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In the war of ideas there is neither treaty nor truce. To ask for quarter is to admit defeat; and to give it is treachery to Truth.—G. W. FOOTE.

Is Theology Played Out?

THERE are multitudes of people in the various Churches who have lost all patience with theology. In their estimation theological dogmas are but "so many brilliant efforts of word-spinners," and can scarcely be regarded as possessing any practical value. They say: "What care we about those fierce battles, so tenaciously fought, over dogmatic definitions in the great Ecumenical Councils? We are sick and tired of the silly hair-splitting so persistently indulged in by the pulpit, and long unspeakably for a little practical common sense, such as is contained in the Sermon on the Mount." The theologians are fully aware of the existence of such an attitude of opposition to what they are pleased to call the queen of the sciences; and their first observation on it is that it is "largely exaggerated." They assure us that theology is the most popular subject of the day. "It is a significant fact," they aver, "that when some great theological problem is being discussed in the pulpit or in fiction a very widespread interest is at once excited." True; but Professor Peake, who makes that statement, ignores another fact of even greater significance, namely, that the interest taken in the discussion of theological problems arises from the consciousness that theology is attackable, that it presents debateable problems, on none of which the last word has been uttered, and that even its most vital dogmas have not been irrevocably established. Theology devoid of the spice of heresy is not popular: it is theological debates that attract the people. Dr. Peake is mistaken on another point. He says: "The attendances in our churches may be far from what we could desire, yet religion is the only topic that could draw together week by week the multitudes who are found in our places of worship." Such an assertion contradicts well-known facts. It is beyond question that in towns and cities where no special privileges are conceded to churches and chapels, the crowds are to be found, not in these, but in theatres and music-halls. In this country, alas, Sunday is by law pre-eminently the preacher's own day. Until recently his was the only voice permitted to be heard. The only institution licensed to compete with him was the public-house. Now that Sunday League concerts and lectures and excursions, Socialist gatherings of all kinds, and secular demonstrations on non-Christian lines are multiplying throughout the country, the preacher is finding out that his hold upon the people is gradually weakening; and, conscious of his inability to compete with these dechristianising movements, he raves impotently against them, and denounces the public for its culpable apathy in not angrily rising up and suppressing them. No, theology is not popular, its promulgators, except in a few exceptional instances, are not heeded, and its appeals to supernatural sanctions and resources fall on deaf ears.

Professor Peake is nearer the mark when he affirms that the present impatience with theology is "partly

due to the mental habit of our own time." Of course, according to this professional teacher of theology, the mental habit that cannot endure ecclesiastical dogmas is of necessity depraved. He slashes "our age" with the scourge of his wrath, crying, "Take that, thou impious, God-forsaken villain!" He says:—

"Our age has lost the secret of meditation; it is impatient of brooding thought. It is incapable of sustained mental exercise; it flits like a butterfly from one thing to another; its interests are alert, but they are easily fatigued."

How this lamentable state of things has been brought about we are not definitely told. The Professor is not quite sure himself:—

"Whether it is the rush of life that leaves man no time to think, or whether it is the flabbiness of a mind fed only on the newspaper and light literature, or the drugging of intellectual tastes by the thirst for pleasure and excitement, the ominous fact admits of no denial."

But Dr. Peake's diagnosis is entirely wrong. Our age is what it is by reason of its close contact with the works of Spencer, Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, Mill, Swinburne, Meredith, Hardy, and many others of the same school. And is not our theological champion aware that among the people of this age least interested in Christianity are included great leaders of thought in science, literature, art, and the secular professions? Take the intellectual giant whom we have just lost, and note what he teaches about the dogmas of theology. Unhesitatingly he calls them "Fables of the Above" and "Legends," with which Nature will have nothing to do. He says:—

"The Legends that sweep her aside,
Crying loud for an opiate boon,
To comfort the human want,
From the bosom of magical skies."

Then comes his most withering condemnation of them. The Legends that thus sweep Nature aside—

"She smiles on, marking their source:
They read her with infant eyes."

"*They read her with infant eyes*" is an inimitable line, a sparkling gem. That is exactly the discovery that the "man in the street," so much despised by Dr. Peake, is now making by the aid of such master-minds as we have just mentioned. The "man in the street" is, on the whole, a clearer and deeper thinker to-day than he was fifty years ago, only he is no longer guided in his thinking by the parson. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that now he *does* think, at least a little, whereas formerly he merely believed what the majority round about him believed. Then he was surrounded by an atmosphere of credulity, while to-day he lives and moves and has his being in an atmosphere of theological denial, created by the spread of scientific knowledge.

Dr. Peake frankly confesses "that theology has been too much given to abstractions and to hair-splitting." But has it ever been given to anything else? Old or New, is it not wholly composed of abstractions? Very probably Dr. Peake agrees with most theologians in regarding the Universe as finite, in which case the infinite, as understood by him, transcends the physical Universe; and, of course, if anything transcends Nature it must of necessity be incomprehensible, and whatever is incomprehensible can only be an object of pure speculation. Says the Professor: "What, we may truly ask, would any

account of the Infinite be worth to us which professed to level it down to the comprehension of our finite intelligence? A God whom we could wholly understand would be no God for us." We may ask, does Dr. Peake partly understand God? If he says he does, then we must charge him with violating his own principle: *he has, to that extent, levelled God down to his finite intelligence.* The incomprehensible cannot be even partly understood. Later on, in the same essay, the Professor flings his principle down the wind and declares that the Christian "realises that the power which manifests itself in Nature is a self-conscious Person, a holy Will, a loving Father, a redeeming God." Where is the mystery, the incomprehensibility, now? It has vanished like mist before the sun. But how? By a miracle that cannot be defined in words.

Observe the form of the statement. The Christian is said to *realise* the loving personality of God in the face of Jesus Christ. How does he realise it? By faith. He *believes* what he is told, and *feels* it to be true. The Professor's friend who went into a church at a south-coast watering-place heard a sermon in which the Christian position was accurately defined. The preacher said: "Few things, my friends, have done more harm in this world than thought." Then he added with pathetic emphasis: "Don't, my friends, put me down as a thinker; put me down as a believer." Upon that ingenuous preacher Dr. Peake looks down with pity, and asks, "What is the value of belief without thought?" Does the Professor himself believe as the result of thinking? Let us see. As a thinker he tells us that the Infinite cannot be "levelled down to the comprehension of our finite intelligence." As a Christian believer, however, he does the very thing which, as a thinker, he declares impossible. What the south-coast preacher said about the harmfulness of thought he characterises as "this pestilent talk." What lies at the basis of it, according to him, "is the feeling that the intellect is a corrosive agent which, if it be allowed to have its freedom, will eat out the belief in God and the spiritual order." Did Dr. Peake himself discover, by a course of severe thinking, "that the power which manifests itself in Nature is a self-conscious Person, a holy Will, a loving Father, a redeeming God," or was he simply trained to believe it on some external authority? To us, the south-coast preacher's naive confession rings truer than do the Professor's heroic, but self-defeating, attempts to rationalise an irrational faith. It is a fact that, whenever people do venture to think for themselves, the result is, in the overwhelming majority of instances, the disappearance of their faith. It is incontrovertible that the "intellect is a corrosive agent which, if it be allowed to have its freedom, does eat out the belief in God and the spiritual order." Why is it that the bulk of our scientists have no Christian faith? Why is it that most of our greatest writers have been, and are, unbelievers? Is it not because they have come to the conclusion that theology has had its day?

Apart from theology, however, the Christian religion cannot exist. Those whose cry is, "Away with theology, and give us the Sermon on the Mount," forget that the Sermon on the Mount is steeped in theology from beginning to end. A whole Body of Divinity could be elaborated out of that grossly misrepresented discourse. The words "God," "Christ," "supernatural," and "immortality" are creations of theology. Therefore, if theology has had its day, it follows that its offspring, Christianity, has had its day as well.

J. T. LLOYD.

Christianity and Psychology.—IV.

(Continued from p. 341.)

THAT a great deal of assumed religious feeling is merely disguised or perverted sexuality is a conclusion that is rapidly gaining ground amongst such as

study the question dispassionately. Putting aside observations on the subject made by purely literary men, there is a growing body of scientific opinion on the close connection between sexuality and extreme manifestations of religion. More than a generation ago Dr. Anstie said:—

"I know of no fact in pathology more striking and more terrifying than the way in which the phenomena of the ecstatic—which have often been seized upon by sentimental theorists as proofs of spiritual exaltation—may be plainly seen to bridge the gulf between the innocent fooleries of ordinary hypnotic patients, and the degraded and repulsive phenomena of nymphomania and satyriasis."^{*}

The following expressions are also significant as showing the growth of opinion in this direction:—

"It has been noticed that among the morbid organic conditions which accompany the show of excessive piety and religious rapture in the insane, none are so frequent as disorders of the sexual organism. Conversely, the frenzies of religious revivals have not unfrequently ended in gross profligacy.†

"Ecstasy, as we see in cases of acute mental disease, is probably always connected with sexual excitement, if not with sexual depravity. The same association is seen in less extreme cases, and one of the commonest features in the conversation of an acutely maniacal woman is the intermingling of erotic and religious ideas."[‡]

"I venture to express my conviction that we should rarely err if, in a case of religious melancholy, we assume the sexual apparatus to be implicated."[§]

"The ecstatic trances of such saintly women as Catherine Sienne and St. Teresa, in which they believed themselves to be visited by their Savior, and to be received as veritable spouses into his bosom, were, though they knew it not, little better than vicarious sexual orgasm.....Every experienced physician must have met with instances of single and childless women who have devoted themselves with extraordinary zeal to habitual religious exercises, and who having gone insane as a culmination of their emotional fervor, have straightway exhibited the saddest mixture of religious and erotic symptoms."^{||}

"We find that the self-sacrificial vagaries of the rejected lover and the religious devotee, own a common origin and nature. The hook and spiky kennel of the fakir, the pillar of St. Simeon Stylites, the flagellum of the monk, the sombre garments of the nun, the silence of the Trappists, the defiantly hideous costume of the hallelujah lass, and the mortified sobriety of the district visitor, have at bottom the same origin as the rags of Cardenio, the cage of Don Quixote de la Mancha, and the yellow stockings and crossed garters of Malvolio."[¶]

Almost any first-class medical work will furnish similar opinions from men whose business in life it is to deal with facts, and not amuse themselves with spinning theories for the bewilderment of those who look to them for guidance. Indeed, one feels, on reading the outpourings of highly emotional religious natures, surprise that the truth above insisted on is not more generally recognised. Unable to find its outlet in the normal human channels, one finds monks addressing the Virgin Mary, and nuns addressing Jesus, in language the nature of which is unmistakable. St. Teresa's idea of religion is well described by Professor James as being "an endless amatory flirtation.....between the devotee and the deity," and a careful study of her career show that her piety was very largely due to a misdirection of her excessively amatory nature. Marie de L'Incarnation cries out to Jesus, "Oh, my love! when shall I embrace you? Have you no pity on the torments that I suffer! Alas! Alas! My love! My beauty! My life! Instead of healing my pain you take pleasure in it. Come, let me embrace you and die in your sacred arms." If young women do not talk in this manner to their earthly lovers, it is only because custom condemns it as improper.

* The *Lancet*, January 11, 1873.

† Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty*, pp. 66-7.

‡ H. Northcote, *Christianity and Sex Problems*, p. 142.

§ C. Norman, in *Tuke's Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*.

|| Maudesley's *Pathology of Mind*, p. 144.

¶ Dr. Mercier, *Sanity and Insanity*, p. 223.

From a collection of early English homilies and religious writings, published by the "Early English Text Society," I take the following :—

"Jesus, my holy love, my sure sweetness! Jesus, my heart, my joy, my soul heal! Jesus, sweet Jesus, my darling, my life, my balm, my honey-drop! Thou art all that I trust in. Jesus, my weal, my winsomeness, blithe bliss of my breast. Jesus, teach me, thou art so soft, and so sweet, and yet, too, so dear and so lovely and so lovesome.....Kindle me with the blaze of thy enlightening love. Let me be thy leman.....O that I might behold how thou stretchedest thyself for me on the cross! O that I might cast myself between those same arms, so very wide spread!"

Or this, from the same collection :—

"Sweet Jesus, my love, my darling, my Lord, my Savior, my honey-drop, my balm, sweeter is the remembrance of thee than honey in the mouth. Who is there that may not love thy lovely face? Whose heart is there so hard that may not melt at the remembrance of thee? Ah! who may not love thee, lovely Jesus? Jesus, my precious darling, my love, my life, my beloved, my most worthy of love, my heart's balm, thou art lovesome in countenance, thou art altogether bright. All angel's life is to look upon thy face, for thy cheer is so marvellously lovesome and pleasant to look upon..... Thou art so bright, and so white, that the sun would be pale if it were compared to thy blissful countenance. If I, then, love any man for beauty, I will love thee, my dear life, my mother's fairest son."

And lest Protestants, with that charity which thinks no evil of oneself, but piously piles it on one's neighbor, should discount the value of these expressions as coming from Catholic sources, I present them with the following, given in Southey's *Life of Wesley*. It represents a typical outburst from a female convert of twenty years of age :—

"Oh mighty, powerful, happy change! The love of God was shed abroad in my heart, and a flame kindled there with pains so violent, and yet so very ravishing, that my body was almost torn asunder. I sweated, I trembled, I fainted, I sang. Oh, I thought my head was a fountain of water. I was dissolved in love. My beloved is mine, and I am his. He has all charms; he has ravished my heart; he is my comforter, my friend, my all. Oh, I am sick of love. He is altogether lovely, the chiefest among ten thousand. Oh, how Jesus fills, Jesus extends, Jesus overwhelms the soul in which he lives."

Is it possible to mistake the real cause and significance of such outbursts as these? If anyone is in doubt as to their character, let him delete from these quotations the name of Jesus and substitute that of John Smith, and then see how they read. Did such outbursts occur in an ordinary novel there would be an outcry in the press, and our self-appointed guardians of public morality would be up in arms.

Professor James, in criticising the connection between sexuality and religion, observes that one might as reasonably call religion an aberration of the digestive or respiratory organs. The criticism, like so many of Professor James' criticisms when he is defending religious beliefs, is peculiarly inappropriate. In the first place, those who take up the position above insisted on, do not claim that religion owes its origin to an aberration of the sexual functions, but that given religion existing, a misunderstanding of impulses, of feelings, due to a developing sexuality, serves as a powerful support to religious belief. And, secondly, the argument is not at all one of synchrony. During adolescence, as Professor James points out, there is a development in other directions as well as in the direction of religion. The whole of the social feelings undergo a marked development during this period. Nor is there any doubt that an individual's views in art or literature are profoundly affected by the sexual transformation that is taking place. But, withal, there is a very important difference between the influence of the life, and its connection with religious belief. The increased interest in mechanics, physics, philosophy, or sociology, results from a matured physique, a more developed intelligence. There is no need to look beyond for any explanation. We cannot explain

these new interests in terms of religion; they are an end in themselves. But we can explain the religious interest in terms of something else. We can see how—and what has been said above abundantly proves this—the newly experienced feelings are given a religious interpretation by those who are more or less interested in the cultivation of religious beliefs. We see how the sex instinct is diverted from its normal direction to that of the adoration of Jesus. In the examples given, be it noted, it is not God as a universal principle that is addressed, but Jesus the man. And, lastly, in those cases where disease has stripped away all possible disguise, we have the connection between a perverted sexuality and religious fervor demonstrated beyond any possibility of doubt. We are in the position of being able to explain all the phenomena called religious by reference to purely physiological conditions. And when we have done this, "religious forces" may safely be dismissed as mere figments of the imagination.

(To be concluded.) C. COHEN.

The Betrayal of George Meredith.—II.

WHAT I have said of George Meredith's relations with me, and what I have printed of the letters I received from him, is merely enough to show that for more than thirty years he was interested in my work. Perhaps I might better say, in the battle I was fighting. Now it is of no use to try to turn the edge of my argument by saying that he loved a good fight and a good fighter, and that this was the be-all and the end-all of his flattering tributes. Meredith was not the man to delight in mere warfare, apart from its objects. Besides, his penultimate letter to me—the one dated February 24, 1908—is perfectly explicit. My "valiant fight," as he was good enough to call it, was not the whole of his theme; nor the "mixture of ardor and patience," which he thought so rare; the "object" for which I fought was "destined to victory," though not in the near future. That is the point to which I must keep critics who are reluctant to believe, or at least to admit, that George Meredith wished success to my efforts. Praise from the Master's lips might be sweet to a soldier like myself in the war of human liberation; had I been inclined to falter it would have turned me to steel; but the sweetest thing of all, to one with his whole heart in the fight, was the Master's love of the cause itself, and his assurance that it could not fail to triumph in the end.

Such being Meredith's attitude towards the cause of Freethought, it is easy for any honest person of decent intelligence to understand why I am disgusted at the pious farce played around his dead body, why I go to the length of calling it a betrayal, and why I do not hesitate to describe it as a detestable outrage.

The part played in this outrage by the Christian priests does not call, at this time of day, for much waste of breath. They acted after their kind. In the days of their power they burnt great men to death and loaded their memories with infamy; now they do all they can to appear on friendly terms with great men, and try to capture their dead bodies although it was impossible to capture their living minds. Swinburne and Meredith, three hundred years ago, might have met with the fate of Bruno. To-day the priests are not above playing the hypocrite over such men's graves. The old insolence of strength is but the other side of the present cringing of weakness.

Let us now turn to Meredith's poetry. He put into it his own ideas and convictions far more liberally than he was able to do in his novels. He generally sent me his volumes of verse; he never sent me one of his novels, for they were works of art, and were written for the general world. Having those volumes by me, I shall draw from them instead of from the collected edition of the poems, although

I possess that also,—and, by the way, it is not complete.

During the great period of his productiveness as a novelist Meredith does not appear to have written much verse. That was natural. It was also natural that when he took to writing verse freely again he should be less expert than he would have been without the long interregnum. James Thomson once remarked to me that, while Meredith's prose was magnificent, and often of absolute perfection, he seemed not to have mastered the technique of poetry. That he could have done so is sufficiently obvious to competent readers of his happiest efforts after the opening of the eighties, and still more so in view of such superb earlier work as *Modern Love* and the most beautiful and melodious pieces in the earliest *Poems* of 1851, which contained the first draft of the triumphant *Love in the Valley*. But the fact remains that he did not; and as want of technique often results in want of lucidity—for technique, after all, is the method of the writer's approach to the reader—a good many people have found his poems difficult and even obscure; although, for my part, I do not recognise any real obscurity in Meredith except that which is but another name for the reader's sleepy-headedness. His meaning is clear enough if you take the trouble to master it; but, of course, it is of no use to try to read such a poet—with a mind at once so full-packed and so rapid—as you would read a common sixpenny novel, or as you would play a domestic game of cards after a heavy supper.

In the appeal I shall make to Meredith's poems there will not be much method, in the common meaning of the word, and yet I think there may be another kind of method, less formal, perhaps, but possibly more vital.

I take first of all the volume of 1862. It contained "Modern Love," and if that be not a great poem no great poem was written during the second half of the nineteenth century. The fifty stanzas—sonnets they are not—deal with a most subtle love tragedy. The poet starts the fiftieth with a final flash of his genius upon the characters and their situation; then he suddenly turns to a reflection which is probably of greater significance than he contemplated:—

" Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainties in this our life!—
In tragic hints here see what evermore
Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
To throw that faint thin line upon the shore."

That wonderful image is almost too great for the perplexed couple of tragic figures even in that wonderful poem. It fitly applies to the whole range of man's finite life in the midst of the infinite universe. Huxley and Spencer devoted whole pages, whole chapters, to Agnosticism and the Unknowable. Meredith, before them, put the entire substantial truth into four of the greatest lines in the poetry of the world.

From that I turn to the fine Ode, entitled "France: December, 1870." Meredith loved France and French literature. When she lay prone at the feet of Germany, at the end of that terrible year, he contributed this Ode to the *Fortnightly Review*. It could have been written by no other man in England. From the first line to the last it was a glorious achievement; full of insight, and thought, and grand imagery, and strong passion, and noble music. Meredith smiled pathetically at the Catholics in France talking of intercession with heaven and direct aid from that quarter—

" When the whole tragic tale hangs on a broken blade!"

No good could come in that way to the nation that had so stood for Reason:—

" Could France accept the fables of her priests,
Who blessed her banners in the game of beasts,
And now bid hope that heaven will intercede
To violate its laws in her sore need,
She would find comfort in their opiates."

France could not accept the fables of her priests. She had advanced too far for that. Her need was

strength; and strength was not obtainable by frantic yearning:—

" Lo, Strength is of the plain root—Virtues born:
Strength shall ye gain by service, prove in scorn,
Train by endurance, by devotion shape.
Strength is not won by miracle or rape.
It is the offspring of the modest years,
The gift of sire to son, thro' those firm laws
Which we name Gods; which are the righteous cause,
The cause of man, and manhood's ministers."

Nothing saner was ever uttered. And the words I have italicised show how the poet stood towards Theism. What men called Gods were but the firm laws of Nature:—Nature, who never accommodates herself to man, but leaves man to accommodate himself to her. His doing so is wisdom and health; his not doing so is folly and death.

Theology deals with Whence and Whither—and Meredith says profoundly that the former is an echo of the latter; in other words, man's heavenly origin is only the logical cover for his heavenly destination. Meredith laughed good-humoredly at all that. In "The Question Whither" in *A Reading of Earth* he sings:—

" Enough i we have winked to sun,
Have sped the plough a season;
There is a soul for labor done,
Endureth fixed as reason.
Then let our trust be firm in Good,
Though we be of the fasting;
Our questions are a mortal brood,
Our work is everlasting.
We children of Beneficence
Are in its being sharers;
And Whither vainer sounds than Whence,
For word with such wayfarers."

Nature pays man for his work; but he is not satisfied with payment—he demands a *pourboire*, and expects to get it—in heaven.

Whither we go was to Meredith even an idler question than Whence we came. We are of earth, in life and in death. Nature cares no more for individual man than for the individual of any other species:—

" A wind sways the pines,
And below
Not a breath of wild air;
Still as the mosses that glow
On the flooring and over the lines
Of the roots here and there.
The pine-tree drops its dead;
They are quiet, as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead
Rushes life in a race
As the clouds the clouds chase
And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
Even we,
Even so."

The last four lines of that "Dirge in Woods" figured on a wreath at Meredith's funeral. The preceding lines show what a farce it was to utter "resurrection" shibboleths over his ashes.

And now a word with regard to the line—"We children of Beneficence." I have heard it argued that Meredith used "Beneficence" as a synonym for a personal God. But this is a fundamental misconception. Just as a child of folly is a fool, so the children of Beneficence are those who do good; it is that, and that alone, which makes them sharers in its being. It is not an inalienable inheritance, but an acquired felicity.

(To be concluded.) G. W. FOOTE.

Ya Husain!

NEARLY forty years ago I heard Moody, the Evangelist, repeat that his little son had said, "No story makes me cry like that of Christ." Christian people appear to think that the Gospel tale, viewed merely on its literary side, has unique interest and pathos. But, for ten days in any autumn, there may be witnessed in Persia (and in other and more provincial forms in India) the performance of a Miracle-play that stirs the souls of the people—both sexes, all classes, old and young—to passionate emo-

tion, and the sorrows of the hero Husain are accompanied in the audiences by much beating of the breasts, and the shedding of many tears, and the loud and frequent wail of "Ya Husain!"

Hasan and Husain were brothers, and were grandsons of Mohammed the Prophet of Islam. They claimed to be the successors of the Prophet in both temporal and spiritual power, but were opposed with deadly energy by a party whose modern representatives are the Sunni sect. Hasan was poisoned. Some years afterwards, Husain, being deceitfully invited to take the lordship of Babylonia, travelled to that land with his family, halted on the plain of Kerbala by the river Euphrates, and he and all his male comrades were done to death in a massacre which Persia and India weep over every year when the month of Mohurram comes round, and the actors play once again the tragedy of fifty scenes. The drama portrays a history of religion. It opens with a dialogue of Joseph and his Brethren. It closes with the Resurrection-day, when the angel Sarafil blows the trumpet loudly and long, and skeletons and mummies struggle to their feet, and tremble in the lurid shadows of the Wrath.

The play abounds in affecting situations. Just as the *Iliad* of Homer is the noblest of military poems, and the Indian epic of the *Ramayana* the most luxurious in fancy, so the drama of *Hasan and Husain* is, I suspect, the most pathetic in the world's literature. It is one prolonged agony, illumined by golden rays of heroism and love. For European taste, it is preternaturally bitter. All that I here aver for it is that, in plangent appeal to pity, and in brilliance of heroic episode, it equals, and even surpasses, the interest of the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus.*

Mohammed himself figures in one scene, in which he loses his little son Ibrahim. The Angel of Death glides into the Prophet's house, and asks, in a quaint imperious courtesy, for the soul of the boy. At Mohammed's prayer, a short respite is given, and the conversation that ensues is a singular suggestion of what Whitman calls the "sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death."

"Ibrahim.—Who art thou, O man? Leave me to myself.

Izrail.—I am Izrail, the Angel of Death, O little boy.

Ibrahim.—I beg thee to take my soul gently.

Izrail.—Cry not so much, O flower of the age."

And so the boy passes, amid the sobs of Mohammed and Husain, and smelling the sweet apple which the Angel offers to the dying.

In the doomed camp at Kerbala, men and women are stricken with a dreadful thirst, in sight of the plentiful flood of the Euphrates. When the daughter of Husain pleads for drink, the warrior Abis volunteers to cut his way through the enemy, and, if naught else can be done, to die fighting for water—and for honor. His negro slave, Shauzab, implores the privilege of going with him, and the Arab and the black go out to the fatal fray. The enemy's chief offers Abis titles, estates, and ease if he will desert Husain, whose "service is not worth a fig." Abis replies by stripping off his armor, and revealing the shroud in which he had wrapped himself in anticipation of the end, and he is slain near the body of the negro.

As valiantly dies Ali Akbar, the son of Husain. He had expected marriage, and the grave was his chamber of love. Young Kasim and Fatima are wedded in the camp of doom,—the most ironic sacrament that ever was. Two couches are placed for the ceremony,—one gaily adorned for a wedding-bed (on which they never sleep), and the other draped with black in token of the fate of Ali Akbar. Bride and bridegroom sing together a plaintive song, in which they address the departed Ali. Then Kasim rides out to war, and strikes many a blow; and then he hastens back for a last look at his wife,—painfully sighing "I thirst!" (as Christ sighed),—and then summoning up his spirit to salute his love,—

"O dear spouse, come, let me see thee once again! Let me cull blossoms of delight from the rose-garden of thy cheeks! But as my great-grandfather [Mohammed] is anxiously expecting me in Paradise, I am constrained not to hold a long conversation with thee; and so bid thee adieu!"

And Kasim turns back to the field of blood, and sees his wife no more.

Hashim the brave is the last but one of the men to fall. "All the palms in the orchard," then murmurs Husain in poetic sadness, "are fallen but one." This last defender of the camp makes a terrific charge, which sends the enemy flying. The way to the Euphrates is open. Husain rushes to the bank, and thrusts in his hand to scoop the water of life. Just then, before he raises his hand, he hears a voice of warning from the ranks of the foe:—

"The enemy have gone towards the tents of Husain. The soldiers have departed for the purpose of plundering the women. Thou drinkest water whilst thy sister Zainab is being taken a prisoner, and thy Sukainah is in the hands of the soldiers....."

Husain flings the water undrunk to the earth,—surely one of the noblest incidents of chivalric story,—and hastens to the camp to find, indeed, that the alarm is baseless, at least for the moment. The women ask to be allowed to go with him. One carries a standard, one a sword, one a shield, and Husain, lion-hearted and unconquerable, melts into a prayer to Allah: "O Lord, have mercy on my daughter and my sister. I am alone in this wilderness, and these widowed women compose my army."

The very angels of Paradise are moved. They speak with each other in hasty council. One of them, —Futrus the swift-winged,—is despatched to earth to offer aid.

"I have come to earth to save thee, O descendant of the Prophet," he announces to Husain; "if thou permittest, I shall destroy the enemy in a moment."

Husain bids the angel glance over the blood-soiled field, where lie the bodies of his beloved companions.

"If," he says, "the crown were placed on my head; if the planet itself were subject to me; if kings such as Alexander the Great obeyed me; if even Solomon the wise were to be my doorkeeper, I would not care to exist after the death of these dear youths."

He pauses to join with the women in lamentation for the slain; and he bids farewell to them one by one. Perhaps the most striking adieu is that said to an aged female slave, who had nursed Husain as a baby. The negress had grown old in his service; she asks pardon for all the faults she has committed. He answers,—

"Thou art black-faced, it is true, but thou hast, I deem, a pure white heart, and art much esteemed by us. To-day I am about to leave thee, owing thee, at the same time, innumerable thanks for the good services thou hast performed; but I beg thy pardon for all inconsiderate actions on my part."

And presently this Arab knight, "without fear and without reproach," has cloven the last skull in his war-record and struck the last blow in defence of the solitary women, and yields up his life, and there are no more palms in the orchard.

Is it any wonder the people beat their breasts and wail "Ya Husain"?

When, in the Christian drama, the folk of Jerusalem look upon the Crucified, and return home, smiting their breasts, have they looked upon a purer type of humanity?*

The women (except Fatima, who is fortunately rescued) are carried off to Damascus, and confined in a dark apartment in a half-ruined house, roped to the wall like dogs, and passing the long hours in dirges for the slain heroes. One day they are dragged into the banqueting-hall of the Yazid, the prince of Damascus, and the head of Husain is brought in on a spear, for the sport of the company. An Ambassador from Europe (as to whose identity one need not inquire after the manner of dry-as-dust antiquarians) sits at the feast, and his heart is afflicted by the grief-stricken women.

* A very ample version is given in Sir Lewis Pelly's two volumes of *The Miracle-play of Hasan and Husain*, published by W. H. Allen in 1879.

The Head of Husain addresses this Christian, and, telling him that the lips which speak are the lips of the martyr of Kerbala, recites a verse from the Koran.

The Christian Ambassador faces the prince of Damascus, and upbraids him for his callousness. A furious altercation agitates the banqueting-hall. The Ambassador is felled by order of Yazid, and he dies declaring his faith in Islam. "There is but one true God," he says.

"Let the entertainment proceed," cries Yazid. "Bid the musicians play."

The women go back to their cell.

But another heart is to be won over,—the heart of Yazid's own daughter. She wants to see the captives. Her father bids her go with her maids, but she must be brightly costumed, so as to deride the ragged women in their misery.

With jingling tamborines, the girls of Damascus flaunt their way to the prison-chamber.

"My hands are painted red with henna," laughs the princess, "my necklace is of gold, my feet are shod in gold shoes,"—

"Alas," answers Husain's daughter, "my hands are marked with the blood of Kerbala; tears fill my eyes; the rope encircles my captive neck,"—

The reproachful words pierce the soul of the princess. She breaks down in contrition, and asks pardon, and begs that she may be permitted to do the prisoners a favor.

The daughter of the hero requests that the head of her father may be brought. She gazes upon it, and dies.

The rest of the women are released.

Last of all, the Day of Judgment arrives. Abraham rises, and complains of the fire of God's wrath. David's bones stir into life, and he yells for mercy. Solomon stands in his tomb, and shivers. Old Noah emerges, and grumbles at the dreadful disturbance. And a mass of sinners groan in chorus. Mohammed the Prophet surveys the dismal world, and anxiously questions the angel Gabriel if, after all, there is much hope for this uneasy host.

As he speaks, the souls of the men of the camp of Kerbala come from their place of burial, and last glides in the soul of Husain the stainless knight.

The entrance of Husain is decisive. Gabriel gives the key of Paradise to Mohammed, and Mohammed hands it to Husain; for to the warrior-saint of Kerbala it is granted to open Heaven to all who have ever admired his courage, or shed a tear at his woes. And who would be left out on such conditions?

The play closes.

"Ya Husain!"

F. J. GOULD.

Some Opinions Concerning Thomas Paine.

President Andrew Jackson :—

"Thomas Paine needs no monument made by hands; he has erected a monument in the hearts of all men who love liberty."

President Monroe :—

"The services he rendered to his country in its struggle for freedom, have implanted in the hearts of his countrymen a sense of gratitude never to be effaced as long as they shall deserve the title of a just and generous people."

President Jefferson (to Paine) :—

"You will, in general, find us returned to sentiments worthy of former times; in these it will be your glory to have steadily labored, and with as much effect as any man living. That you may live long to continue your useful labors, and reap the reward in the thankfulness of nations, is my sincere prayer. Accept the assurances of my high esteem and affectionate attachment."

William Cobbett (1818) :—

"As an arduous defender of the people's rights, as a strenuous and unflinching advocate for the curtailment of aristocratical power, as the champion of popular power in opposition to the abuses of monarchical government, Paine will always stand pre-eminent in the

world.....He belongs to England. His fame is the property of England; and if no other people will show that they value that fame, the people of England will."

Walt Whitman :—

"I dare not say how much of what our Union is owing and enjoying to-day—its independence—its ardent belief in, and substantial practice of, radical human rights—and the severance of its government from all ecclesiastical and superstitious dominion—I dare not say how much of all this is owing to Thomas Paine, but I am inclined to think a good portion of it decidedly is."

Elsewhere he said "he was among the best and honest of men."

Colonel Ingersoll :—

"If to love your fellow-men more than self is goodness, Thomas Paine was good. If to be in advance of your time, to be a pioneer in the direction of light, is greatness, Thomas Paine was great. If to avow your principles and to discharge your duty in the presence of death is heroic, Thomas Paine was a hero."

William Hazlitt :—

"Paine affected to reduce things to first principles, to announce self-evident truths.....in a few short sentences seems by his peremptory manner to clear it from all controversy, past, present, and to come."

Dr. Parker :—

"Bishop Watson answered the *Age of Reason*, but the Bishop is now nowhere. Tom Paine's 'soul goes marching on,' but the Bishop is forgotten as if his book were a mere escape of gas."

Sir Leslie Stephen (*Dictionary of National Biography*) :—

"Paine deserves whatever credit is due to absolute devotion to a creed believed by himself to be demonstrably true and beneficial. He showed undeniable courage, and is free from any suspicion of mercenary motives."

Dr. Morrison Davidson :—

"He died as he lived, one of the grandest examples of intellectual piety, fidelity, and rectitude that ever breathed."

A. E. Fletcher :—

"Paine was the first man in America to demand freedom for the slave, to urge International Arbitration, justice for women, more rational ideas as to marriage and divorce, and to plead for the rights of animals."

Hon. Augustine Birrell, M.P., refers to "the complete resuscitation of Paine's reputation," and says :—

"If we are to follow the biographer the whole way we must not only unhang the dog, but give him sepulture among the sceptred sovereigns who rule us from their urns."

Rev. J. Page Hopps :—

"Paine was a splendid radical prophet, and therefore, though a thoroughly practical man, was only a teacher and leader born too soon."

Sir G. T. Trevelyan (*History of the American Revolution*) :—

"Thomas Paine brought to the study of the American Revolution a mind neither profound nor cultivated, but agile, vivid, and impressible, quick to see into things, and marvellous in its power of stating them with lucidity, with liveliness, and with incisive force."

John Morley (*Life of Burke*) :—

"Mackintosh replied to the *Reflections* with manliness and temperance in the *Vindicie Gullicae*. Thomas Paine replied to them with an energy, courage, and eloquence worthy of his cause in the *Rights of Man*."

W. J. Fox, 1845 (*Lectures on Burke and Paine*) :—

"Those who can be induced attentively to read his pages will find much more than the common mode of speaking of him has ever led them to anticipate. They will find that, although there may not be the splendid imagination of Burke, nor his diversified attainments, yet that there were acquisitions neither few nor small, that there was a keen and powerful intellect, and a philosophical mind going to the foundation of every question; bringing first principles forward in a luminous and impressive manner, and often with great felicity of expression; enshrining the truth in a happy phrase, that fixes it in the fancy, and gives it a power over the understanding."

Acid Drops.

Canon Horsley has been blackguarding the Church of England laity. They raise several millions a year for Church purposes, over and above the revenues from endowments, but this doesn't satisfy the horse-leech clergy, for whom Canon Horsley was speaking at the late annual meeting of the Curates' Augmentation Fund. This is how he was reported in the *Daily News* :—

"He attributed the want of funds to the want of honesty amongst the laity. When the laity became more honest in their duty, then the grants would be increased largely both in amount and in number. Where was the honesty of the church laity? As a matter of fact, it did not exist at all. The laity of the Church were a very 'spongy' lot; they were ready to get all they could out of their parsons in every possible way, and they would borrow 5s. just as readily as they would call them knaves behind their backs. They expected the clergy to work enthusiastically, and themselves stood by and criticised. That was all they did. There were one or two glorious exceptions, he knew, but the exception only proved that the rule was much more obvious than the exception."

Now if all this were true, it would only prove that the Church of England is an utter failure from a moral point of view. Nearly all the sheep in its fold being a very "spongy" lot—perhaps the proper word in this connection is "mangy"—it follows that the Church itself is a very rotten institution. We daresay Canon Horsley did not see this, and perhaps he now wishes he had spoken more cautiously. As it was, he went on to the bitter end, and wound up by declaring that the "laity should help ten times as much as they did at present." Ten times as much! Evidently the gentlemen of the Black Army have a tremendous swallow for hard cash.

Amongst the May meetings was the annual gathering of the Christian Evidence Society. The greatest "howler" perpetrated on that occasion occurred in the speech of the chairman—the Bishop of Rochester. His lordship congratulated everybody concerned on "the increasing regard and respect for the character of the Lord Jesus Christ." Fancy a man—even a Bishop—talking in that way of a personage whom he professes to believe in as God Almighty. People are thinking better of him than they did! By-and-bye he will be quite a respectable character.

Dr. A. E. Garvie, another speaker at the C. E. S. annual meeting, remarked that "men who lived a moral life without professing Christianity lived it 'second-hand,' helped by their Christian environment." Will this gentleman kindly tell us how people who lived a moral life before Christianity existed were helped by a Christian environment, and how he explains the moral lives of "heathen" men and women in China, Japan, Burma, etc., who know nothing of Christianity?

We suppose we may take the Rev. Stuart Gordon Holland Shadwell Keen as a sample of those who live the moral life "first hand" under the inspiring influence of Christianity. This man of God has lately been in the Divorce Court, where his wife obtained a decree nisi with custody of the children and costs. Besides drinking heavily, and brutally ill-treating his wife, he debauched the governess and borrowed her money. The evidence against him was so bad that he took his counsel's advice and kept out of the witness-box. At one stage of the governess's evidence she exclaimed: "The rector is looking at me with those horrible eyes of his!" Whereupon the foreman of the jury added: "If I may be allowed to say so, the jury have noticed it, too." We leave this "first hand" moralist in the possession of the Christian Evidence Society.

Another poor Christite gone—God knows where, though we fear for the worst. Rev. Nathaniel Dimock, of Hemsted, Redhill, Surrey, left £18,193. No wonder we hear so much of the "poor clergy."

The Rev. Principal Selbie was quite right when he told the Congregational Union audience that "the Church could not over-emphasise sin," and that "before men could preach successfully the sense of sin must be recovered." Why, it is on sin that parsons live. To banish sin would be to deprive them of their bread and butter. Their only chance of a future is to keep the sense of sin alive. The moment this sense becomes extinct the Church will certainly die.

It is no wonder, then, that, in the opinion of the Rev. Mr. Goforth, the finest spectacle on earth is to see "congregations of men and women broken-hearted, confessing sins of

which those nearest and dearest to them know nothing." Such a sight fills a clergyman's heart with joy unspeakable and full of glory, because it involves a new lease of life for himself and his church. But, judging from a philanthropic point of view, it is impossible even to imagine a sadder and more humiliating phenomenon. The mere thought of it gives one a fit of the blues.

The Catholic *Herald*, having positively disgraced itself by its grossly prejudiced and unjust obituary notice of the poet Swinburne, has just done penance by pronouncing an eloquent eulogium on the late George Meredith. It refers to him as the "authors' author," whose "marvellous character-creations and descriptions of Nature" prove him to have been "a consummate master of his art," and whose "gallery of women characters is peerless." And yet Meredith was as thorough an unbeliever as Swinburne.

Things are not in a satisfactory state as regards the Catholic Church even in Italy. It is complained that at the Congress of Catholic University Students, recently held, there was "an element of discord," several students being clearly "influenced by the Modernistic spirit, taken in its broadest sense." The Rome correspondent of the *Herald* sadly confesses that the "influence of modern ideas on Catholic youth is a reality." The truth is, that the Italian Government, by taking "the education of the country entirely into its own hands, and using it for its own purposes," is "undermining the very foundation of the Catholic Church." Indeed, Dr. Martini, in a speech delivered at the said Congress, declared that "the learning of Italy to-day is in a debased condition."

From Dr. Martini's speech, it is evident that "the learning of Italy to-day is in a debased condition" simply because, being secular, it is robbing the Church of the very rock on which it has always stood. In the absence of dogmatic religious teaching in all the day schools, Christianity is in imminent peril; and to this fact the Church is fully alive. Dark in the extreme is the outlook for the House of God even in the Eternal City itself; and throughout Italy there is rapidly spreading "a Liberalism permeated by a Voltarian folly with regard to faith and morals, the danger of which is only too apparent." In fact, from the Church's point of view, "everywhere there are false ideas on every subject." Incontrovertibly, Freethought has every reason to be proud of the progress it is making in the most superstitious centres in Christendom.

Professor Macalister, presiding at the missionary meeting of the Presbyterian Church of England, held at the Queen's Hall, London, a few evenings ago, said that in China there is at present an open door for Christianity. "We must do our utmost," he remarked, "before the open door is closed as it surely will be if China receives scientific education without Christian." What a frank admission that Christianity and science are fundamentally antagonistic. What a naïve confession of the practical impossibility of converting a scientifically trained people to the Christian faith. What a flood of light the observation throws on the motive of the Churches in so fiercely fighting for religious instruction in all Government schools, and in being prepared to agree to almost any compromise rather than adopt the secular solution.

All the Churches are finding it extremely difficult to procure candidates for the ministry. Youthful ambition no longer looks for fulfilment in the direction of the pulpit. The story is going the round of the papers just now about a distinguished theological professor in Scotland that, on being met in the street one morning by a friend, and asked, "Professor, how is it that you are outside the College at this hour of the day?" he significantly answered, "Well, my class has got a gumboil, and won't be back at work for a week or so."

Principal Forsyth says that there are hundreds of preachers whose faith is loosened, who have lost "the note of certainty, of conviction, of life or death." He is quite right. Moreover, there are unbelievers in the pulpit, who preach the Gospel only for their daily bread, and who would rejoice to see a fairly safe way out.

The Rev. Bernard Snell, of South London, is a man of unlimited faith. He cannot paint such a horrible picture as England without churches. While admitting that the established creed-bound churches are hopelessly doomed, he maintains that the "Free Churches can safeguard the nation's advance, and translate the kingdom of God from an ideal into an actuality." How delightfully easy it is to pro-

phesy! Mr. Snell knows very well that at present even the Free Churches are, not only morally impotent, but steadily becoming both numerically and influentially weaker. What is there in the future that will translate them from lamentable failures into such magnificent successes?

"Deny it who will," excitedly cried a well-known preacher, "Spirit and not matter is the greatest thing in the Universe of God." That is audacity run mad. The dear man is acquainted with only the tiniest corner of the Universe, and with that only most superficially; and yet he speaks oracularly for the whole. In the following sentence this infallible guide of Christian Endeavorers betrays his quality: "Science is far less materialistic than it was twenty years ago, if we are to believe Sir William Crookes and other great savants." Who are the others? Sir Oliver Lodge and Dr. Russel Wallace; and the whole three are Spiritualists. One scientist, though a crank, if on the Christian side, represents all the best science of the day!

We are told that when the Lord adds to the Church "there is no subtraction to follow." Then, why doesn't the Lord always add, and add all the world? Who adds when a revival is on? Seventy-five per cent. of such additions get detached again in a few weeks or months. Does the Devil take part in the addition work?

The Rev. Mr. Rattenbury informs an orthodox working-man in the North of England that his opinions about the Old Testament are quite wrong. Most of this orthodox man's fellow-workers in a factory are not Christians, and they ask him awkward questions about the Bible which he confesses he cannot answer effectively, with the result that their arguments shake his own faith. Mr. Rattenbury tells him plainly that the Infidels are nearer the truth concerning the Old Testament than himself, and then advises him never to argue with them, assuring him that the sun never did stand still, and that the story of the Garden of Eden is not necessarily a narrative of what happened six thousand years ago. Fancy a Wesleyan minister writing like that! Why, the most strictly orthodox Protestant Churches are now being thoroughly permeated with Freethought. Only yesterday people were burnt at the stake for infinitely less heresy than Mr. Rattenbury publicly owns up to without a protest from any quarter.

Rev. Eric S. Waterhouse declares that "a friend" of his "recently canvassed a large number of leading scientists, and out of 140 answers, 120 confessed to a belief in God; only 20 suspended judgment; not one replied in the negative." A general statement of this kind is not worth much. We could judge better if we knew the names of the "leading scientists," what was the precise question addressed to them, and what were their precise answers. There is a world of significance in the alleged answer of "one of the greatest" that he accepted "the teaching of Christianity broadly interpreted." Not honestly interpreted, not faithfully interpreted, but broadly interpreted; which probably means more or less accomodatingly—that is to say, dishonestly—interpreted.

According to a Central News telegram from Lisbon, a terrible thunderstorm burst over the cathedral at Avila during a special Mass designed to induce "Providence" to break up the long drought. The officiating priest and three ladies were killed by lightning, which also set fire to the altar. A mad rush was made for the doors, many persons being injured, and twenty-seven taken to the hospital. "He doeth all things well."

"Providence" has been active on the Spanish coast. Sixty-fishing boats foundered in one storm. "For his tender mercies are over all his works."

More "Providence." The earthquake in the New Hebrides destroyed the Tongoa Mission. "Providence" does not discriminate between friends and enemies.

A woman named Bouquet, at the village of St. Julien, near Chalou-sur-Saone, after hearing a sermon on Joan of Arc, shut herself up in a disused chapel, saturated her clothes with inflammable spirit, and set fire to herself on a pyre of wood and straw. She was rescued but died in frightful agony. Another blessing of religion!

A girl named Rice, at Higham Ferrers, sang hymns before throwing herself into the river. Verdict—Suicide while temporarily insane. More blessings of religion.

King Edward has given £2,000 to the Church of Scotland, for the extension of the blessings of religion to the Highlands. The Ministers and Elders didn't ask whether the money was won on Derby Day.

According to the seventy-second Canon of the Church of England, no clergyman may cast out devils without the license of the Bishop of the diocese. A most regrettable restriction. We hope the law will be altered to allow clergymen to cast out devils as they please. It is a pity to limit a profitable employment.

The *Daily Mail* of May 29 had an editorial article on "Immaterial Things." These were recommended to its readers. The *D. M.* itself is after something more substantial.

A "hospice" in connection with the Church of England has been opened in Albert-road, Regent's-park, for "healing the sick by prayer and the laying on of hands." This is as fine a piece of humbug as we have heard of lately. Peculiar People, who trust to prayer and the laying on of hands, are sent to prison as felons for the "manslaughter" of their children when they happen to die under that treatment; and the clergy of all denominations never raise a finger nor utter a word against the imprisonment of those poor New Testament enthusiasts. Yet clergymen are now pretending to do what the Peculiar People are severely punished for doing, and newspapers like the *Daily Chronicle* devote long reports to the enterprise.

A Busy God.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father..... But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."—MATTHEW x. 29, 30

WHILST the Lord was busy watching cheeky sparrows, small and big,
Softly chirping feathered gossip as they hopped from twig to twig,
Whilst he watched them with attention, listening to their voices sweet,
He ignored the fact that Smithers died of having naught to eat.
Said the Lord, "'Twas rough on Smithers,
But the poor are always with us,
And their prayers are most annoying—they're a nuisance,
one and all;
When I'm gazing on my birdies
None of their petitions heard is:
I must watch my darling dickies lest they topple o'er and fall."

Whilst the Lord was busy counting every hair on Tommy's pate
(Why he sought to know the number heavenly records do not state),
He was told that certain creatures, worshipers of Christ on earth,
Were despatching one another—yea, for all that they were worth.
Said the Lord, "I really oughter
Stop this sanguinary slaughter,
For I know the gentle Christian when he starts a-seeing red:
It behoves me, then, to mention
That I'll give my best attention
To the matter when I've counted all the hairs on every head.

When my 'worms' have all abandoned every trace of thatch on top,
When the sparrows need no 'Father' to attend them on the hop,
Then I'll see all wrongs are righted, then I'll conquer death and hell.
Now possess your souls in patience.....I am Yahvoh! All is well!"
Said the people, "Wily Father,
We have heard thee, and we'd rather
Have a grain of good at present than a ton when ends thy task.
We your Godship hate to worry,
But, you see, we're in a hurry—
No more yarns of what you will do; deeds, not words, are what we ask!"

JOHN YOUNG.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

Tuesday, June 8, at 8 p.m., St. James's Hall, Great Portland-street, London, W.: Paine Centenary Celebration.

To Correspondents.

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £202 7s. Received since.—C. Neville, 5s.; A Friend, per L. H. W. Mann, 3s.

C. NEVILLE.—Glad you still find the *Freethinker* so enjoyable after three years' reading, and that you have been amply repaid for your travels to Liverpool to hear our lectures.

J. GRANDON.—Mr. Foote will not be doing any more lecturing work till September. He wants to overtake his arrears of other work—and to get a little rest by the way.

T. W. HAUGHTON.—Thanks for cuttings.

T. V. WILLIAMS.—See paragraph. Thanks.

LLANDUDNO READER.—You will see we have referred to it.

W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always welcome.

L. H. W. MANN.—Your "Reflections on Eastertide" should do good.

F. C. HOLDEN.—Next week.

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

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

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

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

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.

This is the last announcement we can make of the Paine Centenary Celebration at St. James's Hall, Great Portland-street, London, W., next Tuesday evening (June 8) at 8 o'clock. Nobody capable of attending this meeting is likely to be able to attend another of the kind. It is now or never for everybody. We hope the Freethinkers of the metropolis are resolved not to miss this historic gathering. The hall should really be crowded out. There is an attractive list of speakers—including Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, Mr. Herbert Burrows, Mr. George Greenwood, M.P., Mr. Harry Snell, Mr. A. B. Moss, Mr. F. A. Davies, Mr. C. Cohen, and Mr. G. W. Foote. Admission to all parts of the hall is free, but a collection will be taken up towards the expenses. Reserved-seat tickets, for elderly persons, ladies, and persons coming from a distance, can be obtained of the N. S. S. secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, 2 Newcastle-street, E.C. Our final word is—Let this meeting be worthy of its great object.

The report of the proceedings of the National Secular Society's Annual Conference at Liverpool will appear in our next issue. The Annual Report, read by the President, appears in this week's *Freethinker*. We may state that everything passed off satisfactorily at the Conference, and Mr. Foote was, of course, re-elected President. The evening public meeting at the Picton Hall, in spite of the brief advertisement—owing to the circumstances explained in the Annual Report—was a great success; the attendance being very large, and the speakers all in their very best form. Not a line of report appeared in the local press, however; the only reference to it being a disgraceful paragraph in the *Evening Express*, evidently written by an unmentionable Christian Evidence agent. It should be added that the Whit-Monday excursion to Llangollen was attended by more than sixty delegates, visitors, and members of the Liverpool Branch, besides a party of "saints" who came all the way from Birmingham.

Mr. Foote, who attended the excursion—a thing he has seldom been able to do lately—was in London the next morning by 12 o'clock, rather tired, but seeing the *Freethinker* through the press.

The *Sunday Times*, the *Western Mail*, and other papers have drawn attention to our last week's article on George Meredith. The *Western Mail's* editorial suggests that the refusal of burial in Westminster Abbey was based on the fact of his heterodoxy. "That Meredith's creed was not orthodox," it says, "is shown by some statements made by that militant Freethinker, Mr. G. W. Foote, with whose cause the novelist seems to have sympathised very strongly."

Mr. Foote's articles on Swinburne have been reproduced—with proper acknowledgment—in the *New York Truthseeker*.

"Abracadabra's" new series of articles is quite unavoidably postponed for another week. It could not be got into the present week's make-up.

The sparse supply of paragraphs in this week's *Freethinker* is due to the holidays and Mr. Foote's week-end absence in connection with the N. S. S. Conference. Compensation will be made next week.

Russian Religious Fanatics.

BABY "ANTI-CHRIST" MURDERED. "PROPHET'S" HYPNOTIC INFLUENCE.

THE Mophileff Circuit Court, sitting at Gorki, has acquitted all twenty-six peasants of Sysvevo village, who were charged with the murder of a two-year-old child, who had been denounced as "Anti-Christ." The instigator of the crime, a religious fanatic, and the father of the child, were released on the ground that they had acted in an excess of mental exaltation.

The self-styled prophet seems to have hypnotised the degenerate peasants into a state of brutal frenzy. After he had named the "Anti-Christ" who had appeared in their midst, and had ascribed all the woes of Russia, and more particularly the bad harvests of Sysvevo, to his arrival, the peasants marched in procession to the hut of the child's parents. Midnight was the hour chosen for the sacrifice.

The peasants carried lighted candles and ikons, and sang prayers. They found the child asleep in its cradle. The "Prophet" seized it in his hands and dashed it to the ground, then jumping on it and trampling it to death. He next ordered the peasants to lift the body and pull it asunder, and they obeyed his injunctions. Afterwards hatchets were fetched and the body was chopped to pieces. The remains were then wrapped in a cloth, which was tied to the tail of a white horse and dragged to a neighboring bog, into which it was thrown.

The "Prophet" had assured the peasants that the child would immediately rise from the dead, and when the promise was not fulfilled they began to realise the enormity of their crime and fear for the consequences. They were arrested the following day. During the trial they all admitted their guilt, although eleven of them declared that they had taken no actual part in the butchery.

The village priest testified to the remarkable influence exercised over the peasants by the "Prophet," who was thoroughly versed in Holy Writ, and, with diabolical speciousness, distorted the sacred writings to support his fanatical theories.

When the verdict of acquittal was announced all the prisoners fell on their knees thanking God, and blessing the judges.

THE LATEST REVISION.

"You call this the up-to-date family Bible," said the prospective purchaser; "in what respect does it differ from the standard Bible?" "Well," replied the book agent, "you will notice that it not only contains records of births, deaths, and marriages, but divorces as well."

CARRYING RELIGION A LITTLE TOO FAR.

"John," said the minister to the sexton, "that pulpit cushion is worn out. I wish you would see that a new cover is put on it."

"Yes, sir," said John, grimly; "I know it's worn out, an' it's the third this year. It ain't my place to make remarks, sir, but, in my opinion, there is such a thing as carryin' religion a loettle too far."

The Early Life of Thomas Paine.—IV.

Social, Political, and Religious Reformer.

BY W. G. CLARKE.

(Concluded from p. 348.)

CHAPTER VII.

SUBSEQUENT VISITS TO THETFORD.

Paine left his home at Thetford in 1755, and apparently did not again return until July, 1761, when, having renounced staymaking, he came home for the purpose of studying for the position of an exciseman. He came with a varied experience of life. In the comparative peace and retirement of his parents' home at Thetford, he devoted himself to study, and doubtless also to inducing his friends to "pull the strings" by which alone he could obtain an entry into the government service. The chief of these friends seems to have been Henry Cocksedge, who had succeeded Sir John Wodehouse as Recorder of Thetford, and was in 1762 succeeded by the Earl of Hertford. He had also been Mayor of the borough a portion of the year 1719 (the Mayor having died during his year of office), and also in 1721, 1725, 1729, 1737 (the year of Paine's birth), and 1745. Chiefly through his influence Paine was appointed, after fourteen months' study, a supernumary of excise. On December 1, 1762, he was appointed to gauge brewers' casks at Grantham.

In February, 1768, he paid a brief visit to Thetford after having been promoted to the position of excise officer at Lewes. When next he saw his native place he was a man of almost world-wide notoriety, for the great American Revolution had taken place, and the War of Independence, in which he took so prominent a part, fought. On September 3, 1787, he arrived in London from America, and proceeded straight to Thetford, entering the town by the London-road, past the old Grammar School where he was educated, the Bell Hotel (little changed since then), to Heathenman-street (now Guildhall-street). His father, from whom he received affectionate letters to the last, had died the year before, and his mother had left the house in White Hart-street, and was living at No. 9 Heathenman-street, in what is now the fifth house east of Pike-lane, on the north side of the street. It is an ancient house of lath and plaster, color-washed, with low door and steps leading down from the street to the entrance-hall. It is probably over 200 years old. Here he stayed several months, and it is doubtless owing to this fact that there are strong traditions as to his having been born there. The name of the street—though occurring as early as 1507—also harmonised in popular thought with Paine's reputation, and was doubtless a factor in the persistence of the tradition. "Heathen-man" had, however, nothing to do with Paine, but may, perhaps, have referred to the Danes, who were described as "heathen-men" in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. This house was in St. Mary's parish, but the registers contain no record of the Paines of that period. On this occasion a local barber named Jack Whistler shaved Paine, and in later years related this fact to Mr. Stephen Oldman, who went to school in the house, and died in 1901 at the age of 85. With his father dead, and his mother aged 91, Paine would doubtless be somewhat lonely; and writing to Jefferson from Thetford early in 1788, he said: "After I got home, being alone and wanting amusement, I sat down to explain to myself (for there is such a thing) my ideas of national and civil rights, and the distinction between them."

How did the people of Thetford look upon Paine as he walked the quiet streets of the town, sat in the meeting-house, or chatted with the friends of his boyhood—Paine who had written *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*, had fought with the sword against the soldiers of George III., had given ungrudgingly of his time, his talents, and his money to the cause

of the revolution, had filled some of the highest positions in the government of America, and was the intimate friend of George Washington and the revolutionary leaders? So far as we can judge from negative evidence, they evinced no hostility to Paine. With an illiterate populace, newspapers expensive, and with no organised system of obtaining accurate information, it seems probable that Paine's share in the American Revolution was not generally known. The *Rights of Man* which aroused so much political prejudice, and the *Age of Reason* which caused Paine and his memory to be assailed for a century by calumny and bigotry, had not yet been written. It is more than probable that at that date, even had the facts as to Paine's connection with the War of Independence been commonly recognised, sympathy would have been not altogether on the side of George III. Doubtless Paine found some of his schoolboy friends to whom he could talk of his adventures across the seas, and of his friendships with the leading spirits in the newly-formed United States. On Sunday he may have escorted his mother the two hundred yards or so to the Friends' meeting-house and sat with her in the barn-like building listening to the testimonies of the saints, and possibly judging their utterances by the known facts as to their daily life. On this occasion Paine settled on his mother an allowance of 9s. per week, but whether he was ever again in the town is not quite certain, though he was probably there at the burial of his mother in May, 1790.

His connection with Thetford was frequently alluded to by friends and foes during his lifetime. On May 23, 1791, a caricature by Gillray was published, depicting Paine measuring the Crown for a new pair of revolution breeches. There is a lengthy soliloquy beneath in which occurs the following: "Lord! Lord! I wish I had a bit of the stay-tape or buckram which I used to cabbage when I was a prentice, to lengthen it out. Well, well, who would have thought that I who have served seven years as an apprentice, and afterwards worked four years as a journeyman tailor," etc. Another caricature by Gillray published in 1793 represents Paine fitting Britannia with a new pair of stays—evidently a painful operation. On one side of the picture is a cottage and over the door a sign, with the following inscription: "Thomas Paine, staymaker from Thetford—Paris modes by express."

Westminster Abbey.

"Aux grands hommes la Patrie reconnoissante."
—Inscription on the Pantheon.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY is one of the most venerated of buildings. Apart altogether from its religious aspect, it is rich with historic association. It is the last resting-place of many famous men, of every rank and creed, and of no creed, and every form of mind and genius. It contains the bones of Charles Darwin, one of the greatest of scientists, whose august name towers over the other celebrities buried there. One name alone surpasses his; but only a statue represents Shakespeare, whilst his dust makes Stratford-on-Avon the central spot of the world's idolatry.

The Abbey is to England what the Pantheon is to France, what the Valhalla is to Germany, what Santa Croce is to Italy. Yet, owing to clerical prejudice, it is but an imperfect and irregular commemorator of greatness. A building from which clerical hostility excluded Byron, Shelley, Swift, Pope, Gibbon, Keats, and Burton, while many of small and no fame sleep within its precincts, hardly deserves to be regarded as the Mecca of the Anglo-Saxon race. Westminster Abbey holds the dust of St. Evremont, a mere rake. It immortalises such actresses as Anne Oldfield, Susannah Cibber, Hannah Pritchard, and Anne Bracegirdle. It throws a halo round the memory of John Broughton, the prize-fighter, and

sanctifies the bones of Aphra Behn and Tom Brown, two of the meanest and most contemptible scribblers in the English language.

The Abbey should be the Valhalla of our greatest dead. If we except about a hundred of real eminence, it is crowded with the tombs of the illustrious obscure. For every eminent name inscribed on its monuments there are a score of nonentities either interred or commemorated within its walls.

It was Nelson's wish to be buried in the Abbey, but neither for him who made the world resound with the splendid tumult of his deeds, nor for Wellington, the victor of a hundred battles, was room to be found, for the Abbey must find space for the bones of its own dead clergy and sometimes of their wives.

One marvels at the monuments which meet the eye. The cenotaph justly raised to the Earl of Chatham, which proudly declares that he "was worthy to rest near the dust of kings," is jostled by the colossal monument to three of Rodney's captains, doubtless worthy individuals, but possessing no claim to such extreme honor.

This last-named monstrosity was long thrown in the shade, however, by the prodigious mass which commemorated the peaceful death of Admiral Tyrrell. Hard by rests Sir Cloudesley Shores, "wearing the eternal buckle of a long periwig." Tyrrell and Shores were brave men; but what is to be said for Generals Fleming and Hargrave, who never heard a shot whistle in anger? Hargrave was one of the richest men of his day. The clergy, who thought Isaac Watts, Mason, and Shadwell very great poets, had no scruple in honoring this military nobody. Hargrave's burial roused much indignation. The monument was by Roubilliac, and when Goldsmith saw it he said: "I find in the Abbey memorials erected to several great men. The names of these great men I forget, but I remember that little Roubilliac carved the tombs."

Some of the inscriptions, too, are in bad taste. The caustic remarks of the first Duchess of Marlborough, as she gazed on the epitaph erected to Congreve by the second duchess, with whom Congreve had been intimate, might have been uttered by Thackeray. The epitaph alludes to the happiness and honor the second duchess had enjoyed in her intercourse with Congreve. "Happiness, perhaps," scornfully ejaculated the Dowager, "but the less we say about honor the better."

To place the Abbey on a level with the wants of a great nation, it should not be the private property of a prejudiced and purblind priesthood. The Abbey should be the possession of the nation. A narrow and sectarian body is by no means a fit judge as to who is worthy to rest under the Abbey's time-honored roof. The clergy dare not admit that they excluded Swinburne and Meredith on account of their being Freethinkers. They hypocritically pretend that the Abbey is too crowded, and quietly find room for the deceased wife of one of their own archdeacons.

On this spot should be written the whole history of a mighty Empire. Here should be garnered the mighty dead. Under the present regime the Abbey's sculptured glories throw their shade over the tomb of the archdeacon's wife, whilst Swinburne and Meredith, two of the greatest geniuses, are excluded from what should be the British Valhalla.

VERDANT GREEN.

GOOD WORKS—NOT FAITH.

A Kansas preacher likes to tell this story on another member of the "cloth." This other parson missed his train one day because he relied on his watch.

"I can scarcely believe it," he said, as he looked dismally after the train just disappearing. "I had such faith in that watch."

"Well, it seems to me," remarked his companion, "that this is a case for good works rather than for faith."—*Kansas City Journal*.

National Secular Society's Conference.

THE ANNUAL REPORT.

READ BY THE PRESIDENT.

It is advisable to remind all who hear or may afterwards read this Report, as well as all who hear or may afterwards read the Balance Sheet, that neither covers nor represents all the activities of the Secular movement. The Executive in London does its own special work, but all the Branches throughout the country are autonomous, doing their own work, and collecting and expending their own funds. Moreover, a great deal is done now—officially apart from the N. S. S. altogether—by the Secular Society, Ltd., the incorporated body which was brought into existence in 1898 for the purpose of acquiring funds, by bequest and otherwise, and holding and expending the same for the Secular purposes set forth in its Memorandum of Association.

During the past year your Executive received handsome financial assistance from the Secular Society, Ltd. Not so large, it is true, as during the former year; but that was the year of the "blasphemy" prosecution, with its exceptional demand on the party's resources. Branches of the N. S. S. have also received a good deal of assistance from the same quarter; although these amounts, of course, do not appear in the London Executive's Balance-sheet.

There has been nothing particularly exciting in the past year's history. Steady work has been done through the regular machinery. Audiences at Freethought lectures have been well maintained, and in some instances much improved. It is also gratifying to learn that the *Freethinker*, which is edited by your President, and contributed to by several of your Vice-Presidents, has maintained the improved circulation it secured during recent years, and promises to advance again as soon as the general trade depression shows signs of abating.

Your Executive has to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of £42 12s. 6d. from the editor of the *Freethinker*, being one half the amount of the "Shilling Month" Fund raised by him during April.

With the growth of Freethought in so many directions—even inside the Churches—there is less and less discussion, and public debates are almost a thing of the past. The clergy appear to recognise that encounters of that kind do their cause far more harm than good. Nevertheless one public debate occurred in a remote part of the county of Durham, where Mr. C. Cohen very ably defended Secularism against a locally well-known Christian representative.

Taking the metropolis first in the general survey, it is to be noted that, in addition to the regular outdoor propaganda carried on by the London Branches during the summer of 1908, highly successful open-air Demonstrations were held in Victoria Park, Regent's Park, and Parliament Hill Fields. These great gatherings, for such they were, were addressed by Messrs. Foote, Cohen, Davies, Moss, and Heaford. Thanks are due to Mr. E. Wilson who provided a platform on each occasion in the form of a brake with a fine pair of horses. Under the financial auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd., courses of Sunday lectures have been delivered at Shoreditch Town Hall, the St. Pancras Public Baths, Stratford Town Hall, and Woolwich Co-operative Hall. The last hall was secured instead of the Woolwich Town Hall, where previous large meetings had incensed the bigots, who gathered their forces together on the Town Council, and passed a resolution debarring the Secularists from the use of a municipal building which belongs as much to them, as ratepayers, as it does to the Christians in the borough.

A noticeable characteristic of all these courses of lectures was that the audiences went on improving—and the smallest of them were really large, and would have gladdened the heart of almost any orthodox preacher in the neighborhood.

Courses of Sunday lectures, delivered by the President, have taken place also at Queen's Hall, an old familiar spot, and at the beautiful new St. James's Hall, which is the last thing in public halls in London. The meetings there were eminently successful, and an effort will be made to repeat and extend them next winter.

Sunday meetings of such a character, in such halls, would have been impossible, and even unthinkable, twenty years ago in London. This is one of the better signs of the times. Yet the Christian Churches still go on pretending that Secularism is a dead cause. They know better, but their instinct of self-preservation prompts them to resort to a conspiracy of silence now that open persecution is becoming so increasingly difficult.

The Annual Dinner at the Holborn Restaurant was a splendid success. Occasional social gatherings have also been organised by your Executive at Anderton's Hotel. The object is to bring the Society's members together in friendly intercourse, and make them better acquainted with each other. These functions have been much appreciated. They

are organised by the Executive because it is the only common machinery through which the various London Branches can act.

New Branches of the N. S. S. have been formed at Wood Green, Blackburn, Boston, and Liverpool. Of the last two of these more will be said presently.

Outside the metropolis a pause must first be made at Birmingham. The great propagandist effort in the Town Hall there has been continued. With the financial aid of the Secular Society, Ltd., the Birmingham Branch organised four more Sunday evening lectures in that famous building, the use of which was once more obtained by courtesy of the Mayor. These lectures were more largely attended than ever. Your President led off and wound up the course, and the two intervening lectures were delivered by Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd, who both had better meetings than they ever had in Birmingham before. The President's final meetings were remarkably large and enthusiastic. Yet nothing is due to the Birmingham press, which continued to ignore the Town Hall meetings until silence began to be quite too ridiculous. After the President's final meetings the Birmingham press woke up, and rubbed its eyes with a "Dear me!" look, and admitted that the Secularists were making wonderful progress. It is pleasant to add that, again by courtesy of the Lord Mayor, the Birmingham Branch has secured the use of the Town Hall for a further series of meetings next winter.

There is little to report from the West and South of England, which sadly needs a Freethought revival, and might get it if a few Freethinkers in half-a-dozen of the larger towns would only bestir themselves a little—leaving the Executive (for the present) to do all the rest. Bristol has been inexplicably quiescent, but is just showing signs of fresh activity. Passing along to South Wales, it is to be noticed that the Aberdare Branch continues to do gallant work, acting as a centre for the whole district. Its members are a handful of working men, and their constant devotion merits the highest praise.

From Wales to Scotland is a big leap. In the latter country the Glasgow Branch is still vigorously flourishing, with a good membership, ample funds, and large audiences. Under its auspices, lectures have been delivered in neighboring towns by Messrs. Cohen and Lloyd. The Edinburgh Branch has also been doing good work, mainly through outdoor meetings. There is talk of doing something at Dundee, which contains a good many readers of the *Freethinker*. Coming further south, the Newcastle and South Shields Branches are found; but trade depression has been very unpropitious to Freethought propaganda on the Tyneside during the past year. The Newcastle Branch organised the public debate in which Mr. Cohen took part at Auckland; an interesting experiment considering the thirty miles between the two places.

Yorkshire and South Lancashire did not adequately support the Wishart mission, which the Executive, after several hesitations, was finally obliged to drop. Manchester has a Branch and a Hall, where the President has had his usual large audiences during the winter. But the audiences have not been satisfactory on other occasions, and a fresh effort is requisite in the midst of that vast population.

Eastward, at Boston, where a Branch has lately been established, the lecturing activity of Mr. Joseph Bates—leading to the interference of the police and his imprisonment for "obstruction"—brought him into prominence. Some weeks ago the local bigots succeeded in getting him ousted from his employment, and in order that the movement might not be summarily extinguished there Mr. Bates was engaged by the Secular Society, Ltd., to do missionary work in the district. The experiment is too young at present, however, for any but the most speculative forecast.

Liverpool, which had for some time been a storm-centre, is happily settling down in peace and harmony for a successful future. The late Branch which, for several reasons, had fallen into a chaotic condition, was wound up by the Executive, with a view to uniting all the active and useful elements of Freethought in the city in an entirely new Branch. This effort at unity has given a great deal of work and some anxiety to its chief promoters, but it is succeeding admirably. Men and women of real good will—who have no wish to rake up the embers of old differences—are steadily flowing into the new Branch; and it is probable that in another twelve months the "old unhappy far-off things" will be practically forgotten. A few persons of mercilessly morbid memories may try to prevent this fortunate consummation, but the common sense and good feeling of the overwhelming majority are bound to triumph.

Sporadic cases of intolerance show that much remains to be done before freedom of thought can be a reality in England. The case of Boston has already been referred to. At Camberwell, in London, the *Freethinker*, on a most hypocritical pretence, has been thrown out of the Free Libraries' reading-rooms. This act of bigotry has the cheerful support

of the local Free Church Council; which enables one to judge how far the Nonconformists really love liberty—when it does not happen to be their own. A large protest meeting against this intolerance was held, and energetic action was taken against it by Mr. Councillor Moss, but he was voted down by the mechanical majority of his fellow Councillors. Here at Liverpool a kind of battle has been going on behind the scenes. The Tivoli Theatre was engaged for the evening public meeting in connection with this Conference, but the police and the licensing magistrates, acting arbitrarily and not legally, tried to upset the arrangement, and they succeeded to the extent of terrorising the lessee, who reported that they would not grant him permission for the Secularist meeting on Whit-Sunday. They pretended a desire to prevent Sunday meetings, but they permitted the Tivoli Theatre to be used on Sunday evening by the Zionites, and General Booth, and Mr. T. P. O'Connor. Sunday meetings were, apparently, only objectionable when held by Secularists. Happily the Committee of the Libraries and Art Galleries were a more civilised body—as is not exactly unnatural, and the use of the Picton Hall was granted just in the nick of time—thanks very largely to the tact and energy of Mr. John Hammond, the President of the united Liverpool Branch.

During the past year the Education question has been to the front again. The Government introduced its third Education Bill. It was based on the same old impossible "Compromise" and it met with the fate of its predecessors. It was ignominiously dropped. The Minister of Education lamented that no agreement could be reached by the Churches. This may be taken as absolutely settled. Secular Education, therefore, is the only feasible policy. This has been admitted by the President of the National Union of Teachers. It has been reaffirmed by the Trade Union Congress. It was also asserted by a public demonstration, convened by the Secular Education League, at St. James's Hall, with Lord Weardale in the chair. Your President was one of the speakers at that demonstration. He sits on the League's Executive, and is supported there by one of your Vice-presidents, Mr. C. Cohen. It is pleasant to state that they get on very well with the Christian members of the Executive. Such is the binding force of a common principle.

It is customary in this Annual Report to give a glance at Freethought in other parts of the world. One of your vice-presidents, Mr. W. W. Collins, is still lecturing at the Antipodes and conducting a well-written journal called the *Examiner*. There seems to be a considerable spread of Freethought in South Africa, where a good deal of Freethought literature is circulated. The Latin Republics of South America are largely permeated with Positivist and Secular ideas. In the United States there is no commanding figure to fill the place of Ingersoll, but the country swarms with a variety of Freethought periodicals, which must be producing no mean effect. The oldest Freethought journal in the United States, the *Truthseeker*, is bravely holding its own under the able management of Mr. George Macdonald. In Canada the monthly magazine called *Secular Thought* is still issued by Mr. Ellis at Toronto. In all the countries of Europe, including Russia, Freethought is spreading rapidly. It is well-known that most of the principal leaders of the Young Turks are Freethinkers. France has effected a complete separation between Church and State, and little remains to be done to accomplish the absolute secularisation of national life in the land of Voltaire. In 1910 another International Freethought Congress is to be held at Brussels, at which the National Secular Society will no doubt be well represented.

During the past year one figure well known to the Freethought world in America, and not unknown on this side of the Atlantic, has disappeared. Mr. E. M. Macdonald, who edited the *Truthseeker* for so many years, was a man of great practical ability and sterling character, and his loss will long be felt. Here in England, though outside the organised Freethought party, death has been busy amongst distinguished Freethinkers. Algernon Charles Swinburne, the poet, was a thoroughgoing Atheist. George Meredith, the poet and novelist, was the first of Humanists in contemporary English literature. Only a few weeks before his death he sent a cheque, with his name, towards the support of the most pronounced Freethought paper in England. This is perhaps the most notable fact of the year's history. Its significance is far-reaching, as will some day be recognised. Meanwhile the Secular cause is to be congratulated on winning the countenance of one who, for long before his death, was incontestably the greatest figure in the world of letters in this country.

Nine days after this Conference occurs the hundredth anniversary of the death of Thomas Paine. Your Executive is organising a celebration of that event at St. James's Hall, in London. No doubt there will be a crowded attendance. In addition to the N. S. S. speakers, including Messrs. Cohen, Davies, and Foote, there will be outside speakers

including Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, Mr. George Greenwood, M.P., Mr. Herbert Burrows, and Mr. Harry Snell. It will not be a sectarian gathering. It will represent, as far as possible, all who really admire Thomas Paine and are sincerely grateful for his splendid services to the cause of human liberation. And this report may well close with the remembrance of that splendid and effective soldier of freedom and progress, who first pleaded for the "Rights of Man" and then found that they could not be achieved except through the "Age of Reason." That discovery of his stands as the justification of the National Secular Society's existence. Every other liberty ultimately depends on mental liberty. To lose sight of this fact is to lose sight of the course of evolution; and the practical result is a succession of sterile movements, which keep the word of promise to the ear and break it to the hope.

God and Supra-God.

BY ARTHUR H. ADAMS.

LONG at his forge of the world,
God labored on in the dark,
Till from his anvil was hurled,
Redly rebellious, a spark.
Clumsy, this blacksmith, and blind,
Hammering vaguely his plan,
Till from one stroke undesigned,
Forging, haphazard, a Mind,
He had made possible—Man.

Still on his crude work intent,
Toil-worn and feeble and old,
God on his fumbling way went,
Making and breaking each mould.
Uni-cell, starfish and germ
Passed in and out of his dream,
Plesiosaurus and worm—
Each did its work for its term,
None of them finished his scheme.

But 'mid the debris cast out,
Glowed the red eye of the spark.
Coming the old gods to flout,
Smouldering lone in the dark,
Fiercely contemptuous, Man,
Flung in his corner unseen,
His new creation began,
Took up the clumsy old plan,
Fashioned the wheel, the machine

Slowly a new world took shape,
Bettering God's dim design;
He was content with the grape;
Man found within it the wine!
God merely scattered the seed,
Thankful his work was complete,
Till from that chaos of weed
With his imperious need
Man, the creator, brought wheat.

Giving his task with a sigh
To this strange god he had made,
God saw him build to the sky
Triumphs he never essayed.
Having evolved him the horse,
God drowsed again in his dream
Man, with his worship of force,
Man, with his God-like resource,
Multiplied it into steam.

Into God's chaos of pain
Man came to build and complete;
Made it with Justice more sane
Made it with Pity more sweet.
Finding a world but half-hewed,
Lacking the kindlier half,
Into this universe crude,
Strode this divinity rude—
Man, who created the Laugh

Man took his woman, a clod,
Lifted her up to his side;
Made her divine, like a god,
Put in her chastity, pride.
Poets and troubadors long
Cunningly made her their theme,
Hymned her away from all wrong,
Till she became as their song;
Peerless, she stepped from their dream!

God was content with the ape;
That his mean climax, his goal.
Man took that bestial shape,
Made it divine with a soul.
So with this soul to aspire,
Onward this Supra-God goes.
Which is the nobler, the higher—
God, who broke off at the briar;
Man, who created the rose?

—Sydney Bulletin.

Correspondence.

SOCIALISM AND THE CHURCHES

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Perhaps you would allow me, as an Atheist and a Socialist, to express my opinion, which is not quite in agreement with yours.

I cannot say what would happen if men were logical; but, being what they are, Freethinkers are able to be Conservatives or Liberals or Socialists, as Balfour, John Morley (I can't remember his new-titled name), and Robert Blatchford show. Also, Christians are able to be Socialists and anti-Socialists, to be Conservatives, Liberals, and Laborites. In short, the commonplace statement that politics and economics on the one side, and religion on the other, are two kinds of things, seems to be in accordance with experience.

Hence, I favor the cold-shouldering of men who must attack Christianity when speaking for Socialist bodies, just as you probably would not tolerate Secularist speakers at your meetings who spent long in explaining Socialism.

I believe I am right in saying that some prominent Freethinkers are Individualists. In my opinion, their failure to understand the importance of a change in the economic structure of society, and their over-estimation of personal intellectualism as displayed in arguing about the nature of the universe, as well as their contempt for that enthusiasm which grows up in a body of people organised to attain what they believe to be a great aim (whether their aim is quite correctly seen by them or not)—these Individualist feelings on the part of some old-fashioned and too-rational Freethinkers seem to me a danger to the progress of Freethought.

I hope the *Freethinker* will be able to find room for these remarks. I have sometimes found Freethinkers intolerant when the modern sin against the Holy Ghost—which is any attack on property—was at all hinted at.

ARTHUR D. LEWIS.

[This correspondent does not appear to see that his fourth paragraph invites a discussion of Socialism and Individualism in the *Freethinker*. The fifth paragraph is of the same character. But we are not easily caught napping.—EDITOR.]

Freethinkers' Wedding in Walworth.

WE have the pleasure to record a most charming wedding in South London. On Thursday last, May 27, at the Town Hall, Walworth-road, Mr. Robert Henry Side, eldest grandson of the Grand Old Man, Mr. R. H. Side, was married to Miss Ethel K. Penney, in the presence of a very large gathering of the members of the families. The breakfast was beautifully and most amply provided by Mr. and Mrs. Erle Douglas Side, who most kindly grant the use of their house for all important family meetings. In proposing success and prosperity to the bride and bridegroom, the veteran grandfather stated that he attributed his eighty-five years of good health and success mainly to the fact that he had been a total abstainer all his life, and begged the newly married couple not to allow intoxicants into their house. Followed by showers of good wishes, the happy pair departed for the Isle of Wight.

How oft around the well my Soul would grope
Athirst; but lo my pail was without rope.
I cried for Water and the deep dark Well
Echoed my wailing cry, but not my hope.

—Abu'l Ala (Arabic poet).

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, F. A. Davies, "Thomas Paine."

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15 and 6, Messrs. C. Cohen and A. B. Moss, Lectures.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road). 11.30, F. Schaller, "Science v. Bible."

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, J. W. Marshall, "Atheism a True Aspect of Life."

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Spouters' Corner): 11, a Lecture.

WOOLWICH BRANCH N. S. S. (Beresford-square): 11.30, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

DALKEITH (High-street): Saturday, June 5, at 7, N. Levy, "The Flood."

EDINBURGH SECULAR SOCIETY: Leith Links, 2.30, a Lecture; The Mound, 6.30, a Lecture.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, H. Percy Ward, "The Hundredth Anniversary of the Death of Thomas Paine." Wednesday, June 9, at 8 (Edge-hill Lamp), Mr. Ward, a Lecture.

WIGAN BRANCH N. S. S. (Market-square): Monday, June 7, at 8, H. Percy Ward, a Lecture.

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This Society was formed in 1898 to afford legal security to the acquisition and application of funds for Secular purposes.

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

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