious coincidence, but perhaps nothing more, that in the latter part of the seventeenth century towns in New England were directed to erect a cage near the meeting-house (usually Puritan), and in this all offenders against the sanctity of the Sabbath were confined. In Thetford the cage adjoined the Quaker meeting-house and gave its name to the lane in which they both stood. A year after they secured this building as a meeting-house, that is in 1697, the Friends were sufficiently influential to have the births of their children inserted in the register of St. Cuthbert's Church, and it so continued until 1710. This was for legal purposes, to prove descent in cases where property was left. We know nothing of the hundreds of saintly men and women who worshiped in the old meeting-house. By some strange paradox the only Thetford Quaker who attained any distinction was Thomas Paine. Dr. M. D. Conway says:—

"There are various indications that in one way and another Thetford and Quakerism together managed to make the early years of their famous son miserable. Had there been no Quakerism there had been no Thomas Paine. Remembering the extent to which Paine's Quakerism had influenced his political theories, and instances of their bearing on great events, I found something impressive in the little meeting-place in Cage-lane. This was his more important birth-place."

In another place Mr. Conway says: "His whole political system is explicable only by his theocratic Quakerism. His first essay, the plea for negro emancipation, was brought from Thetford meeting-house."

Paine himself, writing in later life of the Quakers, indicated that though he attended the meeting-

house, his inner self protested against some of the Friends' assumptions. He said: "Though I reverence their philanthropy, I cannot help smiling at the conceit, that if the taste of a Quaker had been consulted at the creation, what a silent and drab-colored creation it would have been! Not a flower would have blossomed its gaities, nor a bird been permitted to sing." Yet Paine could never shake himself free of this austere training. On the general subject of religious sects, he wrote:—

"For myself, I fully and conscientiously believe that it is the will of the Almighty that there should be a diversity of religious opinions among us; it affords a larger field for our Christian kindness. Were we all of one way of thinking, our religious dispositions would want matter for probation; and on this liberal principle I look on the various denominations among us to be like children of the same family, differing only in what is called their Christian names."

Dr. Conway, writing on "The Story of the Declaration of Independence," says: "Strange destiny that this humble Thetford Quaker should be borne by the cyclones of the last century into the thick of the American and French Revolutions, and write works on which a thirty years' struggle was fought in England for freedom of the Press." Just before his death Paine requested permission to be interred in the burial ground of the Quakers at New Rochelle, United States, saying that they were the most moral and upright sect of Christians. The request was refused, and Paine was buried on his own farm.

CHAPTER VI.

HIS EARLY ENVIRONMENT.

It is very evident from his writings that Paine's youthful environment affected him strongly throughout life, and that, in addition to the atmosphere of the Friends' meeting-house, the public life of the borough of Thetford helped to mould his intellect and character. All the evidence tends to show that at the time of Paine's birth the town, which had then probably less than 2,000 inhabitants, was in a very neglected condition, insanitary and unpaved, corrupt politically, and with no staple industry. In 1715 Thomas Martin, the historian of the borough, though obviously in a despondent mood, tabulated the reasons why he should not be an attorney, one of which was as follows: "It was always counted ruinous for young persons to be brought up at home, and I'm sure there's no worse town under the sun for breeding or conversation than this." As Thomas was then but nineteen years of age, and had probably been in no other town, unless it might be Bury St. Edmund's, too much stress must not be placed on this. But the Earl of Oxford came thither on December 31, 1737, and said that it was "very poor and mean, much decayed, as I was told, of late years, many houses dropping down not worth repairing."

Once a year, however, Thetford was a scene of activity, a rendezvous of the fashionable and the vicious, and furnished evidence of the pomp and severity of the law, for the Lent Assizes for the county of Norfolk were always held there, partly in continuance of ancient custom, and partly to save the judges the long journey to and from Norwich at an inclement season of the year. Four years before Paine's birth a man and woman were tried at Thetford Assizes, the former for murder, the latter for petit treason. The woman was servant to a lady of property at King's Lynn; the man was her follower, and with her connivance murdered her mistress. He was hanged, and she burned at the stake at Lynn. At the same Assizes six other men were condemned to be hanged. During the first fifteen years of Paine's life the number of persons tried at Thetford Assizes was 217, of whom no less than fifty were condemned to death. Only three of these were for murder, a barbarous penal code allowing sentence of

death to be passed on 15 persons for horse-stealing, 14 for theft or highway robbery, 11 for burglary, 1 for assault, 1 for forgery, and 5 for cattle or sheep-stealing. Two horse-stealers were executed at Thetford in 1740 and a sheep-stealer was ordered to be whipped three market days at Thetford. A man who was convicted of poisoning and other offences in 1742 was sentenced to death and also to be hanged in chains on Diss Common, while two men for uttering false coin received the triple punishment of a fine of £5, twelve months' imprisonment, and to stand in the pillory at North Walsham and Yarmouth. Jeremiah Pratt, who was sentenced to death for horse-stealing at the 1746 Assizes, confessed to four highway robberies, and asserted that he had stolen more horses than Turpin, offering to give information as should lead to the recovery of those he had stolen, to people who had lost horses and would visit him in Norwich Castle. In 1755 Edward Thurstin was ordered to be detained in gaol until bail was forthcoming, the charge being of "dispensing and delivering to divers persons three pamphlets tending to promote the religion of the Church of Rome." At the following Assizes, Jane Shinn was ordered to be branded on the hand for highway robbery. Some of the leading legal luminaries of the country visited Thetford either as judges or counsel, Lord Chief Justice Willes being present in 1739, Lord Chief Baron Parker in 1747, and Justice Denman in 1753. Sometimes they made a ceremonious entry to the town, and always on "Size Sunday" attended one of the three parish churches—usually St. Peter's—in state, when a sermon was preached by the High Sheriff's chaplain. There was also in Thetford a large prison, probably on the site of the present one, and adjoining the Friends' meeting-house in Cage-lane were the pillory and stocks. Memories of his youth were doubtless strong when Paine wrote: "When in countries that are called civilised we see age going to the workhouse, and youth to the gallows, something must be wrong in the system of government."

Other occasions when many of the inhabitants would indulge in an orgie of excitement and dissipation were the elections of two members of Parliament for the borough. Thetford Corporation, in which the power of election was vested, was a corrupt body, under the dominance of the Duke of Grafton, who lived at Euston Hall, about four miles distant. At the election of 1740 two of the Duke's relatives, the Hon. Charles Fitzroy and Lord Augustus Fitzroy, were elected, and in 1747 and 1754 those chosen were Charles Fitzroy Scudamore and Lord Henry Beauclerk. Some of the doings of the corrupt corporation in the half century preceding Paine's boyhood would doubtless be common talk in the town. There was a petition with reference to the election of 1685 and Parliament resolved that the Mayor could not be elected, as the right of election was then vested in the mayor, ten burgesses, and twenty commonalty, a total of thirty-one out of approximately 2,000 inhabitants. An agent of James II. reported in 1688 that "The towne is under the power of the Duke of Norfolk and the Lord Chief Justice Right. They will choose whom Your Majesty will name." In the same year there was complaint of a wrongful election, the question arising upon the illegal surrender of the charter, the petitioners claiming the right by the new charter, the member insisting that the old was still in force. The latter secured the victory. That year Dean Prideaux wrote:—

"At Thetford all is sould. Ye elections there is among the magistracy and 50 guineas for a vote is their price. One Mr. Baylis a stranger was their last chapman to whom they have sould themselves much dearer, for it hath cost him 3000*l.* to get a return from thence the next Parliament and that is but a litigious one, for Sr John Woodhouse will be petitioner against him."

There was further trouble in 1690, the Mayor under the old charter returning two members, and a rival Mayor under the new charter doing the same. Parliament resolved that the old charter was not legally

* Manchester Guardian, July 4, 1891.

surrendered, and that the Mayor who acted in accordance with its provisions acted correctly. In 1698 there was another petition, when it was stated that the Mayor had refused to allow several legal votes to be polled, had admitted others who had no right to vote, and "by many partial proceedings and unlawful practices" secured the return of his friends. One of the members then returned was declared incapable of sitting in that Parliament. Knowing of these things, can it be wondered that Paine wrote of Parliamentary elections: "A man of moral honor and good political principles cannot submit to the mean drudgery and disgraceful acts by which such elections are carried."

The people generally had no power, and the rights of the corporation were jealously guarded. In the second part of the *Rights of Man*, Paine deals with charters and corporations, and the influence of Thetford is very manifest. "Charters and corporations," he says, "are sources of endless contentions in the places where they exist." And furthermore—"Rights are inherently in all the inhabitants, but charters by annulling those rights in the majority, leave the right by exclusion in the hands of the few." Though but a small town there are three ecclesiastical parishes in Thetford—St. Peter's, St. Cuthbert's, and St. Mary's—and residents in one were debarred from participating in the charities, etc., of the others. Owing to the amalgamation of ancient parishes, the parochial boundaries also seem ridiculous and arbitrary. For instance, the top part of White Hart-street, including the house in which Paine was born, was and is in St. Cuthbert's parish, the lower part in St. Peter's parish, though St. Peter's Church is much the nearer to any part of the street. Not improbably Paine had this in mind when he wrote that a man's rights are "circumscribed to the town, and in some cases to the parish of his birth; and all other parts, though in his native land, are to him as a foreign country."

To his native place he also referred when he wrote that "The generality of corporation towns are in a state of solitary decay, and prevented from utter ruin only by some circumstance in their situation, such as a navigable river, or a plentiful surrounding country." The river Little Ouse had been made navigable as far as Thetford towards the end of the seventeenth century, and it was doubtless this fact which, at the time of Paine's boyhood, prevented it from utter decay. So recently as 1833—though in pre-railway days—the income of the corporation was £1,054, of which £955 was derived from navigation dues.

On his way to the Grammar School, Paine would see several of the big coaching inns. Only a few yards away from his home, at the junction of Croxton and Norwich roads, stood the "Fleece"; nearly at the bottom of the street was the "White Hart" inn, then there was the "Bell," with its huge courtyard, and near the bridge over the Little Ouse the ancient "George." Of these the "Fleece" and "George" are now disused. This street was on the main road from Norwich to Newmarket, and thence to London, and Paine, as a schoolboy, would doubtless see many of the equipages of the aristocracy. In White Hart-street he would pass a very ancient half-timbered house, and also St. Peter's Church, as it was before the tower was rebuilt in 1789, with a clock projecting over the roadway. Paine would go to the meeting-house either by Earl-street (then Alice's-lane) and the present market-place, then surrounded by houses and not used as a market; or by White Hart-street, King-street (passing the King's House, which had been used as a country seat by James I.), Tanner's-street, Raymond-street, and Cage-lane.

The churches appear to have been sparsely attended, and the only Nonconformist body in the town was the Society of Friends. John Wesley did not pay a visit to Thetford until 1757, and Paine had then left the town. The Rev. G. Burton, rector of Elveden—four miles from Thetford—writing to the

Rev. William Stukeley, M.D., on November 17, 1757, says* :—

"Heaven only knows where the present degeneracy will end, for I fear the common people are as much sunk down into superstition and fanaticism as their betters are in folly and atheism. We have amongst us a Methodist preacher, just come hot from one of your London tabernacles. He has made so deep an impression upon our common people already, that it becomes a fashion amongst them to be almost, one and all, cross-eyed, by rolling their eyes about in their fits of religious madness. I have had some conversation with him, and, amongst many questions, I asked him how many regular Methodists he supposed there might be at this time in the kingdom. His answer was he was certain there were at least forty thousand—too formidable a number to be permitted of any sect, much more of one of such dangerous principles, who assume to themselves the power of the keys of heaven and hell, and deal out salvation or damnation by caprice or humor. For my own part, I must confess these appearances give me many gloomy apprehensions, but still, I hope there are many thousands in this unhappy nation that have not yet bowed the knee to Baal, that may prove the glorious means of averting the vengeance that is consequentially due to prevailing wickedness."

A few months later, on April 14, 1758, the Rev. G. Burton was even more pessimistic. "We have got," he said,—

"a furious hot Methodist come amongst us, who has already scattered so much of his hellebore as to raise a conventicle of about fourscore, and a love-feast once a week.....If some stop is not put to the proceedings of these people, they will in time throw us into confusion, for they attack us very forcibly by stealing into Orders; and under a sanction of that, and by the help of the Act of Toleration, they bid us defiance, and even promise salvation to their converts, and defame and misrepresent us and our best performances. In short, I know not what you do with them in London, but we have a melancholy prospect from them in the country, for what with fondness for novelty, their encouragements to sloth, and a reliance on Providence for support, and their largesses to the poor, as our poor where they come are no longer in danger of being starved, there is likely to be nothing but psalm-singing coblers and spiritual taylors amongst us shortly; and a cobbler's bastard will by and by be employed upon the bench in splitting a text instead of an hair to lengthen out his end with."

It seems probable that this reference to the conventicle must be to the one in Pike-lane, which was formerly known as Old Meeting-lane, and of which all the early history has been shrouded in the utmost mystery. Wesley was in Thetford again in 1761, on his way from Lakenheath to Norwich, and as Paine was then staying in the town studying for the Excise, he may possibly have heard the great eighteenth-century preacher and founder of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion. Paine was again in the town in 1787, and stayed with his widowed mother in Heathenman-street (now Guildhall-street), not two minutes' walk from the Friends' meeting-house in Cage-lane. The year before the market had been moved from its old situation by the Icknied Way as it passed through the east-end of the town to its present site, about 100 yards from the house in Heathenman-street. There are some curious references to the Thetford of this period in a letter (in my possession) written in 1790 by James Warner, alias King—born at Thetford in 1764—from Jamaica. It appears that a William Payne, of Thetford, a carpenter, and possibly a relative of Thomas, had just emigrated to Jamaica, and Warner, writing home, says :—

"Payne is an exceeding clever man, who bids fair to return in a few years one of the first men in Thetford, and he is very deserving any success he may meet, as he is an honor to his family and the place he came from, and I fear there are few his equals left behind, for as he says, and I believe, most of the young Thetford people are dissipated, simple, ignorant young men, that mind nothing but the low and insipid sport of cock-fighting."

(To be continued.)

* "The Family Memoirs of the Rev. William Stukeley, M.D., and the antiquarian and other correspondence of William Gale, Roger and Samuel Gale, etc.," issued by the Surtees Society.

Free Thoughts.

BY LEMUEL K. WASHBURN.

WHEN a man asks you for a ten dollar bill do you ask yourself: What would Jesus do in my place? The man who would obey the injunctions of Jesus: "Give to him that asketh thee and from him that would borrow turn not thou away," would join the tramp army within a month, or fetch up in the almshouse.

If you wish to study hypocrisy, go to church and to Sunday-school.

If you have anything to give, give it to man, not to God; it will be more likely to reach its object.

The Church has given to the world damnation instead of information, falsehoods instead of facts and superstition instead of science.

A man who is "spiritual" is generally a person whom you do not want to do business with, or else he is too big a fool to waste time on.

It is little wonder that all men are liars, and all women too, for that matter. We are taught lies, and we are taught that these lies are holy. A child is taught to believe, not to know. Nothing is calculated better to make human beings liars and hypocrites than the methods of teaching in Sunday-schools. Religion is not a safe guide. It does not rest upon facts. It teaches ghosts, miracles and fables. Men and women will tell the truth and respect the truth when they are taught the truth in their childhood.

All that has been written about gods, goddesses, ghosts, spirits, fairies, witches, and divine things has been, and is, worthless, foolish, and false, for the reason that all such creatures and things have been, and are, creatures that never existed save in the imagination or fear of man. A large proportion of the literature of the past has dealt with what was unreal, and all such literature should be left unread. Facts are more valuable than fables, and what is true and good and right is better for mankind than what has been made sacred by cupidity and revered by ignorance.

Good behavior does not bloom on the bush of any religious superstition.

There is no evidence that God has damned a human being on earth, much less in any other place.

There is more or less talk indulged in by a certain class of writers about man being "divine," "the divine humanity," and "the divine consciousness," etc. Now, the real fact is, that, instead of man being divine, he is not as yet half human. Humanity is enough for men to achieve. That is all we know anything about. Divinity is something that cannot be intelligently discussed.

Christianity is not coal, it is ashes.

The undertaker, not the priest, disposes of the dead.

The orthodox believe in the deity of Jesus; the Unitarians in the divinity of Jesus. Unitarianism is merely ingrowing orthodoxy.

Who killed the Devil? Whoever did, dealt religion a fatal blow. Whereas once people saw the Devil, were chased by the Devil, and found the Devil's footprints on the rocks, where his red-hot feet had stepped; to-day there is no trace of him anywhere on earth. His reign is over. Christianity lost its greatest ally when the Devil was killed.

God never did anything yet without someone to do it for him.

Tell the truth, and not a convert to Christianity could be made.

Why not sing truth and be happy here, rather than sing lies and believe that they will make us happy "over there"?

If Jesus were to come on earth to-day not a church dedicated to his name would allow him to stay in it over night.

What good are churches, anyway? They are asleep six days in the week, and have the nightmare on the seventh.

Which is the thinner, a ghost or a spirit?

If there is a holy ghost, are there unholy ghosts?

The way to truth, freedom, should be just as sacred as the truth itself.

No nation is safe as long as the viper of priestcraft is protected by its flag.

The man who goes about inciting human fear of God or the hereafter is the most contemptible man alive.

Jesus did not say: Build a church, start a Sunday-school, hire a priest, pray in public and take up a collection where the contribution boxes can be seen by all. Just what did Jesus say? Compare existing Christianity with the teachings of Jesus, as reported in the gospels, and see how far off their trolley modern Christians are.

If I do not wish to be saved I do not see how it is anybody's business. I certainly could not be saved by Christianity's Savior without assassinating my intellect, and I prefer to follow my reason rather than the guidance of a priest.

As far as I have read the history of Christianity in human affairs, here and hereafter, I choose to be lost with the lost rather than to be saved with the saved.

The man who first uttered the foolish expression, "My mother's religion is good enough for me," probably would not say that his mother's bonnet was good enough for his wife, or that his mother's furniture was good enough for his own home. Many a man, who honored his mother while living, and who respects her memory, can honestly say: My mother's religion is not good enough for me, or good enough for men and women in this age. Fifty years ago religion was about all superstition, and a large part of it is to-day.

In Africa they say, Come to Mohammed; in Asia they say, Come to Buddha; in Europe and America they say, Come to Jesus; but we say, Do not "come" to any of them; come to your senses.

If a man pays his bills promptly and tries to deal justly by his fellow-humans, he has a better religion than any churchman and a better faith than any believer.

Worship of God has made slaves of men.

There is a great deal in this life worth living for besides another life.

A Roman Catholic is a person who has been scared for life.

Man's goodness is better for the world than God's goodness.

The only decent religion in the world is morality.

A man does not make a better politician because his soul is saved.

What justice is there in taxing a humble home and exempting a gorgeous cathedral?

When I was a child I believed as a child, and believed that there was a God who cared for a child, but when I became a man I knew as a man, and knew that there was no God who cared for a man.

The moment that Jesus died his power to help human beings ceased.

There is no fool like a religious fool.

Had the Christians adopted Seneca's "Morals" for their holy scripture instead of the Bible, there would be more virtue and less superstition in the world.

If you put your trust in the Lord, it shows that you have something yet to learn.

The Lord God set the bad example of cursing things. The first thing that the Lord God cursed was the serpent, who told Eve that the Lord God had lied to her, then he cursed Eve with all the pains and sorrows of womanhood and finally he cursed the ground for Adam's sake. Men and women have divine authority for their cursing.

When the Lord God was making Adam and Eve, it is to be regretted that he had not taken more time for his work, and turned out a better job.

The church of the twentieth century ought to be the home.

Don't think all of the time what you shall live for. It is enough to live sometimes without living for anything. To dwell upon the effect of everything you do makes life a burden. Do the work of each day as it comes, with no thought for the morrow. Don't live for a monument. The one you want will never be erected. Give a helping hand here, a kind word there, and let the result go to grass, or somewhere else.

A great many persons believe that in the next world they will get even with this world, and so put up with poverty and injustice. There is a lot of consolation in thinking that you will see your superiors suffer hereafter.

We do not see what this world has to do with a person who said that his kingdom was not of this world.

If Jesus were living to-day he would have too much sense to follow himself.

There are better sermons in pictures to-day than pictures in sermons.

Obituary.

There died at Edinburgh, on the 10th inst., a link with the past generation of Edinburgh Secularists in the person of Mrs. Charles Nicholson, aged 67. In the seventies and eighties she was a close worker, along with her husband, in connection with the Edinburgh Branch of the N. S. S. at a time of great activity during the best period of the propaganda of Charles Bradlaugh, Charles Watts, Annie Besant, G. W. Foote, Joseph Symes, W. W. Collins, to most of whom she was known personally as a fearless and outspoken advocate of the cause. In later years, she was a strenuous upholder of the Sunday opening movement in the city, in connection with which, her son-in-law has been most prominently identified, and her views on all such subjects were retained to the last. A secular burial service was read at her interment in Echobank Cemetery on the 13th by W. D. Macgregor, President of the Edinburgh Secular Society.

—J. L. A.

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.**OUTDOOR.**

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 3.15 and 6.15, W. J. Ramsey, Lectures.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill, Hampstead): 3.30 and 6, Lectures.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford): 7, R. H. Rosetti, "If Jesus Christ Came To-Day."

COUNTRY.**OUTDOOR.**

BRISTOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Durdham Downs): 7.15, B. G. Brown, "Some Questions for Christians to Answer."

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