

THE Freethinker

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Folly is acceptable, at least excusable, with the gods, inasmuch as they easily pass by the heedless failures of fools, while the miscarriages of such as are known to have more wit shall hardly obtain a pardon.—ERASMUS.

Christian Biography.

MATTHEW ARNOLD called History a Mississippi of Falsehood. He might have called Christian History a Mississippi of Malignant Falsehood. Herder was well-advised in saying that "Christian veracity" deserved to rank with "Panic Faith." There is a deliberate element in both. Christians have not only taken to falsehood as naturally as a cat laps milk, but have cultivated it as a fine art, and the way in which they have employed it against those they fear and hate is a perfect object lesson in their own doctrine of original sin.

Every great Freethinker has been the target for Christian mendacity. The lies about Voltaire would fill a book. A large supply has been bestowed on Thomas Paine. My readers will recollect how I had to take the Rev. Dr. Torrey to task, only a few years ago, for declaring that Paine eloped with another man's wife. Another lie from the same mint was that Colonel Ingersoll helped to circulate obscene books and articles through the American mails. These lies were thoroughly exposed, first by me, and afterwards by Mr. W. T. Stead, but the Rev. Dr. Torrey has not apologised for them yet. A countryman of his, ex-President Roosevelt, has described Thomas Paine in print as a "dirty little Atheist"—although he was clean, tall, and a Deist.

A complete collection of Christian lies about Charles Bradlaugh would be a weighty budget. But the latest one takes the cake. It seems to be a growing fable that he was half responsible for the birth of Mr. Horatio Bottomley—the other part of the responsibility belonging to Mrs. Besant.

The following is an extract from a letter which has just reached me from a reader of the *Freethinker*, and a personal friend of mine, resident in London:—

"Last Saturday I was at a musical gathering (several of those present being strangers to me), and during an interval, when the gentlemen were deprived of the presence of the ladies, the conversation veered round to Mr. Horatio Bottomley, the Editor of *John Bull*. The statement was made (and this was the first time I had heard it) that Mr. Horatio Bottomley was the son of the late Mr. Charles Bradlaugh. (I may explain that we were a mixed assemblage, simply met for conviviality and music). Instantly I questioned the speaker as to the source of his information, when another proffered the remark, 'Oh, yes, that's a well-known fact; and Mrs. Besant is his mother!' I was non-plussed, and had to content myself with observing that I had never before heard the suggestion, but would take steps to ascertain its truth or falsity, as I felt that the remark was made solely to asperse the name of Bottomley or Bradlaugh, or both, as Freethinkers, and was in all probability another pious lie. I should be so glad, Mr. Foote, to have your pronouncement, as I feel that you, at any rate, would know the facts, and will not trifle with the truth. There were some twenty gentlemen in the circle of listeners, and if I am able to contradict the statement I shall certainly take steps to do so with emphasis."

This story is so contemptibly silly that I should
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apologise even for mentioning it if I did not know what a credulous race of people has been produced by nineteen centuries of Christian conspiracy against the truth. Even my reader and friend, who is a capable as well as an honorable man, is a little apprehensive about this new effort in Christian biography. He inquires of me with a certain trembling. He feels I will not trifle with the truth. So much has "Christian veracity" infected the whole intellectual atmosphere!

I never heard that Mr. Bottomley was ashamed of his parentage. It would greatly astonish me to learn that he had any resemblance to Davenant, the poet and dramatist, who cultivated the idea that he was a by-blow of William Shakespeare's. Mr. Bottomley is not even dead. He is able to satisfy people as to the identity of his father and mother. And then there is the chronology,—which is easily ascertainable and settles the matter beyond dispute.

I became acquainted with Bradlaugh in 1869. In 1870 I was in the full tide of the Freethought movement. Mrs. Besant was not then on the horizon. She was the wife of a Lincolnshire clergyman, living at the vicarage, and nursing her two babies. Her age at that time was twenty-three. Differences of religious opinion separated her from her husband, and she came to London. She met with Bradlaugh's paper by accident. She went to the Hall of Science to hear him on August 2, 1874. She had never seen him before. In less than a month she was contributing to the *National Reformer* over the signature of "Ajax." Her first lecture was delivered at the Co-operative Hall, Castle-street, London, W., on August 25 of the same year. It was not on a Freethought subject. It dealt with "The Political Status of Woman."

All these facts and dates appear in Mrs. Besant's *Autobiography*. And in a general way I can corroborate them. I have a distinct recollection of her advent on the Freethought press and platform. I knew her personally while she was writing as "Ajax" in Bradlaugh's paper, which I was writing for myself. She did not begin lecturing for our movement until 1875.

Now comes an exquisite joke. Mr. Bottomley stated in *John Bull* a few months ago that he sat on the platform near Mrs. Besant when she delivered her first lecture. Behold the beauty of Christian biography! Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant first set eyes on each other on August 2, 1874. Mrs. Besant delivered her first lecture on August 25, 1874. Mr. Bottomley was able to attend public meetings and occupy platform seats. I know he was old enough, for I knew him personally. As a nephew of George Jacob Holyoake it was natural that he should run across me at the house of Mrs. Austin Holyoake, who had subsequently married Mr. Theodore Wright. I was living with them in 1875, and Mr. Bottomley was for some time an inmate of the house. He was then a lad of about fourteen.

Now I admit that Horatio Bottomley is a very clever man. But he couldn't possibly be as clever as this pious story depicts him. To get born, and grow to the age of fourteen, by August 25, 1874, although his parents never saw each other until August 2, 1874, is too clever a bit of business even for the honorable member for South Hackney.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Sham of Christian Belief.

THIS is a Christian country. So much is affirmed in numerous papers and from thousands of pulpits. And the statement is supported by proofs of a more or less conclusive character. Preachers point to our extensive possessions as evidence that the British Empire has been selected by Providence to carry the blessings of British rule—which is British Christianity disguised—to all parts of the earth; and whenever a new territory is conquered, or annexed, or protected, missionary advocates dilate upon the door that Providence has newly opened for the introduction of the Gospel. That this is the work of Providence is further proven by the spontaneous indignation with which the British Christian meets the attempts of other nations to carry on the same policy of evangelisation. It would be stupid to believe that, having selected us for the work, Providence would straightway appoint other nations to obstruct our process of religious expansion. The sinister and selfish motives of Germany or Russia are manifest to the poorest type of Christian intelligence. The work is ours—and if material profit accrues from this unselfish task, so much the better. But we are a religious people, resolved at all costs to carry British Christianity to the ends of the earth, and if other countries obstruct us—and Providence—they do so at their peril.

It is, therefore, regrettable, under these circumstances, that Mr. W. T. Stead should have struck a jarring note in connection with the International Press Conference. He complains that religious papers were practically unrepresented at that gathering. Further, in an article in the *Daily Chronicle*, he charges editors and journalists with systematically ignoring Christianity in their daily work. The ordinary press, he says, does not editorially recognise even a fifty per cent. chance that there is a Deity who cares anything for us or ours.

"Even those great fundamental postulates of all religions, God and a future life, are equally ignored. If anyone denies this, let him ask himself if a visitor from Mars were to read all the editorials in all our daily papers would he even for one moment have a glimmering suspicion that the men who wrote them or the readers for whom they were written had any faith whatever either in the existence of a God or in the persistence of our personality after death."

Now I probably think less of journalists in general than does Mr. Stead; yet I fancy this passage hardly does the knights of the pen justice. It may be true that they do not perpetually refer to the belief in God and a future life, and to Christian doctrines. Yet it must be admitted that British editors do what they can to protect and preserve these beliefs. Our press takes the most elaborate care to preserve with the unthinking public the conviction that all these beliefs are accepted by the wisest and best of mankind. For all that the public can learn from the general press, any such thing as an organised attack upon Christian beliefs might be non-existent. That this attack rests upon the most elaborate research, profound scholarship, and recent scientific acquirements, it would also never discover. Our press keeps up a most elaborate pretence that such people who do attack Christianity are vulgar, illiterate, and, generally speaking, horrible examples of what people ought not to be. If Atheism is mentioned at all, it is in connection with something of a most unattractive character, so that the public may be warned off by noting the unexpressed moral. Surely these services deserve some word of recognition. Our journalists may not believe in the strenuous manner in which Mr. Stead believes. But they believe up to the point of boycotting, misrepresenting, and slandering by innuendo in the interests of a creed that has always found these things conformable to its interests. And Mr. Stead might bethink himself that if our journalists did take to writing on religious subjects there might soon be less religion amongst us than there is at present. Few things are so well calculated to

encourage disbelief in Christianity as the arguments of its supporters.

For the rest, one may cheerfully admit that a visitor from Mars would be a little puzzled both at our religious beliefs and at the divorce between theory and practice. And, if it be true, as some speculative thinkers hold, that the Martians are more considerably advanced intellectually than we are, he would look at us in much the same way that a civilised European does at a tribe of savages. Nay, in many respects, he would group both Europeans and savages together. Without the possession of that fearful and wonderful cast of mind, only to be acquired by a theological training, he would be quite unable to distinguish between the religious beliefs of the two peoples. The savage praying to his fetish, and the modern preacher praying to his God, would be, to our Martian observer, only two terms in a series, the latter of which possesses no greater validity or value than the former. He would note with amazement a people who, while priding themselves on their scientific culture, yet maintained elaborate organisations to teach doctrines that are either a direct negation of ascertained scientific truths or are held without the least scientific warranty, and in defiance of scientific method. Such a visitor might well be puzzled to decide whether the modern European is a savage who has managed to annex someone else's clothes and learned to use his language, or the savage a European who has thrown off clothing and acquired a new dialect.

After all, the absence of reference to religion in our press faithfully represents the divorce between theory and practice in our daily life. Our belief is only a solemn pretence made respectable by its universal character. That really and only religious person, the savage, does act upon his belief. He believes the gods do things, and he invokes their aid and deprecates their anger accordingly. And, observe, that as a Christian people we fit out missionary expeditions to laugh at his belief and demonstrate their absurdity. We teach the savage that the fetish whom he can see, and does to that extent know, does nothing; and we offer him another fetish whom he cannot see, and cannot hope to understand, whom we tell him does everything. We find him savage and intellectually honest. We civilise him and transform a honest savage into an intellectual abortion. We ask him to become as we are, professing one thing and practising another, and we call the process developing his religious nature.

Mr. Stead is right; the people do not act on their religious beliefs. And the sufficient reason is that they cannot. The necessity for action over-rides the demands of theory, and, when something has to be done, religious theory is thrown to the winds and people act as their wisdom and their experience suggests. If a public man were to suggest that we should leave the settlement of the unemployed problem, the drink problem, the land problem, or any other problem to God, he would be laughed at for a fool, even by his brother religionists. Mr. Campbell tells us the leaders of the labor party are all Christian men. This may or may not be the case; the important thing is that they go to parliament to secure reform, as they might do were they all thorough-going Atheists. They may believe that God can do everything; they act as though the deity is powerless, without an act of parliament to back up his wishes. Christians may believe that faith can move mountains, but when a tunnel is to be constructed they call in the engineer and the navy. All Christians believe that the prayer of faith will save the sick, but the handful who act upon this belief are treated as criminal lunatics by their fellow believers, and imprisoned if one of their children die with none but the "divine healer" in attendance. In the black days of the South African War, when the British Army was experiencing a series of "reverses," Christians cried out for more guns, more men, more horses, better officers. None of them suggested that the need in South Africa was for more religion, or that a regiment of parsons

should be ordered to the front. Indeed, if the suggestion had been made to send to South Africa a few thousands of British parsons, none but Free-thinkers would have supported the proposal.

People can only act on their religious beliefs so long as these remain a true expression of the prevailing social and intellectual life. But no one can pretend that Christianity fulfils this condition. Even since the thirteenth century, at least, the history of Christianity has been a record of modifications and rejections. Every advance in knowledge, every improvement in social conditions has placed Christianity more completely out of touch with life. Its theory of prayer and of special providence has been so falsified by experience that the dullest refuse to act upon it, and the more astute treat it with a smile. Its teaching of miracle has been entirely discarded before the advancing conception of natural causation. From one quarter after another evidence has been forthcoming to discredit its special doctrines, until it is left an intellectually discredited superstition, only maintaining its existence because of the more or less interested efforts of thousands of special pleaders.

The practical exclusion of religious journalism from the Press Conference was no more than an unconscious recognition of this fact. I say unconscious because, had it been thought necessary, religious organisations have strength enough to secure a representation. And, in spite of the flattery poured upon the assembled journalists by many of the speakers, newspaper editors and writers would have played their old and dishonorable game of backing up a set of religious beliefs in which they probably do not believe. But it was evidently not thought of; the Conference met for business, and when practical matters came to the front religion was kept in the rear. So far as it goes, Mr. Stead's indictment merely emphasises how much of an organised humbug modern Christianity is. It lives, as it has done for centuries, a mere parasitic existence, tyrannising where it can, fawning where it cannot play the tyrant, pursuing a mean career to a dishonorable grave.

C. COHEN.

History Distorted.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the havoc wrought by theologians whenever they touch history. They seem incapable of supplying anything like an accurate and proportional presentation of its facts. They have a specific, selfish purpose to serve and everything must be brought into subjection to it. Even when they conscientiously desire to be fair their theological bias inevitably blinds them to the truth as clearly seen by impartial outsiders; and the mischief is that they are never prepared to acknowledge their blindness. Indeed, they are absolutely certain that they are the only people who see aright. They fondly imagine that Heaven has appointed them sole interpreters of all the facts of history, and that all others are but dangerous interlopers. Their first error consists in treating the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as the only reliable mirror of the world. These contain every scrap of information about man worthy of preservation. As an eminent divine says: "All that man was, and is, and could be, in his moral and religious development, has got itself stored in these wonderful pages. They are typical of man at his best and at his worst. They are the most pregnant sample of his sins and sorrows, joys and fears, hopes and falls." At least, that was the light, according to this pulpit genius, in which Jesus regarded the Scriptures with which he was familiar. How on earth does the reverent gentleman know what Jesus thought about the Old Testament? There is certainly nothing in the recorded life of the Galilean to indicate that he saw in the document the most accurate picture of man as he was, and is, and ever shall be, "in his moral and religious development," nor is there the slightest

hint that to him "the heathen world was there represented with its deep-lying, ancient movements, with its vast ambitions, with its high culture, with its wealth and splendor, with its armies and its gold, with its tyrannies and wars, with its cruelties and its wrongs, with its arts and its glories, its laws and civilisations, its rise and fall of empires, its mysterious dooms." This modern priest has the temerity to attribute his own doctrine of the Bible to Jesus of Nazareth.

But that is not all, nor the worst. Our modern divine not only ascribes his own views about the Bible to Jesus, but, under the influence of latter-day knowledge, he coolly misrepresents the Bible itself. He says:—

"And then gradually you watch men's inner ethical and spiritual being disclosed and specialised. Out of the dim welter of time attention is concentrated upon a peculiar people in whom man's efforts after God are concentrated with unique force."

Why were the Jews a "peculiar people"? Simply because it was believed that Jehovah had chosen them to be pre-eminently his own possession, or because he had seen fit to reveal himself to them, and not to any other nation whatsoever. It was the contention of prophet and priest alike that the Divine dwelling-place was in Palestine, and that all other countries were in the darkness of hopeless ignorance and unbridled wickedness. It is true that at first Jehovah was but one deity among many, though, perhaps, more majestic and powerful than all his rivals. But in course of time other gods came to be looked upon as nothing but idols, while Jehovah gradually mounted the throne of the Universe, and was declared to be the only living and true God. The consequence was that the Jews learned to look down upon and despise all other nations simply because they were believed to be without God and without hope in the world.

Such a doctrine of God spells Atheism. The whole of the Old Testament is purely Atheistical. A god that can indulge in favoritism annihilates himself. Aware of this, our twentieth century divine falls to sophistry. Listen:—

"Yet special and peculiar as is the notice bestowed upon this peculiar people, it is as representative of all men that they are thrust forward. It is humanity's soul story that they embody. It is man in his innermost, inherent reality that we watch at his work and in his growth."

Unfortunately for our divine, he flatly contradicts the very Scriptures whose praises he is singing. Again and again are we told in the Old Testament that the Supreme Being's treatment of Israel was partial, entirely different from his treatment of all others. It was to them alone that he entrusted his oracles. They were the only elect nation. All others were aliens, foreigners, barbarians, gentiles. According to the Gospels, Jesus did not intend that any but Jews should enter into his kingdom and reign with him in glory. The gentiles were to enter in only after the Jews had declined the privilege. As a matter of fact, however, the Jews were not superior to all other nations. The very books which speak of them as heaven's darlings, as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, describe them as "a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that deal corruptly." Although Jehovah is represented as so loyal to them, they were constantly running away after other gods.

The divine claims that the whole history of mankind is in the Bible, and that Jesus Christ takes this history all up "and absorbs it and assimilates it, and lets it pass into his very blood." Everything in and about him is "according to the Scriptures." "He sweeps it all in. He identifies himself with it. Even the woeful cry that has come out of that sad past into these pages shall be taken up on to his lips. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'—so the poor, broken sufferer in his lone agony had cried in some ancient night of despair. So Jesus Christ will cry again—making it all his own—from the Cross." And yet every careful student of the New

Testament is fully convinced that "According to the Scriptures," or "That the Scriptures might be fulfilled," is the emptiest and most artificial of phrases. The connection between the Old Testament and the New is purely mechanical, not in the slightest degree vital. In Jesus no prophecy was fulfilled, and no national aspirations realised; and it is equally true that he was not the founder of Christianity. Indeed, one theologian naively observes that Jesus read himself into the Old Testament. It would be more accurate to say that the reading in was done by the writers of the Gospels; and it was they, in combination with many others, who founded Christianity, and read him into it.

The story of the Bible culminating in the story of Jesus, we are solemnly assured, is the story that has transformed the world. But the assurance is wholly false. In the first place, the world has not been transformed. It has never moved steadily onwards. There has never been clear, uninterrupted progress. The world has been turning on its axis rather than running forwards on rails. In the second place, whatever improvement may have taken place in the moral condition of the world has been the outcome, not of the interference of any God-man, nor of the transforming efficacy of any story, but of the natural evolution of humanity; and evolution simply means movement, not necessarily, and certainly not always, an advance. History is a record of events springing from diverse motives, of human life subject to the law of ebb and flow, not of a continuous, though slow, march upwards towards a grand ideal. It is a mischievous misrepresentation and distortion of incontrovertible facts to assert that Jesus, or another, has redeemed mankind or saved the world. What mankind need is not redemption or salvation, but increased self-knowledge, self-culture, and self-awakening. Moral codes we have almost in superabundance; what we lack is moral force and fervor, and these can be acquired only by practical moral training, or by bringing an ever-growing intelligence to bear more and more closely upon the art of actual living.

The theologian bids us look at the Perfect Man and grow into his likeness. That might be a good advice were the Perfect Man, on any terms, visible. But, alas, he has never yet appeared on our planet, and it is safe to predict that he never will emerge. Were he to come, the Perfect Man would be a perfect nuisance. Perfection, in the moral realm, is always an ideal, never an actuality. Life is an aspiration, a struggle, a chase. Achievements are but stepping-stones on the upward road. And it is so easy to slip backwards and downwards. It is said that if we scratch the most civilised person living we shall see a savage. The moral difference between a raw Zulu and the wisest European philosopher is but skin deep. Civilisation is only a veneer, that can so easily be washed off. No story, no person behind a story, no supernatural grace conveyed by supernatural agencies, has ever transformed the world, or any portion thereof, and any pulpiteer who contradicts this statement is merely romancing.

According to theology, the fundamental condition and means of progress is suffering. Take the press, says the preacher, and you must confess that only Christ can deliver it from its sins, and he only, by enduring the Cross. "Ah!" he exclaims, "Christ who so achieves its redemption—He must suffer. That record which you have printed of what man is makes the Cross inevitable." Now, the preacher says that simply because he finds this passage in the Gospels: "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer." Doubtless there is suffering in life, but it is there not as a Divinely appointed condition of salvation, but as an inevitable concomitant of progress in an evolving world. Taking Christendom as a whole, the truth is that most of the suffering in it in all ages has been caused by this Christian doctrine of suffering. The men who opposed the whole scheme of salvation as taught by the Church have had to suffer solely at the hands of that Church, in punishment for their fidelity to the truth of Nature. That

suffering, we rejoice to learn, is at last beginning to bear fruit in the gradual disappearance of the theological master-heresy. Man is slowly throwing off the galling yoke of superstition, and getting rid of the false Savior-gods born and bred in the ages of ignorance and slavish fear. It was inevitable that such mythological beings should come, but it is equally inevitable now that they must go. The law of progress is not suffering, but struggling, and in healthy struggling there is always much more happiness than suffering, while, in any case, most of the latter is the direct result of the false teachings of theology, Christian or Pagan.

J. T. LLOYD.

Notes From "The Fatherland."

AS far as I have been able to see Westphalia and the Rhenish Provinces, I have no hesitation in styling Germany a truly Christian country. The population seems to be about equally divided into Catholics and Protestants; but I have not yet met with any Freethinkers, though I am told that there are a few Unitarians in Hamm and Dortmund. Last Sunday I attended the service in an ugly old Lutheran church in Hamm, and some of the Lutheran churches are ugly—hideous enough to have filled the hearts of the early English and Scotch Puritans with undiluted joy. There was not the slightest taint of that unspeakably vile and wicked thing, Modernism, in the discourse. On the contrary, it was a refreshingly old-fashioned, evangelical address on the cleansing of the leper, and the power of the blood to cleanse an even greater disease than leprosy—Sin. Speaking for myself, I should prefer being the greatest sinner that ever was to passing my life in the lazaret. Only once—it was many years ago in Australia—have I seen lepers, and I have no desire to see any more. An English theologian recently wrote a book entitled *The Fact of Christ*, which was hailed by the religious journals as an important contribution to apologetic literature in the dark days of unrest in the orthodox camp. The same writer should pay a visit to a lazaret. He could then write a book on *The Fact of God*, showing how the existence of leprosy only strengthens the Theistic position. No doubt he would find the task quite easy.

In the larger centres of population here, however, Modernism is making itself unmistakably felt. All the reviews and important newspapers show that. The forces which in the past produced a Luther in Germany, and in these days have given France a Loisy and Italy a Fogazzaro, are still actively at work. And one part of Christendom is feeling the scalpel's probe as much as another. While the Holy Father is issuing encyclicals, sixty-five articles long, denouncing the insistent demands of certain modern scholars as "dangerous in philosophy, faith, theology, history, and criticism—the synthesis of all heresy," Protestantism is being stirred to its very depths by men like Harnack in Germany, Reville in France, and Cheyne in England, and even Mr. R. J. Campbell is constrained to come forward and give the results of his profoundest cogitations. He offers us "The New Theology," "Liberal Christianity," "The Cultivation of the Higher Self," and a number of other phrases. But with all their claims, both those that are sincere and those that are manifestly the special-pleader's, they are leading the forlorn hope, and it is not a noble forlorn hope either. Truly does Matthew Arnold say, speaking of Rome's pretences to rule the consciences of men, that Europe will not be again commanded to enter the prison-house and to allow the key to be turned upon its mental freedom.

In one respect German piety is much less offensive than the English brand—it does not try to make "the Sawbath" a day of gloom. Parades, entertainments, bazaars, and plenty of bright music, are quite the order of the day here on Sunday, and, as far as I can ascertain, no effort has ever been made by the evangelical section of the community (Anglican, the

Nonconformist Conscience) to enforce any other kind of "Sabbath observance."

Berlin papers of last week announced quite elaborate preparations for the entertainment of a large number of English men of God. It was expected that about a hundred and twenty bishops and Anglican dignitaries, and several leading lights of other denominations, would soon be welcomed to the German capital. Later, the Teutonic servants of the dear Lord will pay a return visit, and so the game goes on. Do the men of God serve for nought? Certainly not, and Modernism or no Modernism, they don't intend to throw up the sponge until they are absolutely and finally counted out.

At the Dortmund Stadttheater the Keppler Company has been recently presenting a number of Shakespearean plays, and on every occasion the theatre has been crowded. I saw *Henry V.* at the beginning of May, and thought the performance exceptionally creditable. Keppler's rendering of the part of the warlike king showed a knowledge of the fine points of a fine acting play, and the audience seemed well satisfied. The military spirit is strong here, and no doubt *Henry V.* suited their taste. I was sorry that I could not go to see *Hamlet* and *The Merchant of Venice* by the same company. These two plays would have been more in my line. But it was indeed pleasant to feel that in a commercial country and a commercial age—an age of Esperanto, phonographs, air-ships, motor-cars, Dreadnoughts—there are still men and women who have a thought above the latest quotations for pickled pork, or the dimensions of the latest battleship.

Yes, the military spirit seems to be deep-seated in the German people. Their position right in the heart of Europe, with other Christian powers on all sides, perhaps helps to account for their ever-active preparedness for war. And yet, long before the Confederation, every twopenny-ha'penny little State had its own standing army, and every petty count played the part of a great general. Some of these armed hosts consisted of sixty or a hundred men, and their commanders-in-chief exacted homage from the rank-and-file in true Teutonic fashion, or rather, proudly accepted what was humbly offered, for these little bands of warriors were animated by an intense patriotism, a sincere love of father-state, officers, and rulers. That spirit largely exists to-day, only to-day Germany is *one*. But this militarism is not a good thing. In the abstract it cannot be defended, though it must be admitted that no nation can neglect matters of defence while its neighbors are armed to the teeth. And many opponents of militarism regard the few years' drill, undergone by every able-bodied young man in the country, as a by no means unmixed evil when viewed as a disciplinary training pure and simple. Unfortunately, however, the notion instilled into the youthful citizen is not that of defence alone. The so-called glory of the thing, and the desire for national aggrandisement, are kept uppermost in the minds of each young aspirant. Hardly any system or ism that has ever existed has failed, at some time or other, to find advocates, or, at any rate, apologists ready with some plausible excuse. Why, learned men write avowedly in defence of superstition. This reminds me of a remark once made by Chief Justice Cockburn when he was practising at the bar. He said that a certain prisoner whom he had defended was "rather a decent fellow, except for the fact that he had committed two atrocious murders." Carlyle, whose admiration for everything German was almost unbounded, says somewhere: "Truly these Germans are a fighting, God-fearing race"; and he expressed the hope, after the capitulation of Paris in 1871, that the victors would exact the full reward of their successes. It may have been characteristic of a "God-fearing" man to triumph thus over a fallen foe, but it was not the remark of a humanity loving man. Surely the Freethinkers throughout the world will oppose militarism, and support all movements for the reduction of armaments. We are often asked what we

are going to give people in place of Christianity. Well, that religion has had undisputed sway for nineteen centuries, and what has she to offer now? Dreadnoughts. The workers ask for some of the comforts of life, and their Christian rulers reply, "Train eye and hand for fatherland"—that is, learn to shoulder a rifle and aim straight at your fellow-workers in some other country. Yes, Freethought has something to offer in place of religion.

I visited some schools in Dortmund and Hamm recently. The schools in this country are well organised, and the teachers are highly trained. That is indisputable, notwithstanding the fact—to me an unpleasant one—that the system is not entirely secular. As I heard all those little boys and girls,—the "sweet children," as our beloved Lucretius always calls them—repeating a lot of mummery, I thought sadly of Locke's words to the effect that it is of great importance what the child is taught, and that he should never be taught what is unreasonable. Returning in the train, I found my ears still ringing with those voices, and I perpetrated the following in my pocket-book:—

"Take the little children
With their open, trusting eyes,
Point the way to heaven
Up above the skies;
Tell them Jesus loves them,
He will save their soul,
All earth's joys are fleeting,
Heaven is their goal.

Privilege and Capital
Ample funds will find,
For Testament and Bible
To feed the infant mind;
But if you make the children
A worldly minded set,
Hell will cool for want of fuel,
Heaven will be To LET."

A. D. McLAREN.

A bird sings—a child prattles—but it is the same hymn; hymn indistinct, inarticulate, but full of profound meaning. The child, unlike the bird, has the sombre destiny of humanity before it. This thought saddens any man who listens to the joyous song of a child. The most sublime psalm that can be heard on earth is the lisping of a human soul from the lips of childhood. This confused murmur of thought, which is as yet only instinct, holds a strange, unreasoning appeal to eternal justice; perchance it is a protest against life while standing on its threshold; a protest unconscious, yet heartrending; this ignorance, smiling at infinity, lays upon all creation the burden of destiny which shall be offered to this feeble, unarmed creature. If unhappiness comes, it seems like a betrayal of confidence—
Victor Hugo.

Leave to the crowd its faiths, its fears,
Its dread of angry gods on high;
The gods in calm passivity
Care nought for praises nor for prayers.

Leave to the crowd its fears of death,
Or terrors that beyond may lie;
The worst can come to all who die
Is but cessation of the breath.

Who thus will his desires confine
To healthful sense and fearless soul,
Holds happiness in his control
And leads as man the life divine.

—J. A. Farrer.

It took several thousand years to convince our fine race—including every splendid intellect in it—that there is no such thing as a witch; it has taken several thousand years to convince that same fine race—including every splendid intellect in it—that there is no such person as Satan; it has taken several centuries to remove perdition from the Protestant Church's program of post-mortem entertainments; it has taken a weary, long time to persuade American Presbyterians to give up infant damnation and try to bear it the best they can.—*Mark Twain.*

Few of us realise what Shakespeare is becoming to the English people. He performs for us the service which Homer used to render to the Greeks. Homer was the Hellenic Bible, and more than the Bible. Shakespeare is the foundation and source of the higher education of the people.—*Oscar Browning.*

Acid Drops.

Mr. W. T. Stead complains that journalists are not sufficiently religious. He wants to see more religion in the editorial department of newspapers. May we suggest that editors know their own business (in this respect) better than Mr. Stead does? So few people are genuinely interested in religion. More are interested in sport and betting.

Mr. Stead is a bold and original man. He has written a long article in his monthly magazine on "Darwin: Genesis, Gospel and Apocalypse." He maintains that Darwin is one of the best friends that Christianity ever had,—but he refrains from saying what Christianity is. We invite Mr. Stead to tell us. It would be the most difficult task he has yet attempted, and we are afraid that even *his* courage will not be equal to it. If he does make the brave effort we hope he will try to be a little more precise in the use of language. He says, for instance, that Darwin has strengthened the Christian faith, first of all, by having "enormously heightened the sense of the marvel and the miracle of the world." Now this is mere confusion. "Miracle" is a word that should be used strictly in these discussions. Evolution has nothing to do with *miracle*—it is indeed the negation of *miracle*—in the old, theological, honest meaning of the term. We suspect that what Mr. Stead really means is that evolution has opened up to us a grander view of nature than orthodoxy presented. But dragging in such words as "marvel" and "miracle" is simply an endeavor, whether conscious or unconscious, to prejudice the case under consideration. Similarly, when Mr. Stead says that Darwin takes men "behind the veil and shows them the great Thaumaturgist at work," he is talking into his own hat. Darwin does nothing of the kind. He merely explains natural phenomena—that is, he shows their proper order of cause and effect. He does not supply introductions to the Thaumaturgist behind the scenes. Darwin did not believe in the Thaumaturgist behind the scenes. He did not believe there was any "behind the scenes." He left all that to the *unscientific* gentlemen like Mr. Stead.

We hope Mr. Stead will forgive us for saying that it is not intellectual honesty to deplore the "literal interpretation" of Genesis. "Interpretation" forsooth! The reasonable interpretation of all words is that they mean what they say. And they *did* mean what they say to the people who wrote them and the people who accepted them as the words of God. When you give up the "literal" interpretation you simply mean that those people were mistaken—and you should plainly say so. To read into the old words entirely new meanings is intellectually on a level with thimble-rigging and the three-card trick.

Mr. Stead must also try to forgive us for reminding him that he is very much behind date in talking about "the murmur of the sea" dwelling in the shell. That idea informed two fine passages in Wordsworth and Landor, but the shell, when you apply your ear to it, does not "remember its august abode and murmur as the ocean murmurs there,"—neither does it bring "authentic tidings of invisible things." What you hear in the shell is the reverberation of the beating of the blood in your own veins. And the echo of your own sound is all you ever hear in the shell of the universe.

All sorts of things are set down as due to the Budget. But the following takes the cake. Rev. John Adolphus Liddle Fellowes, rector of Bunwell, near Attleborough, Norfolk, after denouncing the new taxes on tobacco and spirits—about which he seems *very* much concerned—states that he will be obliged to reduce all his subscriptions, including his annual gifts to the poor at Christmas. The reverend gentleman cries, "Wake up, England!" Well, when England *does* wake up, what will become of such parsons? This one is blessed with a net income of £345 and a house rent free *now*. He may be lucky to get thirty shillings a week *then*.

James Smith speaks at last. He does it in the *Commonweal*. This is a Christian Socialist paper conducted by Churchmen—perhaps *for* Churchmen. And when a gentleman with the classic name of Smith writes in such a paper on such a subject as Shakespeare we may look for something uncommon. The special topic is Shakespeare's religion. James Smith has found it out. "I take it," he says, "to have been the Christianity of Christ." There you are. That will do. James Smith has spoken. And the world wouldn't suffer much if he followed the example of Balaam's four-legged friend, who astonished the universe for once in his life, and never spoke again.

James Smith says that nobody can read Shakespeare without perceiving that he "believed in an after-life." That is this great writer's (James Smith's, not Shakespeare's) second sentence. He winds up by quoting the famous Prospero declaration that—"We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep." What a curious proof of James Smith's conviction of Shakespeare's conviction! Good-bye, James Smith!

One Christian prayer, at least, seems to have been abundantly answered. The prayer was as follows: "O Lord, save us from the perils of modern thought; yea, O Lord, deliver us from all thoughts whatsoever." The moment Christians begin to dabble in thoughts, they become illogical, self-contradictory, and absurd. Their only safety lies in utter thoughtlessness, in which also is their death-warrant.

The Rev. Dr. Orchard, of Enfield, has made a startling discovery in theology. The Christian world has hitherto gloried in God as the loving Heavenly Father; but in future, according to this divine, he shall be known as our loving Heavenly Mother. It is so easy to be wise in matters that transcend all human knowledge.

We are certainly getting on, theologically. The Rev. Mr. Rattenbury has declared that "God is not an individual," but "a fellowship, a society." This is exceedingly luminous. A society is composed of individuals who have fellowship with one another. If God be a society it follows that he is made up of individuals; that is, that he is not one, but several. And yet Mr. Rattenbury has the audacity to affirm that there is but one God. He would represent the Deity as saying, "There are three of us, and we commune with one another to prevent loneliness, but we want all our creatures to think of us as if we were but one." What exquisite wisdom.

The Jesus of the Gospels is sufficiently egotistical, in all conscience; but not even he ever represented himself in so extravagant a language as that which Canon Scott-Holland attributes to him in a recent sermon. The Canon always culpably exaggerates, but for the following he takes the biscuit: "I [Jesus] am what man is meant to be by God. I fulfil his true and only Self. I satisfy the intention of his creation. I am all that man ought to be. No one can ever better it." Dr. Holland does not know what man may become, or ought to be; and there is nothing to indicate that Jesus himself knew. One gets tired of this man of God's ponderous coxsureness and prolix commonplaces.

Rev. A. J. Waldron took off his hat the other day and offered to sell it for the benefit of the Hospital Sunday Fund. We always thought his head wanted cooling.

Wales is not what it ought to be, if we may believe the Rev. Gwilym Williams, of Carmarthen. According to this gentleman, Welsh Nonconformity is a failure. "Our hypocrisy as Nonconformists," he says, "calls aloud to Heaven for punishment." He points out that the most immoral counties in England and Wales are those where Nonconformity is prosperous and the Sunday-school is flourishing. North Wales is worse than South Wales in the matter of illegitimacy. There are three illegitimate children in the north to every two in the south. Mr. Williams says he has seen naked figures of men and women sketched on hymn books and also on Bibles used in Sunday-schools. The minds of the young people seem to be saturated with unclean thoughts. Yet the Churches are silent.

What an impudent lot of "blasphemers" are most of the professional friends of "God"! Here is the Rev. G. T. Sadler, for instance—pastor of Christ Church (Congregational), Wimbledon, declaring that "God could not make a morally perfect race all at once." Fancy this poor little creature setting bounds to what God (if there be a God) can do! It is enough to make an elephant grin. Mr. Sadler informs the world that God had and has to work through evolution. He has been millions of years on the job, and the result is—Mr. Sadler. It hardly seems good enough for the Almighty to turn out after so much practice.

The salvation of Japan is at hand. It is about to be converted by and to the New Theology. "There are many followers of Mr. Campbell in Japan, and [wonder of wonders!] the *Christian Commonwealth* is read there." And yet we are bound to confess that, in spite of all this eagerness for the New Theology, Japan is declared, by a native Christian, to be, at the present time, in a most chaotic condition in relation to everything. And no wonder, when so many conflicting sects of Christians are knocking at its door. But the Japanese are in no real peril.

Rev. Dr. Jowett, the famous master of Balliol, and the translator of Plato, was a bit of a Freethinker in his way, and anticipated a good deal of the "Higher Criticism" in the Church of England. He had also a gravely satirical tongue. It was he who said, "We are none of us infallible—not even the youngest." Here is another *mot* of his. A discussion was going on about two Oxford men who had attained to high position at an early age. One of them had become a bishop, the other a judge; and the discussion turned on which was the better career. One of the speakers preferred the bishop's. "The judge," he remarked, "can only say, 'You be hanged'; the bishop can say, 'You be damned.'" "Yes," said Jowett, "but when the judge says, 'You be hanged,' you are hanged."

We referred last week to a remarkable article in the *Times* of June 8 on Thomas Paine as "The Greatest of Pamphleteers." We desire to return to it this week. The opening sentence shows how inaccurately even well-intentioned people write about the great Revolutionist. It is said that Paine "died in poverty and neglect in a miserable lodging house." As a matter of fact, he possessed an estate which brought him a reasonable income. His death took place in a comfortable residence; he had all the back part of the house to himself, he was tenderly nursed, and attended by Dr. Romaine, the first physician in New York.

We may quote what the *Times* writer says about the *Age of Reason* :—

"What he did in the political world he repeated with no less effect as to the religious systems and doctrines of his time. Their enemies, who were many, had fought hitherto behind walls and under cover. Their strategy consisted of secret hostile movements and of cutting off detachments. Their weapons were sneers, innuendoes, deadly stabs by men on whose lips were professions of friendship, and offerings of homage in which was hidden poison. Not wishing to be expelled from the Churches against which they plotted, they were unflinching in their outward homage. They were not much feared, because they had little direct power. Here came one who threw pretence to the winds, who was for open war and no compromise, who spoke in plain terms what the Collingeses, and Wollastons, and Gibbons whispered or insinuated, who took the people into his confidence and told the Radical weaver the results of the higher criticism in simple language which could be read aloud and understood in workshops and village smithies. A long-confined mass of incendiary teaching was at his touch let loose. It is one of the many distinctive points of Paine's style that he makes the reader confident in his ability to master any question. Like an adroit advocate addressing a jury whom he would win to certain opinions, Paine flatters his readers by persuading them that his conclusions are theirs. The effect of this pamphlet was vast. There was widespread alarm which it is now difficult to comprehend. 'Coolness is a crime,' said Bishop Watson in his famous answer to it, and a crime of which few were then guilty. Bishops must pen 'apologies' and law officers frame indictments."

The *Times* writer ends by suggesting that Paine's books were not words, but events in history; and that he was a born leader who could make men march to victory or defeat.

Professor Ernest Rhys, in his *Nineteenth Century* tribute to Swinburne, says :—

"He left English poetry reinforced at point after point, where he used his strength on real themes, and while he was at heart a Pagan—a Pagan of the Pagans—he was religious in his worship of nature, and if pantheism ever becomes a church, he will help to furnish its litany."

Swinburne was certainly a Pagan of the Pagans; but nature-worship is not necessarily pantheism. Swinburne only saw God in Man. The only God he recognised was the divine Humanity. He was therefore a Humanist.

Mr. G. L. Dickinson is an able and graceful writer, but his *Ingersoll* Lecture for 1909 on Immortality only adds a new number to the list of futilities on that subject. Not one of the *Ingersoll* lecturers, including Professor James and Dr. Osler, has thrown a beam of fresh light upon the question of a life after death. Dr. Osler ends by declaring that the only answer to the question comes from Faith. Mr. Dickinson discusses the desirableness of immortality. But what has this to do with the problem? Any man may inform the universe of what he desires. Whether the universe will oblige him with it is quite another matter.

The *Dublin Evening Mail* devoted a leading article to the Boulter case. It was rather strongly worded, and made very free use of "indecent" and "obscene." But there were no such words in the Boulter indictment. He was

prosecuted for pure and simple "blasphemy." Our Irish contemporary takes the position that freedom of speech is to be maintained as "one of the first gifts of life," but that "license" should be put down. It forgets that "freedom" is definable while "license" is not. We incline to agree that, if any difference is requisite, there should be more careful speech at street-corners than in halls. It may be quite true that the "ears of passers-by" should be respected—though this, again, is a somewhat vague proposition. But why should the decorum of public speech at street-corners be enforced by means of the Blasphemy Laws, which were not designed for that purpose? The Blasphemy Laws only apply to Freethinkers. Why should the vulgar Christian advocate go scot free? There is no freedom unless the laws are impartial. We trust our Irish contemporary will see now the weak point of its argument.

Last week's *New Age* contained the following paragraph :—

"Tom Paine's hundredth anniversary occurred on June 8th, and the *Times* devoted an excellent article to him, calling him the 'greatest of pamphleteers.' Two days later Mr. Harry Boulter, a tailor's cutter, was sentenced to a month's imprisonment for blasphemy. This is the kind of thing that stamps us as a nation of hypocrites. Blasphemy is no longer a crime outside the nursery—and the Liberal Cabinet."

This is so like the *New Age*. Our contemporary's besetting vices are cleverness and Liberal-phobia. The paragraph is a good one up to a point—for the *New Age* (we say it without sarcasm) is always written with ability. But our contemporary must have its dig at the Liberal Cabinet, and must also be clever even at the expense of truth and sound judgment. Moreover, it affects not to know that there is a multitude of people called Christians, who are still very bigoted, who do regard blasphemy as a crime, and are quite content to see the Blasphemy Laws put into operation. We beg to assure the *New Age* that the prosecutors in the Boulter case, the jury, and the two judges, are not connected with the nursery, except intellectually. They are all adult males. We believe, too, that not one of them belongs to the Liberal Cabinet. Mr. Gladstone, as Home Secretary, did not initiate the Boulter prosecution. His disgrace is that he stood by the police afterwards and justified their action. A braver and wiser Home Secretary would have stifled the wretched thing.

Charles Bradlaugh used to say that the great fight would be between Freethought and Catholicism, and we always agreed with him. Catholicism is the religion of the future as it is the religion of the past—in Christendom. There are many signs that it is more than holding its own. Take the following extract from the *Dublin Review* :—

"We learn from the latest edition of Keiter's 'Handbuch der katholischen-Prese' that in 1908 the Germans possessed no less than 500 Catholic newspapers and periodicals, including 255 dailies. The total number of subscribers is put at 6,687,530. It is astonishing to learn that the number has more than doubled in the last eight years. Such results have only been secured by careful organisation and unceasing effort. They are largely due to the exertions of various Catholic societies. Take, for instance, the *Augustinusverein*, which has done such excellent work during the last thirty years in the matter of improving Catholic newspapers. Nearly a thousand journalists are members of it to-day. They have their employment bureau, their literary agency, and their pension fund. By concerted action they are able both to swell their own ranks by offering a career to promising young Catholics, and to increase the demand for their work by raising the standard of the Catholic Press."

We commend these facts to the attention of those superfine Freethinkers who imagine, or affect to imagine, that all the real fighting between Reason and Faith is over. They will see if they live long enough.

The Rev. Thomas Phillips, of Bloomsbury Chapel, says that "the Spirit of God disarms death of its dreaded sting." But does not the reverend gentleman know that the sting of death is a creation of the very religion which, according to him, extracts it? Freethought does a much nobler work; it shows conclusively that the sting never existed, except in the fevered imagination of credulous people.

The Rev. Mr. Collins informs us that "it is the man whose life is poor and thin who neither desires nor hopes for another life." The reverend gentleman is wholly wrong. The very root and secret of the hope of immortality is the feeling of utter dissatisfaction with the present life. They whose lives are rich and deep and joyous here do not usually yearn for a hereafter. The desire for another life springs from the most ignoble and anti-social type of selfishness.

The Rev. Dr. Campbell Morgan says that we must have patience with God. Things are all wrong just now; but the time is coming when they shall be set right for ever. He who believes that must be a man of unlimited patience but of painfully dull intelligence.

The Dean of St. David's has a great zeal for foreign missions, although he admits that the foreign doors are not so wide open as they were. But what is the use of urging people to send Christianity abroad when it has turned out such a colossal failure at home? In the Dean's own county and several adjoining counties we are authoritatively informed that the population is steadily succumbing to immorality and intemperance.

The "sweating" game of the Salvation Army seems to be imitated elsewhere. We take the following from the *Port Elizabeth Advertiser*, Cape of Good Hope, for May 19:—

"Missionaries as Traders.—At a special meeting of the Alice Town Council on Monday, an application by the Lovedale Missionary Institution for a general dealers' license was dealt with. The Mayor (Mr. E. Lock) said he had no desire to increase the unfortunate strain that appeared to exist between the town and institution, but he thought Lovedale was trying to punish the town. He held that the subsidy (£3,500) granted annually by Government to the institution was for the purposes of Christianity and education, and not to enter into competition with business men. There was no need for the license asked for, as the merchants did their best to serve the district, while Lovedale, as a missionary institution, imported goods from London cheaper than the merchants could. Lovedale, by means of subsidised crafts, also entered into unfair competition with tradesmen. The other councillors present spoke in a similar strain, Councillor McLeod remarking that Lovedale was 'placed in its present position to cater for Christian motives, and not to enter into unfair competition with the town of Alice.' The motion that the application be refused was carried unanimously."

The Salvation Army will please notice.

The *British Weekly* has a "God's Corner." There is a little "Prayer" in it every week addressed to that personage. We wonder if he ever reads it.

"Yes," says the Rev. R. J. Campbell, "we all believe that an unseen intelligence hears us when we pray." We pity the unseen intelligence. What a frightful lot of selfish cackle it must listen to!

Mr. P. W. Wilson, M.P., has been lecturing or preaching (we don't know which) at Birmingham on "The Bible and Labor." Of course the local *Daily Mail* gave him a report. For he said all the sweetest things he could think of about Jesus Christ; listening to him, indeed, you would fancy that Jesus Christ invented the Labor Movement. Incidentally, the honorable member for the St. Pancras Division asked what Jesus Christ would have thought of a child being tied round a lamp-post while his father went to get a glass of beer. It doesn't seem to us to matter what Jesus Christ would have thought. The question is, what ought we to think? And this is a question that our own reason must decide. This harking back to Jesus Christ is a mere confusion of modern problems. The answers to these problems lie before us, not behind us; and we only waste our time by looking for them in the wrong direction. For the rest, we have only to hope that Mr. Wilson's reference to the "glass of beer" does not mean that he thinks Jesus Christ was a teetotaler. If he believes that he has read the Gospels to very little purpose.

The *Daily News* is a pious newspaper, and the depth of its theology may be gauged by its sub-headline to the report of the derailing of the Plymouth express on Sunday night: "Miraculous Escape of Passengers in Plymouth Train." If the escape was miraculous, of course the accident was miraculous. We invite the organ of the Nonconformist Conscience to explain that miracle. What was its God about? Was his celestial Highness doing any of the things mentioned by Elijah in his sarcastic speech to the priests of Baal? We should really like to know.

Combined with the piety of the English press is a vile national egotism which has the impudence to call itself patriotism. When the cruiser *Sappho* was rammed and sunk by a peaceful little merchant ship (curiously of the same name) the Jingo journalists, who are all ostentatiously religious, called upon the world to admire the magnificent spectacle of the crew of a British warship not falling into a panic of fear in the presence of danger. It is enough to make a decent person vomit.

There is a Jack-the-Ripper scare in Liverpool. We shall see whether the police are as clever at detecting criminals as they are in worrying Secularists.

When the Liverpool religionists have no special opportunity of worrying Freethinkers they worry each other. They must worry something. Catholics and Orangemen had a fine old shindy on Sunday afternoon. Pokers, brick-bats, and stones were the favorite weapons. The combatants enjoyed it so that it was very difficult to separate them. Mounted police charged them again and again. Many were injured and fifty arrests were made. How they love one another!

The suicide of Mr. St. John Hankin, the well-known author and dramatist, has not led to any withering articles in the newspapers. People who are not Freethinkers, or not known to be Freethinkers, may commit suicide without unpleasant reflections. That sort of thing is reserved for the heterodox.

Jack Johnson, the famous negro pugilist, is the son of a negro Methodist preacher, and a good Methodist himself. And thereby hangs a tale. According to the Boston "our correspondent" of the *London Daily Chronicle*, a negro Methodist church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has hit upon a new way of paying off an old mortgage. Jack Johnson was engaged to give a three-round exhibition against all comers on Friday (June 18). The tickets went off like smoke, and the Lord's cause benefited handsomely. We might suggest that the Lord should send Nicholas as his representative on such occasions. Three rounds between Jack Johnson and Old Blazes would be an immense draw.

Mr. George Sampson, reviewing Professor Bradley's *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, is allowed to say, even in the *Daily Chronicle*, that so far from Shakespeare being, as a Church dignitary alleges, a typical witness of his age to the personality of Jesus, he "could not even be called a religious poet, in the ordinary sense of the term."

Father Smith, a prison chaplain, preaching at St. Augustine's, Preston, told the congregation that if a prisoner coughed during a sermon the doctor ordered him to stay in his cell for two or three days. This humane gentleman added, "It would do some of you good to go to gaol." Perhaps a strong dose of the same medicine would do him no harm.

A twelve-year-old boy scout, at Kingston, complained of the heat and went upstairs into a bedroom, where he dropped on his knees and offered up a prayer. Then he drank two ounces of carbolic acid. The stomach pump saved him from the kingdom of heaven.

Miss Elsie Siegel, whose murder has thrilled New York, had apparently been carrying on an intrigue with her murderer. She was engaged in mission work amongst the Chinese in the city. William L. Leon (Lee On Sing), who killed her and put her body in a trunk, was one of the "converts." There is no moral. These people were not Freethinkers.

A man who wants to thieve at the minimum risk if detected should join the Boothites. William Hicks, a collier, of Blaengarw, was charged at Bridgend with broaking and entering the house of Miss Barnett, a Salvation Army officer, and stealing £7 and some gold trinkets. It was pleaded in defence that the prisoner, who was a member of the same Army himself, had given way to "a mad impulse," and he was simply bound over for a period of three years. During that period he will be all right if he doesn't have any more "mad impulses." Such is the advantage of piety—even amongst thieves.

The Archbishop of York has been preaching on "Character and Opportunity." We know nothing about his lordship's character. His opportunity must have been A. I. His salary is £10,000 a year. It is sufficient, we should think, to maintain his strength to sing "Blessed be ye poor! Woe unto you rich!"

The Church Pageant is over. It seems to have been a great success. Unfortunately it was not complete. It did not include the torture and burning of heretics. Pictures of such performances would have been more edifying than the rest. On the whole, the great hit of the Pageant was Mr. G. K. Chesterton, in the rôle of Dr. Johnson—with a moustache.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

(Lecturing suspended during the Summer.)

To Correspondents.

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £214 15s. 6d. Received since.—W. P. Adamson, £1 1s.; J. de B., £2.

S. J. OSBOURN.—Thanks for the paper, but we have given several paragraphs to Gipsy Smith's "wonderful work" in America, while he was there; so we propose to say nothing about his rather vapid confidences to a home interviewer. He is not amusing in the "respectable" vein.

LOUIS LEVINE.—We are obliged to you for sending us the papers from America.

E. FIELDER.—We had already dealt with the matter, but thanks all the same.

G. BRADFIELD.—It is a waste of time to write to a paper like the *Daily News* correcting "mistakes" which are evidently deliberate.

J. DE B.—Instructions attended to. Shall print an extract from your letter next week. Meanwhile, we are glad at your wife's joining you in the letter and subscription.

SIMPLE SANDY.—You omitted name and address.

J. F. C. F.—Much obliged.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

WATKIN ROGERS.—There is no contradiction. Paine was a Deist, not an Atheist; he believed in the existence of God, but denied the truth and utility of Christianity. To attack that faith as he did was a great and brave thing in its day. Were he living now, he would probably be as Atheistic as any of us.

H. SMALLWOOD.—Glad to hear from you as one who met with the *Freethinker* casually and has been a constant reader ever since. Your suggestions will be considered.

E. GYNSSEY.—It would not come before the courts at all. In what way do you think it would?

G. GRIZZELL.—Pleased to hear from so old a reader. Paper shall be sent.

J. ADAMS.—Glad you think, after reading it for twelve months, that the *Freethinker* is "the most outspoken and instructive journal" you have ever met. Thanks for cuttings.

F. WALLIS.—You do not say to what fund it is to be applied.

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

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

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

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

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

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Sugar Plums.

Our readers were inadvertently misled by us last week. The officials at the Old Bailey told us, and others, that Mr Boulter's sentence of a month's imprisonment would be diminished in fact by the lapse of fourteen days since the opening of the sessions. It appears, however, that this was a mistake; or at least that the judge took care to make the month's sentence a *real* month. Mrs. Boulter learns from the governor of Wormwood Scrubbs Prison that her husband will be released on July 8.

"One of the last letters which the late George Meredith wrote," the *Daily Chronicle* says, "was one expressing sympathy with the victims of the Messina earthquake disaster." That must have been written early in 1908. We suppose it would never do for the *Daily Chronicle* to recognize that one of the last letters which George Meredith wrote—perhaps the *very* last—was dated April 23, 1909, was addressed to Mr. G. W. Foote, and contained instructions that his name was to be printed as having sent a cheque in

support of the *Freethinker*. That letter was written with George Meredith's own hand,—a thing rare with him in his later years; the address on the envelope was in his own handwriting, and there are reasons for thinking that he even posted it himself.

The *Journal de Charleroi* of June 15 devotes the first half of its first column to the proceedings of the National Secular Society's Annual Conference. The "International Freethought" columns in that journal are under the able direction of M. Eugene Hins, who is an excellent English scholar.

A correspondent calls attention, in another column, to the fact that Freethinkers take holidays like other people, and that it would be a good thing if Freethinkers who let lodgings, keep boarding-houses, or carry on refreshment places at seaside resorts were to advertise in this journal. What do they say?

Mr. Frank Harris, in *Vanity Fair*, says that he once quoted to George Meredith the words of Edgar in *King Lear* as "perhaps the wisest thing ever written":—

"Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither.
Ripeness is all."

"For the individual," Meredith answered, "that is true enough; but Nature makes of one man's ripeness the springboard to leap higher. Don't forget that." In spite of all the disillusionment of his long life, Meredith said: "I hold more firmly than ever to my faith in the constant advancement of the race."

In a paragraph on the Boulter case, *Vanity Fair* says that Mr. Justice Darling "would have been better advised if he had given Mr. Boulter two hours' imprisonment in Court, and so discouraged the prosecution." Our contemporary asks, "Who is responsible for these disgraceful prosecutions?" These are the people, it says, who ought to be attacked. And it wants to know how long judges are going to "give sentences of a month for expressing opinions which are almost universally held by educated people to-day." Mr. Harris does not note the plea of the prosecution that the "blasphemy" is now not in the opinions, but in the manner of expressing them. We think the plea is an absurd one, but it ought to be noticed, as it provides the bigots with a plausible cover.

A few readers have sent us—quite unsolicited, of course—small sums towards what they call the Boulter defence fund. We have not started such a fund, nor can we say anything whatever about it until after the N. S. S. Executive meeting on the last Thursday in June. Our silence until next week will therefore be understood.

Mr. A. B. Moss lectures in Victoria Park to-day for the Bethnal Green Branch. We hope he will have large audiences and a hearty reception.

A Son's Appeal.

WHAT! would'st thou have me bow my heart to wrong,
And stand in meek submission while the throng
Of suffering thousands passed me struggling by,
Their heads bent to earth, mine raised to the sky,
Too full of vain imaginings that rob
The soul of senseful thought and Freedom's throb;
And clothe the strong with weakening sense of sin
That breaks and quells man's powerfulness within?

What! would'st thou have me kneel before thy God,
Whose knee-worn footstool, hard as iron rod,
Dyed deep in blood from martyred "saints" that poured,
Because their brother man they full adored,
With adoration not from gods inspired,
But from the truths of needs that he required
To mould himself to which your God begun,
And strangely stopped ere yet his work was done?

No! Rather would I stand with those who choose
To fight for Freedom till this life they lose;
Who conquer self, and conquering, seek
To make man Man, not God's impoverished freak;
Who toil thro' life-long days and life-long nights
To break the chain that tortures and affrights:
Father, let me by thy pure justice keen
Obey the light by Freedom's Reason seen!

TULLOCH ARD.

Concerning Richard Jeffries.

"Pain and sorrow flow over us with little ceasing, as the sea-hoofs beat on the beach. Let us not look at ourselves, but onwards, and take strength from the leaf and the signs of the field. He is indeed despicable who cannot look onwards to the ideal life of man. Not to do so is to deny our birthright of mind."—RICHARD JEFFRIES, *The Life of the Fields*.

"Nothing good to man but man. Let man, then, leave his gods and lift up his ideal beyond them."—RICHARD JEFFRIES, *Field and Hedgerow*.

MANY years ago we were acquainted with the science and art lecturer of a college, who became aware of our existence through a junior master who had read a defence of Materialism we were contributing to a scientific journal. Besides lecturing upon science and art, he once, incidentally, lectured our humble self upon the folly of our proceedings. Candidly admitting his belief that the Materialistic philosophy was sound, he argued: Why did we want to force it upon people who did not want to know it even if it was true? Why not keep it to ourself and swim with the stream, like all sensible men? How long did I think that he would hold his own position if he publicly flaunted his opinions in the face of the public? His advice was to drop advocating Materialism, which he assured us would only end in disaster, and turn our abilities—of which he evidently entertained an exaggerated opinion—to something more to our advantage. We thanked him for his advice—which, indeed, was tendered in the most friendly manner—but gave him to understand that we did not intend to follow it; a decision no more worthy of praise than the decision of a man to collect old china or postage stamps, or any other occupation he finds a pleasure in pursuing. After having thus washed his hands of all responsibility for any consequences that might fall on our devoted head, he offered to lend us any scientific works in the library under his control—an offer we were not loath to accept. But he evidently regarded us as a lamb marked for the slaughter.

On the road home we wondered how many, like him, were in the bonds of respectability, hiding the golden truth lest it should destroy them.

But what has that to do with Richard Jeffries? we fancy our readers are asking. Well, the connection only exists in our own mind. It is like this: The master, when lecturing on art, always laid it down as an indisputable fact that the masculine form was superior to the feminine, from an art point of view. We always secretly rebelled against this dictum; but seeing that the teacher was an M.A., we concluded that our view must be wrong. But, reading the recently published *Life of Richard Jeffries*, by Mr. Edward Thomas, we were gratified to find that Jeffries was of our opinion. "The beauty of a woman," says Mr. Thomas, "seemed to him so large and full of divine correspondences, that in *Beauty in the Country* he says: 'Her physique excels man's.'"

In *The Open Air* Jeffries describes—in language to which the heart of every lover of Nature thrills in response—the environment which fashions a beautiful country woman. It is too long to give entire; we give an extract:—

"From the south wind that breathed a century and a half ago over the green wheat. From the perfume of the growing grasses waving over honey-laden clover and laughing veronica, bidding the greenfinches, bawling the bees. From rose-loved hedges, woodbine, and corn-flower azure-blue, where yellowing wheat-stalks crowd up under the shadow of green firs. All the devious brooklets' sweetness where the iris stays the sunlight; all the wild woods' hold of beauty; all the broad hills' thyme and freedom: thrice a hundred years repeated.Thence she sprang"

In his novel, *The Dewy Morn*, he has drawn, in Felise, the perfect type of woman, both physically and morally. The same intimacy he shows in winning the secrets of wild nature, he shows in entering into the mind of a beautiful and pure woman; a rare gift in a man, only to be compassed

by a sensitive and sympathetic nature. He says of her:—

"What a latent power of love was there in that richness of blood, that depth of chest, that greatness of heart. Pure love, pure as the spring-water that comes from the hills, was there ready to be poured forth—always full, always pouring, always the same and always pure."

But, he asks, could anyone love without an object? And he answers: "Not perhaps with a small nature, a narrow mind, a stunted being. With all great hearts and true women it is always the case; they love without knowing why, or whom—it is their very nature." And he truly and beautifully adds: "A great passion does not leap into existence as violets sprang up beneath the white feet of Aphrodite. It has grown first. The grapes have ripened in the sun before they are plucked for wine." And when Martial Barnard came "she endowed him with all that she perceived in the glory and mystery around her by day and night."

Was ever a more beautiful courtship portrayed than the passage where Martial, on horseback, stops to speak with Felise, and when he would be moving on she stays the horse by feeding him with handfuls of grass?—a thing which would appear unmaidenly in a young lady brought up in the artificial atmosphere of modern society, but which we feel to be the most natural thing in the world to this beautiful child of nature. Later on Martial does not require to be detained by such devices.

And here is a beautiful eulogy of love:—

"The August thunder booms far off at sea; the reapers reap in the brilliant sun; and the lovers sit and look out upon the land. Let us not outlive love in our days, and come to look back with sorrow on those times. You have seen the ships upon the sea; they sail hither and thither thousands of miles. Do they find aught to equal love? Can they bring back precious gems to rival it from the rich South?"

At the finish, Felise and Martial are happily married. "The man slept; the woman, wakeful in her happiness, stole to the window where she had so often sat of old time, the contented woman is drawn against the vast loveliness of the dawn":—

"A pure rest had come to her life. Except to love and to love fulfilled, and then only to woman is such rest ever given. For the heart, and the hand, and the mind of a man are for ever driving onwards, and no profundity of rest ever comes to his inmost consciousness. At dawn he looks forward to the noonday."

Felise did not look forward, but "her heart brimmed to the full of love." As Mr. Thomas observes: "In this passage Jeffries has divined one of the clearest divisions between man and woman, whilst making a picture of great beauty that completes the portrait of Felise's youth."

Those who have been trained in the grotesque belief that Atheism is a cold, unpoetical creed, which would degrade and lower the position of woman, will be surprised to learn that Jeffries was a thorough-going Atheist. One, moreover, who did not bow the knee to the Ogre of British Respectability by professing a creed he did not believe. He might have said with Lord Byron:—

"I have not loved the world, nor the world me;
I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bowed
To its idolatries a patient knee."

In his masterpiece, *The Story of My Heart*—which he meditated for seventeen years before finally committing to paper—he declares the belief in a direct intelligence to be an "illusion" and a "superstition," and says:—

"How can I adequately express my contempt for the assertion that all things occur for the best, for a wise and beneficent end, and are ordered by a humane intelligence? It is a most utter falsehood and a crime against the human race."*

If the preachers who are always prating that Atheism destroys the poetry of life could infuse their dreary sermons with some of the poetry of this Atheist, perhaps they might be able to stay the rush of people away from their conventicals.

**The Story of My Heart*, p. 134; 1883.

Poor Jeffries was a great sufferer. Some of his most beautiful work was composed, he tells us, during "intense agony." He died on August 14, 1887, at the early age of thirty-nine, cut off in the flower of his genius by that terrible scourge, consumption. A disease which, by itself, gives the lie to the fable of the existence of a merciful and benevolent Supreme Being.

It is said that Jeffries recanted during his last days. So Sir Walter Besant was given to understand, and in his *Eulogy of Richard Jeffries* he wrote: "The simple old faith came back to him," and he "died listening with faith and love to the words contained in the old Book." But later, in a discussion with Mr. Henry S. Salt—the first biographer of Jeffries—he retracted this statement. He says:—

"I stated in my 'Eulogy' that he died a Christian. His wife read to him from the Gospel of St. Luke, and he acquiesced. But, I have since been informed, he was weak—too weak not to acquiesce, and his views never changed from the time that he wrote *The Story of My Heart*. For my own part, it surprised me to hear that a man who had written those pages should ever return to orthodoxy, but I had no choice but to record the story as it happened and was told to me."

Commenting on this, Mr. Salt observes:—

"Herein is the simple explanation of Jeffries' alleged conversion. He was very weak—so weak that he perhaps could not but yield acquiescence to the affectionate importunities of those around him, while still holding the views which, as he recently avowed, 'expressed his most serious convictions.' So long as he retained any slight measure of health and strength; so long as he was able, even at rare intervals, to enjoy that vital communion with Nature on which his whole being depended; so long, in fact, as he was Richard Jeffries, and not a shattered wreck, he was a freethinker. Even at the last he withdrew no syllable of his writings; he saw no priest; he made no acceptance of any kind of dogma. His own published statements remain, and will remain, beyond dispute or question, the authoritative expression of his Life-creed."

Mr. Thomas concludes this saddening story of the dying Freethinker—surrounded by believers in a faith he had discarded—with a powerful passage, which will apply not only to the case of Richard Jeffries, but to all those fabulous tales of "dying horrors" and dying conversions, which are a standing monument to pious mendacity and malignity. He says:—

"With the interpretations that come of private grief and affection, nobody outside the family and friends of the dead is concerned. But there are some narrow sectarians who would ignore the work of Jeffries' maturity, and lay stress upon words which might be paralleled from the condemned cell. They strike him when he is down, which is a liberty hardly to be conceded to Christians, even when the opponent is a freethinker. They do not claim that his thought progressed to this orthodox end; but intruding upon a matter of the spirit with dead words—with words once spiritual in which they have slain the spirit—they would drag the dead man into an unquiet air, as of a political election, in order that he who pursued truth may vote as a partisan. His pursuit was tripped up by death, and to attach any importance to his fallen hours is to cast scorn upon life, and is like ridiculing the lover and praiser of a vanished beauty because she is now a handful of dust. It is even more impious and absurd, since Jeffries' work survives and is a power. The last circumstances of parting, cannot be a power, whether he dies acquiescent, or delirious, or fuddled by death, or with pain-wrung blasphemy on his lips. Those who would make capital out of these words of Jeffries'—and how far are they 'intelligible' and is not 'all philosophy is hollow' almost equal to blasphemy?—are already comfortable in their own conceit, and need not this poor addition to their calendar. The majority will be those who, orthodox Christian or not, see in the work of Jeffries, when he was most alive, a force at one with the good that is in the world, with what makes for wisdom, beauty, and joy, whether it can usefully be connected with Christianity or not."

Mr. Thomas has produced a very beautiful book,

* *Richard Jeffries: His Life and Work* by Edward Thomas, pp. 315-6 (Hutchinson, 1909).

from which we have freely quoted. A book which every lover of Nature will long to see on his book-shelf; and we hope the publishers will see their way to producing a cheap edition, and so introduce it to a wider circle of readers.

W. MANN.

The Narratives in Genesis.—III.

THE BIBLE CREATION STORIES AND SCIENCE.

(Continued from p. 396.)

THE two creation stories in Genesis are, as we know, pure fiction, though it is more than probable that the writers really believed them to be founded on fact. Written in such ancient times as 700 or 800 B.C., when correct knowledge respecting natural phenomena was non-existent, it would be simply ridiculous to expect to find these stories in harmony with the proved facts of present-day Science. No blame, of course, attaches to the ancient Hebrew writers for not knowing what was unknown to the world in their day, and their narratives would be regarded merely as curiosities but for the vaporings of a number of orthodox but unthinking Christians, who maintain those primitive accounts to be the inspired word of God, and, consequently, to be in perfect agreement with the known facts of modern science. When such claims are made, it becomes necessary to examine those ancient legends, and show, once for all, what a mass of absurdities they really are. This otherwise unnecessary task I now proceed to perform, though it is difficult to notice the crude conceptions exhibited in those narratives with seriousness. And here I should premise that Christian commentators and apologists do not themselves believe the accounts in Genesis; for they employ all the ingenuity they possess in explaining the writers' statements away, and end by twisting them almost out of recognition.

Of the two Creation stories, the first, by the Priestly writer, is the one with which we have chiefly to do. According to this writer, the earth, prior to the "creation," was "waste and void," and "darkness was upon the face of the deep." Amidst this darkness either "the wind" or "the spirit of God" moved "upon the face of the waters." Josephus took the word (*ruakh*) to mean "the wind." The earth, about this time, was placed upon massive pillars or foundations, which supported it like the legs of a table (1 Sam. ii. 8; Job xxxviii. 4-6; Prov. viii. 29); but upon what these foundations rested had not been revealed to the sacred writers. A later Hebrew author, who called himself "Enoch, the prophet," states that he went to "the extremities of the earth where heaven ceased," and there actually saw "the stone which supports the corner of the earth." The knowledge and veracity of this writer are vouched for by the apostle Jude, who quotes from his book as the inspired word of God (Jude 14-15).

The earth having been made to stand firmly, the great creator, Elohim, commenced his work of creation, and completed the whole in six days of twenty-four hours—six sidereal days. His method of working was not excessively fatiguing; he simply commanded things to appear, and they came into existence forthwith. Then follows the account of the work of each day.

On the first day Elohim made "light"—independent of the sun—and "separated the light from the darkness." These two substances were then confined in separate places, ready to be let loose in turn upon the earth. At dawn the light was let out, and in a short time covered the whole face of the earth; but towards evening it was called in, and the darkness came out and took its place. By this beautiful arrangement day and night succeeded each other without the smallest hitch. Care had, of course, to be taken to keep the two substances apart; for if, by chance, they got mixed, the earth would be flooded with semi-darkness day and night. I have often been puzzled to understand how the Israelites had

light in their dwellings, while the Egyptians were enveloped in thick darkness (Exod. x. 22-23): now the difficulty vanishes. The much-tried patriarch Job was aware that light and darkness were confined in separate places somewhere at the ends of the earth; but he did not know the exact locality where these receptacles were situated. The Almighty, knowing this, taunted the poor man with his ignorance—which was, to say the least, unkind (Job xxxviii. 19, 20, 24). The writer of the Creation story did not know—and we have the authority of Holy Writ for saying that the god Yahveh did not know—that light is not a material substance at all, but is merely a manifestation of energy, and that darkness is nothing more than the absence of light. Light is in fact, simply the effect produced upon the sense of vision by a disturbance of the ether which is propagated in waves from the sun to the earth.

The work of the first day having been completed, we are told that "there was evening, and there was morning, one day." Now "evening," being the commencement of darkness, and "morning" the beginning of daylight, there were (according to the story) day and night three days before the Sun had been made. Furthermore, the ancient Hebrews reckoned their day from sunset to the following sunset; hence the "evening" and "morning," or darkness succeeded by daylight, constituted one day. The writer did not know that the earth was a globe; he did not know that day and night are produced by the rotation of the earth upon its axis, by which every portion of the globe receives in succession light from the Sun, and that there could be no evening or morning, no day or night, until that luminary had been created. I do not blame the Hebrew narrator for not being acquainted with these matters; I reprehend the dishonest Christian advocates who declare his story to be in harmony with the proved facts of Science.

On the second day the creator Elohim placed above the clouds an Expanse or Firmament which extended over the whole length and breadth of the earth, to which he gave the name "Heaven." Though it is not stated in Genesis, this structure was conceived to be a solid crystalline roof or partition, above which was the abode of the Immortals—Elohim and his angels—who, whenever they thought fit, came down to see how things were going on upon the earth. The main reason assigned for the construction of this immense sheet of roofing will be seen from the following:—

Gen. i. 6-7.—"And Elohim said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And Elohim made the firmament, and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament."

As will be perceived, the firmament was made chiefly to store above it large bodies of water—sufficient to give rain as long as the world endured. The necessity for this structure to be of a firm and solid nature is thus apparent (Prov. viii. 28). These "waters that be above the heavens" are referred to in Psalm cxlviii. 4; civ. 13; etc. When some of this water was about to be cast down as rain "the windows of heaven" were opened (Gen. vii. 11-12); at other times those windows were kept shut. The withholding of rain was one of the Lord's methods of punishing his people (2 Chron. vi. 26-27; vii. 13; etc.).

But many other things besides water were stored above the firmament. Here was kept a supply of the food given to the Israelites in the wilderness.

Psalms lxxviii. 23, 24.—"He commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven; and he rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them of the corn of heaven."

Here the Lord kept his arrows and his thunderbolts (2 Sam. xxii. 14-15); here he kept his fire and brimstone (Gen. xix. 24); here also he stored large quantities of snow, and kept heaps of hailstones ready to be cast down on the heads of his enemies (Job xxxviii. 22-23; Josh. x. 11; Exod. ix. 28). There appear to

have been three floors constructed above the firmament; for the apostle Paul says that he was "caught up even to the third heaven" where he heard "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. xii. 2-4). Doubtless, the water, thunderbolts, and other things were stored in the two lower floors, while the heavenly host inhabited the top floor.

Setting aside all this nonsense, and coming to facts, the Priestly writer of the Creation story in Genesis did not know that no firmament such as he describes had ever been created; that no bodies of water or other substances are stored above the clouds. He did not know that all the water which falls as rain is contained in the atmosphere itself. As nearly everyone knows, a considerable quantity of water, all over the globe, is constantly being converted into vapor, which, being lighter than the air at the earth's surface, ascends until it reaches a stratum of its own specific gravity; that clouds of vapor thus formed, when carried by winds into cooler latitudes, become lower in temperature and have then less capacity for holding so much vapor in solution; consequently the excess falls to the ground in the form of rain, snow, or hail, according to the temperature of the atmosphere of the locality. This simple process, so familiar to every educated person of the present day, was known to no one who lived in Old Testament times: hence the popular belief of immense bodies of water above the firmament.

On the third day Elohim gathered together the waters that were under the firmament into one place, and allowed the dry land to appear; he also caused all kinds of vegetation to grow out of the ground. This was before the Sun was created: the vegetable world would therefore have to dispense with his rays for one day—which would not perhaps matter for an ordinary day; but would matter a great deal if the "day" were an epoch of thousands of years, as some Christian perverters of the Hebrew scriptures contend.

Further details of the work of this day are given by the Almighty to his servant Job (xxxviii. 8-11). The deity asks that much persecuted patriarch:—

"Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth.....and prescribed for it my decree, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?" (See Prov. viii. 29).

The answer to this question was imagined to be "the Lord, strong and mighty"; but, as a matter of fact, the only "bars and doors" that keep the sea in its place are the laws of gravitation.

On the fourth day Elohim made "two great lights," the Sun and Moon, and "set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth." These two luminaries, we are to understand, were created for the sole purpose of giving light to this world. The Priestly writer would have been astonished to learn that the diameter of one of these luminaries, the Sun, is a hundred times greater than that of the earth; and since the magnitude of spheres are to each other as the cubes of their diameters, the magnitude of the Sun must therefore be about a million times that of the earth: also, that instead of being only a few miles off (in the firmament) it is over 90 millions of miles distant. Can anyone in his senses, then, imagine an immense body like the Sun, being created to give light to a tiny speck like this globe? Moreover, instead of not having been called into existence until the earth was covered with vegetation, the Sun, we have good reasons for believing, was in being ages before this planet took its place in the solar system—the earth, in fact, having once formed part of the Sun, from which it was flung off into space by the law of pressure. The writer of the Creation story had upon many points the simple ideas of a child, one of those being that the ordinary light of day, when the Sun was not visible, was distinct from that derived from that luminary, the latter being an additional and different kind of light.

But what has the writer to say of the stars? Has he forgotten their existence? No, he has not; he gives them as much space in his narrative as he deems they merit. After stating that Elohim made two "great lights," one "to rule the day" and the other "to rule the night," he adds—"the stars also"; then all are placed in the imaginary firmament "to give light upon the earth." And here we may safely say that the writer had no idea—Elohim himself had no idea—of the stupendous nature of this "creation." As an illustration of this point, I quote the following from the *Christian World* (Jan. 26, 1899): "To-day our theology is again being touched from the stars. The telescope has proved a veritable instrument of revelation.....Since it began to sweep the heavens man has had to domesticate himself in a new universe. In his earlier thinking Creation was a comparatively snug affair. The earth was its centre and man its *raison d'être*. Our planet was the fixed point round which everything revolved. The sun was created to give light by day, the moon and stars to shine on him by night. At a handy distance above him was a paradise for the good, and beneath, within equally easy reach, an avernus for the wicked. The astronomer has overturned this theology for us. The scene he discloses is one in which our earth is found to be the insignificant satellite of a sun nearly a million times bigger, but which in its turn is only a speck in the surrounding immensity. He talks to us of fifty million stars as visible with the telescope, each one a mighty sun, the centre probably of planetary systems full, for aught we know, of conscious life. He describes the distances of these worlds by the rate of inconceivable swiftness, to cross the gulf between themselves and us; or, what is not less bewildering, by showing us that a star viewed by us in January, and then again in June, when we are 180,000 miles from our earlier standpoint, has not altered its apparent position by a hair's breadth." We are indeed the denizens of a roomier universe."

ABRACADABRA.

(To be continued.)

Mr. Stead Interviews Sir Robert Stout.

[Sir Robert Stout used to be called the Bradlaugh of New Zealand. He has been Prime Minister there, and is still of great influence. During his present visit to the old country he has been interviewed by Mr. W. T. Stead for the *Review of Reviews*. Mr. Stead does not mention the fact that Sir Robert Stout was once the leader of the Freethought party in New Zealand and is a Freethinker still. The following portion of the interview will interest our readers.]

THE ILLOGICAL NONCONFORMIST.

"In many ways. You are not keen enough to be logical, for one thing. Look at your education controversy. Can anything be more illogical than the position of the Nonconformists?"

"How do you stand with regard to the Churches?" I asked, for it is always well to know the standpoint of one's critic.

"Outside them altogether," said Sir Robert. "But my denominational connections are Unitarian."

"Go ahead!" I said. "You say our Nonconformists are illogical."

"Absolutely illogical. They want to disestablish the Church, and at the same time they have established religion in every elementary school. What is wrong for the parish church cannot be right in the public school. There is only one logical solution—Secular Education. But your Nonconformists will not hear of it."

"There," I admitted, "you hit us on the raw. The result is that ever since 1871, when the Nonconformists insisted upon establishing and endowing what they called the denominational religion in the public elementary schools, the Liberationist campaign for the disestablishment of the Church has lost ground."

"In New Zealand," said Sir Robert, "we are at least logical, and in the State schools there is nothing but secular education. Of course, secular education does not exclude, but ought of necessity to include, moral instruction. I am glad to see that you have a Moral Instruction League here."

We need moral instruction in every school, and a handbook with lessons drawn impartially from the best books in all literature."

I agreed. "A year or two ago I discussed with Mr. Gould, of Leicester, the compilation of a Moral Instruction reading book, in which appropriate lessons selected from the best books in the world, regardless of their claims to special inspiration, should be arranged for daily use in the schools."

"Surely there was such a book in French," said Sir Robert. "By one Steeg, I think. But it was never published in England. There can be no real religion where there is no morality, whereas you can so teach morality on secular lines as to make it a solid foundation for religion without in any way trespassing on the province of the Church. But that is not by any means the only specimen of your lack of logic."

Correspondence.

THE "BLASPHEMY" PROSECUTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Herewith I enclose my annual contribution to the Honorarium Fund—opened in your behalf by loyal-minded Freethinkers—a cheque for £1 1s., and 5s. in aid of the fund for the defence of Mr. Boulter.

Your long services to the great cause of Freethought and Humanity cannot be over estimated. Your noble devotion to principle is to be imitated by all who understand what principle implies and the English language means.

Mr. Boulter has found in you a noble and generous friend. To your timely action last year he owed his liberty and the protection of his person, as again he is appealing just now for the same object. He ought to value your services in the fullest and most unreserved sense, otherwise he certainly would have been hustled unceremoniously into jail. There is no mistaking the temper of lawyers and other persons in authority where matters of religion are the subject of discussion, especially in hypocritical Great Britain. I trust you will this time have the whole Freethought party, and other parties animated with the spirit of love and fair-play, once the characteristic of Englishmen, by your side. These are the times that try men's souls.

W. P. ADAMSON.

Portsoy, N.B.

SEASIDE APARTMENTS.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Have you considered the question of inviting your readers who reside at seaside and other summer resorts, and have apartments to let, to advertise such in the *Freethinker*? This would be another source of revenue for the *Freethinker*, to those who advertise, and to those of its readers who are in quest of such information.

I am shortly taking my usual fortnight's holiday at the seaside, and should prefer, as naturally, no doubt, many of your readers would, to stay with fellow Freethinkers.

ED. WATKINS.

FLOGGING OF BOYS.

The Humanitarian League (Prisons Committee) begs to call attention to the fact that the London County Council propose to extend the penalty of birching for boys. For the offence of giving a false alarm of fire it is provided in the L. C. C. General Powers Bill, now before Committee, that "where any male person between the age of twelve and fourteen years is convicted under this section, the Court may if they think it expedient so to do either in addition to or instead of any other punishment adjudge such person to be as soon as practicable privately whipped with not more than twelve strokes of a birch-rod by a constable in the presence of an inspector of police," etc.

It is not the Atheists, but the Christians, who malign their God, who is represented as the most cruel and revengeful of beings; and endowed by his professed worshipers with characteristics calculated to arouse only horror and disgust in any thoughtful mind. A human parent, who destroyed, or even temporarily consigned his child to torment, in punishment of a fault, would be considered, and rightly, a monster; for whom the extreme penalty of the law would be judged an inadequate sentence; yet this is the course of action attributed to the "all-wise, merciful and loving God of the Christians." It is to be deeply regretted when parents can give no more attractive attributes to the Deity they direct their children to worship and adore; and when the most forcible argument against falsehood and disobedience is the prospect of eternal vengeance at his hands.—*Libertas*.

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): A. B. Moss, 3.15, "A New Age of Reason"; 6.15, "The Work of Charles Darwin."

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, W. J. Ramsey, "How I Fell Among Thieves"; 6.15, a Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road). 11.30, W. J. Ramsey, "Jesus: His Sayings and Teachings."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill, Hampstead): 3.30, C. Cohen, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford): 7, W. J. Ramsey, "Our Gospels."

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

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

COUNTRY.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, H. Percy Ward, "Christian Russia and its Bloodthirsty Czar."

OUTDOOR.

BRISTOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Durdham Downs): 7.30, F. Melton, a Lecture.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Edge-hill Lamp): Wednesday, June 30, at 8, H. Percy Ward, a Lecture.

WIGAN BRANCH N. S. S. (Market-square): Monday, June 28, at 8, H. Percy Ward, a Lecture.

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Secretary—E. M. VANCE (Miss).

This Society was formed in 1898 to afford legal security to the registration 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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