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The Church has always despised the man of humor, hated laughter, and encouraged the lethargy of solemnity. The Church has always abhorred wit—that is to say, it does not enjoy being struck by the lightning of the soul. The foundation of wit is logic, and it has always been the enemy of the supernatural, the solemn and absurd.

—INGERSOLL.

George Meredith Again.

MR. EDWARD CLODD contributes a very interesting article to the July number of the *Fortnightly Review* on "George Meredith: Some Recollections." As a personal friend of Meredith's for twenty-five years, and a frequent visitor at the Box Hill cottage, he enjoyed many conversations with the Master, and some of these are (we should imagine) skilfully recorded.

Meredith once said that he would "horribly haunt" any man who wrote a memoir of him, and in view of this tragi-comic warning Mr. Clodd sets down little that is biographical, and most of that little we shall pass over. But we note the reference to Meredith's first marriage, as it throws some light on *Modern Love* which no doubt contains elements at least of personal experience. His first wife was a daughter of Thomas Love Peacock, who probably figures to some extent in the Dr. Middleton of *The Egoist*. The marriage was unhappy. Meredith rarely referred to it, but once he said to Mr. Clodd: "No sun warmed my roof-tree; the marriage was a blunder; she was nine years my senior." Her mother became mad, so there was a family taint. Her death in 1860 set him free. He subsequently married Miss Vulliamy, a lady of French descent, with whom he had twenty years of happy companionship. He wrote her epitaph in 1885:—

"Who call her Mother and who calls her Wife
Look on her grave and see not Death but Life."

He spoke of her very beautifully in *A Faith on Trial*, which we quoted from at some length in our recent articles on Meredith.

Meredith's fortune of £32,000 was not realised solely from the sale of his writings. We felt quite sure of that. Mr. Clodd tells us that a legacy came to him on the death of his aunt, and another wind-fall on the death of his uncle.

Mr. Clodd confirms our view that Meredith put more of himself into his poetry than into his novels. Here are his own words:—

"Chiefly by that in my poetry which emphasises the unity of life, the soul that breathes through the universe, do I wish to be remembered: for the spiritual is the eternal. Only a few read my verse, and yet it is that for which I care most.....I began with poetry and I shall finish with it."

And he did.
Meredith's first novel, *Richard Feverel*, written in the flush of his young genius, was disliked by Mrs. Carlyle, who flung it on the floor; but she picked it up again, and read it to her husband, who said "The man's no fool." The essential heresy of the book was scented by those who have the keenest noses for such things. "Mudie's 'select' Library would

not circulate it," Meredith said, "and all the parsons banned it in the parish book clubs as immoral."

Some of Meredith's literary judgments, as we get them from Mr. Clodd, sound characteristic. He thought Keats a greater poet than Shelley. Matthew Arnold was "a dandy Isaiah." Byron was a splendid satirist, but "his high flights are theatrical; he was a sham sentimentalist." Tennyson had "rich diction" and "marvellous singing power," but "the thought is thin; there is no suggestiveness which transcends the expression; nothing is left to the imagination." Milton was "the one supreme master of blank verse." Not much of Dickens would live. The world would never let Mr. Pickwick share honors with Don Quixote. George Eliot "had the heart of Sappho" but the face "betrayed animality."

There is an excellent joke about George Borrow (we venture to say the great George Borrow). Leslie Stephen tramped all the way to Oulton Broad to see him once, and incidentally asked him what he read. "I limit my reading," Borrow replied, "to the Bible and the *Newgate Calendar*." Stephen, in telling this to Meredith, said with a twinkle: "There is much in common between the earlier books of the one and the whole of the other."

Mr. Clodd says a good deal about Meredith as a Freethinker—far more than will ever get into the columns of "the glorious free press." Meredith said:—

"When people talk to me of a great theologian, I say, what waste of time and energy, if he were really a great man potentially. When I was quite a boy I had a spasm of religion which lasted about six weeks, during which I made myself a nuisance by asking everybody whether they were saved. But never since have I swallowed the Christian fable."

This point is strongly emphasised. "I never heard him," Mr. Clodd says, "apply any other term than 'fable' to the orthodox creed." "Was there ever," he asked, "a more clumsy set of thaumaturgic fables made into fundamentals of a revealed religion?" Which makes one regret that Meredith did not live long enough to send an electric letter to the Paine Centenary Celebration.

One day Meredith spoke to Mr. Clodd about the greatest of modern historians—the one who, as Byron said, sapped a solemn creed with solemn sneer. "I have been re-reading Gibbon," Meredith said, "with increased appreciation. The subtlety of his remarks on Christianity, and the dexterity of conveying through veiled implication of belief his scepticism, is delightful." John Stuart Mill, by the way, thought it detestable; but he had next to no sense of humor, and was too matter-of-fact for irony.

Here is a passage on a very different writer from Gibbon:—

"Morley has sent me his Gladstone: the life of the intellectual gladiator is more to his taste than the life of a soldier-statesman like Cromwell, because Morley has no stomach for fighting. Hence the difference between him and Carlyle, whose heart was in the story of a battle. Gladstone had not a great mind; he was a great debater, but his scholarship was limited, and his theological opinions of the narrowest. No Homeric philosophy agreed with his fantastic theories of Christian philosophy latent in the Iliad; and in the famous controversy over the Gadarene pigs Huxley pulverised him. But he wouldn't admit that he was beaten: he was a crafty controversialist."

This shows how closely Meredith followed that controversy. Gladstone was indeed a crafty contro-

versialist. He seduced Huxley into a grave blunder in the debate. The real question at issue was demoniacal possession. Did the devils leave the possessed man and enter the pigs? But instead of discussing this Gladstone started discussing whom the pigs belonged to, and Huxley weakly followed his adversary's lead, when he should have kept him strictly to the only question that mattered.

We have seen Mr. Clodd's emphatic statement that Meredith was an anti-Christian. We shall now see that he was more than that. Mr. Clodd plainly chronicles "his disbelief in a personal God and a future life." Meredith had a right to what Swinburne called "that loftiest and most righteous title which any just and reasoning soul can ever deserve to claim." Mr. Clodd says:—

"He was a freethinker in the broadest sense of an epithet which, even to this day, carries discredit in the application. 'The man who has no mind of his own,' he said, 'lends it to the priests.' He supported secular education as the only solution of the religious difficulty; he aided with money Mr. Foote's aggressive methods, being seemingly more in sympathy with these than with the persuasive and patient policy of the Rationalist Press Association, which works on the lines laid down by Lord Morley—'we do not attack, we explain.'"

This confession does Mr. Clodd great credit—for he is himself the Chairman of the Rationalist Press Association. He need not have said anything about Meredith's preference in this case; he might easily have kept a judicious silence; but he told the truth even to his own disadvantage; and for that we honor him. But we may ask him, without the slightest incivility, whether the methods of his Association are really more "persuasive" than our own. Persuasive methods are methods that persuade people. Does he believe that his Association has made more Freethinkers than we have? If he does, we think he is mistaken. The National Secular Society's work has been by far the greatest Freethought leavening of the general public mind in England. So much for the "persuasive." And as for the "patient," why, in the letter which Meredith wrote us in the early part of last year, it was precisely the "rare" mixture of "ardor and patience" in our own case which he did us the honor to praise.

Is it possible to draw a line between *explaining* and *attacking* a superstition? To explain is to attack—and to attack you must explain. The only actual difference in the methods of opposing superstition is one of *spirit*, and that is a question of *temperament*. John Morley, for instance, never made a direct attack on Christianity. Why? Because, as Meredith, who was his personal friend, put it, he "has no stomach for fighting." Meredith had an eye for the vital facts. He had also an active courage of his own. If he watched us at a distance, we also watched him at a distance, and we saw nothing to impair, but everything to confirm, our old unswerving grateful affection for the "Dear Master." There are spirits who never knew fear; it was left out when nature moulded their composition. Meredith was one of the loftiest of that brood. We shall be proud of the humblest position in the great fellowship; and perhaps his recognition is the surest pledge that we have not lived and fought in vain.

We would not end, however, on what may sound like a note of egotism; so we turn, in conclusion, to Mr. Clodd's talk with Meredith about Swinburne's funeral—which bears out all that we wrote in our article on the subject. "As to the burial service," Meredith said, "you remember what we had to undergo at Cotter Morison's funeral, and Swinburne should have had, as did York Powell, silent interment. Burn me and scatter the ashes where they will, and let there be no Abracadabra of ritual, is my wish about myself." This is precisely what we expected. It was bound to be Meredith's wish. But his wish was not respected. The funeral service at Dorking was a monstrous farce. Mr. Clodd evidently thinks the same of the Memorial Service in Westminster Abbey. After referring to

the "scrap from a barbaric ritual" in a psalm sung in procession by the choir, he continues:—

"nor less inconsistent was the expression of 'hearty thanks' that George Meredith, to whom this fair earth, with its flowers, its children, and its dumb offspring, was dear; and life to the end, however lightly held, abundantly sweet; had been 'delivered out of the miseries of this sinful world.'"

That phrase of thanksgiving was a negation of Meredith's whole philosophy of life. Somebody should denounce it in fitting language. It is not an occasion for soft speech. There are higher things in the world than mere politeness. Truth and honesty were outraged both at Dorking and at Westminster. Thousands think so, and we say it; and the words shall stand to show that Meredith's teaching was not altogether lost upon his fellow men.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Pessimism of Faith.

THAT Christianity as a system is profoundly pessimistic has been often pointed out by those who have not permitted themselves to be deluded by a few fair-sounding phrases. The pessimism it enshrines is not of the sober, reasoned order such as has commended itself to more than one great thinker, but of a vague, unreasoning, unconscious variety, expressing itself in an attitude rather than a philosophy. Its distrust in human reason is historic, and admits of no dispute. Its despair of human nature as a whole has been quite as pronounced, although not so apparent. Under much talk of faith, hope, nobility of human nature, dignity of human life, and similar phrases, it has managed to conceal from the vulgar gaze the fact that it lacks belief that human nature, as human nature, possesses the power or capacity to pursue its career with dignity and justice. This applies not to any particular form of Christian belief, but to all. All are compelled to base their plea of the necessity of Christian belief upon the inadequacy of human nature divested of such a support.

Analysis of the most modern as well of the more ancient forms of belief yield the same result. In its highest form, apart from the crude appeal to the miraculous, the proof of the divinity of Jesus is made to rest upon the assumed perfection of his character. That is, his being a good man is held to be sufficient proof of his not being a man at all. So, too, in the statement, made sometimes in a crude form, sometimes in a subtle form, that without religious belief, an adequate morality is impossible, is contained the assertion that men and women cannot be trusted to act with honor and decency unless buttressed by hope of external reward or terrified by fear of external punishment. The belief in miracle, in revelation, connote in another direction the same truth. Neither reason nor feeling are to be trusted. Both need correcting by something that belongs to neither, something that influences man from the outside. Fortunately, in this case at least, men do not live up to their philosophy; otherwise social existence would be wellnigh impossible.

As an instance of this pessimism of faith, I may take a recent address by the Rev. W. R. Inge on "Hope," delivered in St. Margaret's, Westminster. With an audacity that would be splendid were it not commonplace, Dr. Inge claims that the scientific world owes the very hope of progress to Christianity. "Who or what," he asks, "planted this hope in them? Who made hope a moral virtue, if not Jesus Christ? Who started the very idea of progress? . . . As a mere matter of history it is Christianity which gave mankind this Divine gift of hope."

Well, as a mere matter of history this is quite the reverse of the truth. The ineradicable vileness of human nature has been one of the stock teachings of Christianity, and the foundation of more than one of its creeds. The hope of progress in Paul's statement that if there be no resurrection from the dead, let us eat, drink, and be merry, is certainly of a not

very obtrusive description. It is, indeed, about as low as one can get; nor does Dr. Inge, as we shall see, improve upon it to any material extent. An immediate consequence of the triumph of Christianity was, not to inspire men with a faith in human progress, but to convince them that it was a delusion. The hope held out by Christianity was not for this world, but for the next. And mankind was to be crowned with success, not because of anything it might do to deserve it, but because of the free gift of grace that would confer upon man a reward on the other side of the grave. As a mere matter of history, to quote Dr. Inge, the conception of orderly progress in a general form is a comparatively modern conception, and is an expression of the widespread influence of the doctrine of evolution. And the opposition of organised Christianity to that teaching is too recent to be denied. Perhaps the clearest proof of the influence of the evolutionary philosophy is seen in the fact that the conception of progress is now so general that Christians are claiming it as Christian. This is at least a proof that Christians no longer feel that it can be opposed with safety or profit.

That Dr. Inge while claiming a Christian origin for the conception of progress really has his mind on another world view of progress is proven by the following passage. The idea of progress, he says,

"is the Christian hope which you have secularised, and thereby turned it (pardon us for saying so) into a baseless superstition. There is no natural law of progress. Progress in nature is a rare exception; and where it is found, after a time it ceases, and passes into a condition of stable equilibrium or decay.....Even if human progress continues for a long period, what is the inevitable end? Is the light of earthly progress one that shineth more and more unto the perfect day? Far from it. It is a light that will probably flicker out amid the frosty horrors of the next glacial age. And then if the Christian hope of immortality is a delusion, all the history of mankind will be as if it had never been."

Now if Dr. Inge meant that progress is only an ideal construction of the human intellect, and that nature is as perfect under one form as another, I should not be inclined to disagree with him. But I do not think this is Dr. Inge's meaning. What he does mean is, that progress is not progress because it cannot continue for ever. And he proves his point by remarking that there is no natural law of progress because progress in nature is a rare exception. Well, rare or common, if progress does take place it is so for a natural fact—or, in other words, there is a natural law that it shall be so. And if it is not so general as Dr. Inge thinks it ought to be, he is not, in pointing this out, bringing any argument against the scientist or against the scientific position; he is really framing an indictment against the deity, whom he believes called nature into being. The tag about immortality is quite Christian, but it really has nothing to do with the point at issue. If progress does occur with man, if there is a reasonable possibility of humanity moving to greater happiness, that is all that is necessary as an incentive to action. True, the earth may one day be cold and lifeless, but the fact that at some immeasurably remote period the human race will not exist is hardly a reason for not working for, and enjoying, happiness during the myriads of generations between ourselves and that far-off event—at least, it is a poor reason to anyone but a Christian.

If only Christian preachers could be brought to the point of testing their statements by facts, they might realise that the people who work for progress are not at all influenced by a future life, nor are they affected by what will happen to the human race a half million years or so hence. We are all moved by our feelings, and there is a reasonable, even though undefinable, limit, beyond which our feelings refuse to carry us. I do not believe that anyone living would exert themselves in the slightest solely on the assumption that some people, who will live a couple of hundred thousand years hence, will be benefited thereby. Let the benefit realise itself in a century or so, and an influence will be exerted.

Decrease the time of realisation still further, and the influence exerted becomes proportionately greater. Action is always conditioned by feeling; and neither feeling nor imagination can use an immeasurably remote future as a basis for present action. A man does not labor for his home and friends because he believes them to be immortal; such a consideration does not dawn upon his mind in this connection. The facts of wife, children, friends are enough. Nay, his efforts to promote their welfare are likely to be the more earnest as their tenure of existence seems the more precarious.

Dr. Inge, however, is quite wrapped up in his discovery—a discovery made by nearly every other Christian in the pulpit, and by thousands out of it—that life is not worth the living unless it is going to last for ever. And he returns to the subject in the following sentence:—

"Is it seriously worth while for each generation to make sacrifices for the future, if the only result will be to increase the expensiveness of the final crash? Face the question fairly. Is there any justification for a life of unselfishness if there is no Lord of life whose inmost being is unselfish love, and no eternal world wherein all moral values are preserved safe and inviolable for ever?Depend upon it, the loss of faith in God must lead to disenchantment and apathy."

Well, I hope I have faced the question fairly, but it all seems woefully beside the mark. The talk of sacrifice, for instance, is terribly misleading, although quite Christian. The Christian is full of the topic. It is a sacrifice to live honestly and decently. A sacrifice of what? To the man who thinks intelligently, and who looks at life from the proper point of view, there is no sacrifice in acting as one's better nature prompts. It is this constant talk of sacrifice in connection with the exercise of man's higher promptings, and of "moral restraint" in connection with normal moral action that more than anything else betokens the ethical poverty of the Christian faith, while the pessimism that despairs of human nature, unless it is buttressed by the belief in a future life of rewards and punishments, is surely the most distressing form of pessimism that can afflict the human mind.

When all is said, it is the religious disbeliever who brings to bear upon life the most inspiring and refreshing view of human nature. Ignoring some of the facts, he is content that human life is improvable, given time and industry. That the human race may one day cease to be, neither numbs his thinking nor paralyses his action. It is enough that his action bears fruit, in both the present and the future, in the moulding of that common life to which we all belong. The final crash may come, but its coming can in no wise diminish the value of effort while human life endures, nor can it weaken the sane thinker's detestation of a system that would make life dependent for its value upon the acceptance of crude superstitions and unprovable beliefs.

C. COHEN.

Is the Universe Moral?

A FEW weeks ago this question was faced by a number of people, all of whom were pledged by their very profession to answer it in the affirmative. In the nature of things no discussion of it, under such circumstances, could possibly be wholly disinterested and fair. Believers in the existence and sovereignty of a good God are bound to maintain that the Universe he made and governs must be, at bottom, ideally good. Their theology robs them of the very capacity to study the Universe on its merits: they see it only through the eye of their Theism, never through that of its own history. To doubt the beneficence of the constitution of things is to cast suspicion upon the moral character of the Deity. Animadverting upon a recent volume by Mr. C. F. G. Masterman, Mr. R. J. Campbell says frankly: "It is my confidence in the over-ruling wisdom of God in

this and every other age that makes it impossible for me to believe in man's power to wreck anything worth preserving." This reminds one of the logic of a children's hymn:—

"Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so."

So, likewise, the theologians believe that the Universe is good because a good God is its Maker and Ruler. That is to say, they hold a brief for God, and consequently see the Universe in its light.

Now, what is to be understood by the statement that the Universe is good? Are we to infer from it that Nature is a moral agent, whose one aim is to secure the welfare of all concerned? We are told that "faith in the ultimate soundness of the constitution of things is implied equally by the unquestioning complacency of the philosopher in the pursuit of his task, and by the encouragement to go on, no matter what the results may be, which he receives from the public"; but such an implication affords no manner of proof that the faith is well founded. What we need to know is, not what people generally think or believe, but what is the testimony of the facts, so far as we are able to decipher it. Is the Universe moral, and does it make for high moral relations within its bounds? It is easy to affirm that "the existence of philosophy in any or all of its varieties rests on the assurance that the deepest truth of the Universe is good," but the question that demands an answer is, On what does such an assumption rest? and in the presence of this inquiry philosophy is dumb. Professor L. P. Jacks, editor of the *Hibbert Journal*, admits that this is a difficult point:—

"If this assumption is made in advance, what is there left to philosophise about? Is not the very question at issue that of the ultimate goodness or badness of things? What, pray, is a philosopher? Is he not a man whom other men appoint to solve the question whether this world is God's or the Devil's, or nobody's? Does not his business spring from doubt as to the answer? How, then, is it possible, without self-stultification, to treat the question as answered in advance?"

But though Mr. Jacks states the difficulty with admirable clearness, he does not even attempt to master it. He plays with it instead. He even makes merry over it, and cracks jokes at its expense. "No world can be ultimately bad," he observes, "so long as it contains a single being who is capable of knowing how bad it is..... Surely a bad world would understand its own business better than to suffer the pessimists to publish its secrets and arm mankind against itself." The merrymaking is continued thus:—

"If we assume with Mr. Huxley that Nature is engaged in an offensive warfare against the moral ideals, then I must say that Nature blundered most egregiously, and showed herself incompetent to conduct war either against moral ideals or anything else, when she produced Mr. Huxley, armed him with a knowledge of her plans, and provided him with the means of spreading them broadcast over the world. A thoroughly bad world would assuredly have the sense to keep its own secret. A pickpocket or a burglar who himself sends for a policeman to witness his crime is not a very dangerous sort of person. This is precisely what Nature did when she sent Mr. Huxley to give the Romanes lecture"

That kind of clever bantering may be very interesting, but it ingeniously evades the real point at issue, and must be characterised as culpable trifling. For one thing, it totally misrepresents Professor Huxley's teaching on the subject. It may be true that Huxley never quite succeeded in thoroughly understanding the great Law of Natural Selection. He was doubtless wrong in thinking that "transmutation may take place without transition," or that "evolution may be accomplished by leaps and not by the accumulation of small variations." He may have been mistaken when he inclined to the supposition that in highly civilised societies the struggle for existence was at an end, and had been replaced by the "struggle for enjoyment," as well as when he identified the cosmic process with evil, and the ethical process with good,

the two being, in his opinion, in necessary conflict. But it is an error to represent him as pronouncing Nature morally bad, or to class him with the pessimists. While characterising the optimism of Leibnitz as "a foolish though pleasant dream," it should be remembered that he also condemned the pessimism of Schopenhauer as "a nightmare, the more foolish because of its hideousness." The conclusion to which he came was that "if the world is governed by benevolence it must be a different sort of benevolence from that of John Howard," that Nature is "reckless," "non-moral," caring no more for man than for the crawling worm. And is not this a fact established beyond controversy? While "the philosopher and his audience share the same conviction—that all will turn out well at the last," where does the conviction thus shared find its fulfilment? The "ultimate soundness of the constitution of things" is a theological phrase for which the scientist can discover no justification whatever. "Morality commenced with society," as Huxley says, "and the ethical process is the gradual strengthening of the social bond," but "of moral purpose I see no trace in Nature."

Someone asked Professor Jacks "how one could convince people in the slums of the underlying soundness of the constitution of things," and he answered by affirming that it is probably much easier to convince such people of it than those who live in the palaces of the West End. He was right. The slum-dwellers are poor and ignorant and oppressed, and naturally more easily bamboozled and victimised by the fairy tales of theology than people more advantageously placed. If they can be persuaded to believe it they may derive some little satisfaction from the assurance that "all will turn out well at the last,"

"that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter turn to spring."

But that persuasion, assurance, or assumption, instead of resting upon positive knowledge, is at best but a dream, indulged in and encouraged by those who "know not anything." It is the stuff on which theology has thriven through all the ages, but in which thoughtful people are at length losing faith. The truth is that Nature is neither good nor bad, neither moral nor immoral, but a stern, unfeeling Sovereign, whose "iron laws" we must rigidly observe or be utterly crushed by them. The nature of things makes no promises, holds out no hopes, and cares not whether we are happy or miserable, alive or dead. "The laws and the institutions which speak to man of the immanent God, which help him to believe that he is living in a divine Universe, and remind him continually of his own freedom and immortality," these are but human inventions, of which Nature takes no cognisance, and which reason condemns as hindrances rather than helps to human progress and well-being. The conditions of peace and prosperity are knowledge and obedience, not faith and worship; submission and service, not forgiveness and favor. Nature opens no backdoors to happiness, and only admits those who can pay the full price. This "one thing is certain and the rest is Lies." These inventions preached as gospels, these assurances of philosophers and divines,

"The Revelations of Devout and Learn'd
Who rose before us, and as Prophets burn'd,
Are all but Stories, which, awoke from Sleep,
They told their comrades, and to Sleep return'd."

The future of the Universe is an unsolved and as yet insoluble mystery. All we know is that it is in a state of constant flux. In its present form it has had a beginning and shall have an end. It is even now on its way to dissolution. What its ultimate destiny is no tongue can declare, nor brain conceive. There is absolutely no indication that it is travelling towards "ultimate soundness of constitution," or that all shall be well with man, its masterpiece, by and-by. Morality is not an attribute of Nature at all, but merely a necessity of social life on her domains. It is not even an attribute peculiar to humanity, but is characteristic, in a greater or lesser

degree, of all society. Indeed, morality does not even exist except as a relation between individuals that live in groups or communities. Some people are very fond of saying that Nature becomes what her latest product is, and there is a sense in which this is true; but it is false to assert that Nature, as a whole, is moral simply because morality is exhibited within the limits of a tiny section of her. Morality counts only as an indispensable channel of social welfare. Beyond that it has no significance whatever. That we are living in a moral Universe is a wholly groundless assumption, an assumption that rests on faith, not on fact, and an assumption utterly discredited by scientific knowledge. Society without morals is a natural impossibility, but a Universe devoid of society must have existed for countless millions of years, and the time may come when it will so exist again.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Unknown God.—II.

My criticism of Butler left off last week at the point where, after demolishing Pantheism and Christianity, he was proceeding to tackle the God of Theism. This is what he says of that Deity:—

"It has generally been declared that this God is an infinite God, and an infinite God is a God without any bounds or limitations; and a God without bounds or limitations is an impersonal God; and an impersonal God is Atheism."

One after another the religionists come up for judgment. They are rapidly tried and sentenced. "You are all of you," Butler says, "no better than Atheists; indeed, you *are* Atheists. Off with you! Your sentence is death. I give you the customary three weeks to make your peace with the true God. May that God—*my* God—have mercy on your souls." Having strewn the ground with the ruins of other people's Gods, Butler sets up one of his own, which (or whom) he thinks will meet with a better fate. He is sure that there is a God, though he is able to tell us very little about him:—

"As to what God is, beyond the fact that he is the Spirit and the Life which creates, governs, and upholds all living things, I can say nothing. I cannot pretend that I can show more than others have done in what the Spirit and the Life consists, which governs all living things and animates them. I cannot show the connection between consciousness and the will, and the organ, much less can I tear away the veil from the face of God, so as to show wherein will and consciousness consist."

God, then, is the Spirit and Life of this world. Not of the Universe, observe, but of this world only. Soul and life, according to Butler, are really identical. The two ideas unite spontaneously and stick together inseparably. And the next step is this:—

"There is no living organism untenanted by the Spirit of God, nor any Spirit of God perceivable by man apart from organism embodying and expressing it. God and the Life of the World are like a mountain, which will present different aspects as we look at it from different sides, but which, when we have gone all round it, proves to be one only. God is the animal and vegetable world, and the animal and vegetable world is God."

A man, a dog, a flea, a rose, and a turnip are parts of the Deity:—

"The memories which all living forms prove by their actions that they possess—the memories of their common identity with a single person in whom they meet—this is incontestable proof of their being animated by a common soul. It is certain, therefore, that all living forms, whether animal or vegetable, are in reality one animal; we and the mosses being part of the same vast person in no figurative sense, but with as much *bonâ fide* literal truth as when we say that a man's fingernails and his eyes are part of the same man. And it is in this Person that we may see the Body of God—and in the evolution of this Person, the mystery of His Incarnation."

Butler has made a God out of the life of this planet, and his effort at theological creation evidently proceeds on the essential distinction between life

and not-life, the organic and the inorganic. But he afterwards found that he could not separate the organic from the inorganic, and that he would therefore have to "reconstruct" his argument. He did not do so, however, and his whole case is vitiated by this fatal admission. On the face of it, he is driven back on the very Pantheism which he says is only Atheism in disguise.

Let us follow his adventures as if he had not met his dialectical Waterloo. After declaring again and again that every soul must have a body, just as every living body must have a soul,—and that a personal God must be limited and material,—Butler goes on to play the very same game which he denounced and ridiculed when played by preceding theologians. He constructs a God who is as intangible and invisible as any other in the Pantheon. Our own organisms, as well as those of other forms of animal life, are vast agglomerations of individual cells, with their own vitality and functions, and quite ignorant, we may be sure, of the part they fulfil in the total bodies to which they belong. In the same way, Butler argues, we also, as well as other animals, are cells in the vaster organism of God. It *may* be so—and it *may not* be so. And there is an end to the matter. Who is going to discuss a speculation which, as it can neither be proved nor disproved, is (for the present, at any rate) a mere fancy?

Believing in the pre-Darwinian evolution, under which life pushes itself forward, instead of being pushed forward by natural selection acting upon infinite variety through the struggle for existence, Butler sees in it "evidence of design." Of course he does. That is why he believed it. And that, we may add, is why Mr. Bernard Shaw believes it. Well now, if the evolution of life shows design, there looms a "far vaster Person" behind *our* God "who stands in the same relation to him as he to us." And behind this "vaster and more unknown God there may be yet another, and another, and another." There are countless worlds scattered through infinite space, and—

"Analogy points irresistibly in the direction of thinking that these other worlds are like our own, begodded and full of life; it also bids us believe that the God of their world is begotten of one more or less like himself, and that his growth has followed the same course as that of all other growths we know of. If so, he is one of the constituent units of an unknown and vaster personality who is composed of gods, as our God is composed of all the living forms on earth, and as all those living forms are composed of cells. This is the Unknown God."

It is a grandiose conception, and *this* unknown God is the *most* unknown God that ever was unknown. But is it not, after all, too much like those Chinese ivory boxes which contain another box, and that another box, and that another box, and so on to the microscopic last of the series? Only this series of boxes within boxes is infinite.

The God of this World (the Bible description of Satan) is a very small personage considering the relative importance of this world in the universe. But there seems to be a great advantage in such limitation; worshipers being apparently something like lovers, who like to be able to say "dear little one."

"The chief difference between the orthodox God and the God who can be seen of all men is, that the first is supposed to have existed from all time, while the second has only lived for more millions of years than our minds can reckon intelligently; the first is omnipresent in all space, while the second is only present in the living forms upon this earth—that is to say, is only more widely present than our minds can intelligently embrace. The first is omnipotent and all-wise; the second is only quasi-omnipotent and quasi all-wise. It is true, then, that we deprive God of that infinity which orthodox Theologians have ascribed to Him, but the bounds we leave Him are of such incalculable extent that nothing can be imagined more glorious or vaster; and in return for the limitations we have assigned to Him, we render it possible for men to believe in Him, and love Him, not with their lips only, but with their hearts and lives."

Butler must have been extremely sanguine to imagine that the human race would accept and wor-

ship this new God. He overlooked the fact that it is precisely the thrill of the infinite which has made the fortune of both Theism and Pantheism. Mountains, and the ocean, and the sun moving majestically over the heavens, and the solemn star-lit night, have filled men with a sense of vastitude, and in that sense all the greater gods have flourished. Limit your God to this world, and he is insufficient to satisfy the imagination. Shakespeare's "prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come" is a grand and pregnant conception. But one must take it as poetry. Harden it into theology—which is so often but fossil poetry—and it becomes wearisome instead of stimulating and suggestive.

And there is another thing to be said. In his criticism of orthodox Theism, it dawned upon Butler that it is possible to conceive of God as personal "without at the same time believing that he has any actual tangible existence." We personify hope, truth, justice, love, fortune, etc., and why may we not personify "our own highest ideal of power, wisdom, and duration"? Butler saw no objection to this manner of using the word "God." "On the contrary," he says, "no better expression can be found, and it is a pity that the word is not thus more generally used." But this God seems to me an unsatisfactory substitute for Humanity. I venture to say that the God that Butler was seeking was the Humanity that he knew. Man has been called the microcosm. Certainly he epitomises the life of this planet. And just as certainly the word Humanity represents our "highest ideal of power, wisdom, and duration." It is in Humanity that we live and move and have our being. We are nothing except in relation to Humanity. We are not only impotent and useless, but meaningless and unintelligible. That we are cells in a God is an imagination. That we are cells in Humanity is a positive fact. The race has the organic note of waste and repair. Death wastes and birth repairs, and the process is so gradual that it does not affect the integrity of the organism.

Surely we may believe in Humanity, and love Humanity, "not with our lips only, but with our hearts and lives." "The first condition of human goodness," George Eliot said, "is something to love; the second, something to reverence." We have reason to love Humanity, for we owe it all that we have and are; and we have reason to reverence Humanity, both in itself as representing all that lifts the man above the brute, and in the person of its greatest servants of all the ages—the poets, the philosophers, the moralists, the deliverers, who have made the world illustrious.

G. W. FOOTE.

Acid Drops.

Lloyd's Weekly News has a weekly column headed "Lloyd's Pulpit"—and it often gets appropriately near the police news. A recent sermon was by the Right Rev. H. C. G. Moule, M.A., D.D., Bishop of Durham. This highly paid apostle of the religion of poverty and renunciation undertook to justify Jael's assassination of Sisera. Simply, of course, because it was in the Bible; had it been in any other book, his lordship would have denounced it in unmeasured terms. He asks us to believe that the slaying of Sisera was not a *murder* but an *execution*. Why? Because she did it "at the demand of Him, who had made Sisera, and to whom Sisera's life was forfeit." But any murderous cat, or any murderous bishop, for that matter, might offer the same pious excuse for a bloody deed. Surely, if Sisera's life was forfeit to God, God should have taken it, and not left him to be assassinated by a treacherous woman. It was an occasion for an "Act of God." But those acts are never handy when they are wanted.

Bishop Moule says of Jael, "I do not believe she was treacherous." But how about *himself*? Is he not treacherous to common sense and common decency in defending assassination under the cloak of hospitality? Fancy men like this episcopal preacher having the care of the national conscience through the elementary schools! Bishop Moule ought to express regret for this performance of his in

"Lloyd's Pulpit" and hand over the cheque he got for it to an unsectarian charity.

The Bishop of Durham's justification of Jael, the assassin of Sisera, might be extended to Dyingra, the assassin of Sir Curzon Wylie. Why not? Couldn't he say that God told him to do the deed? And how on earth could the Bishop of Durham contradict him? We venture to say that the Bible is the assassin's text-book. Jael's assassination of Sisera is gloried in by the prophetess Deborah; Ehud brought a present from the Lord for Eglon, King of Moab, and gave it him—in the belly. It was a long dagger. Judith plays off her beauty on Holofernes, and cuts off his head when drunk or satiety renders him incapable of protecting himself. The last story is the Apocrypha, but the Apocrypha (as the Protestants call it) is a part of the Catholic Bible.

The talking classes of Englishmen soon lose their heads in the presence of a crime like assassination. It makes them utter an infinite deal of nonsense, and the nonsense is pretty sure to be more or less religious. Sir Louis Dane, Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, for instance, is reported to have said in the Political Council at Simla that the perpetration of such a deed by an educated student made one almost despair of our modern system of education. Was there ever a greater absurdity? One plucked student commits a crime, and the whole system of education is condemned in consequence. No wonder Sir Louis Dane wound up by "thanking God" that cowardly assassins were rare in the Punjab. If it is God who thins them down, why doesn't he thin them out altogether?

Sir Louis Dane's adjective only shows his mental distraction. The student assassin may be foolish or wicked, or both, but why "cowardly"? He must have known that he would lose his own life.

The recent assassination has brought India to the front in the public mind. But very little good will be done by that, we fear, for the average Englishman is too unimaginative to realise a problem so remote from his own affairs. The future of India is one of the greatest problems of the world; and we may add that it is but part of the general problem of Asia *versus* Europe, which was so decisively raised by the victory of Japan over Russia. M. Solomon Reinach, in his recent *Orpheus: Histoire générale des Religions*, refers to a certain aspect of this question. He says that the future of India lies neither with Christian nor any other religionist:—

"The moral and intellectual regeneration of that great country depends on the primary school, which, while inculcating respect for a long past, will teach all the idea of evolution, more scientific than that of metempsychosis, and elevate them gradually to the level of educated Europeans, to whom the religion of social duty suffices."

To which we gladly say "Amen." With the addition that "la religion du devoir social" is a capital phrase.

M. Reinach, who, of course, is of Jewish blood himself, has the following keenly satirical passage on the profitable Christian enterprise of converting the people of Israel:—

"Those who get converted to Christianity are either astute beggars, who prefer several baptisms to one, or else young persons, poor but industrious, whom restrictive laws prevent from attending school and earning their living (especially in Russia); or, lastly, the rich who, believing in nothing, purchase by baptism the right to a bad reception in the salons. Their children are generally anti-semites."

The sting of this is in the tail. Some of the vilest anti-semites in Europe have Jewish blood in their veins. Just as in England men of that class are often the most blatant "patriots."

Just a word about the John Calvin celebration. Ingersoll said that John Calvin and John Knox fitted each other like the upper and lower jaws of a wild beast. We may let it stand at that.

The Nelson N. S. S. Branch wrote to Mr. D. J. Shackleton, M.P. for the Clitheroe Division, asking him (in view of the Boulter case) to use his influence to bring about an early repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. Mr. Shackleton replied that—"Should a Bill be introduced for this purpose the same will have my careful consideration." He might have said the same of any Bill. This comes of turning honest men into members of parliament.

One feature of the Boulter case is well worth noticing. It was a policeman called Jenkin, the chief of the police force in North London, who was allowed to revive the Blasphemy Laws in the prosecution of Mr. Boulter. We printed some interesting information about this pious policeman at the

time; the principal fact being that he preaches and runs a mission on his own account, so that his prosecution of the "infidel" bore a certain resemblance to the action of a game-keeper against a poacher. It is perfectly obvious that this pious policeman is the prime mover in the more recent proceedings against Mr. Boulter. The same two subordinates of his were put into the witness-box again. But this time there was a fresh feature in their evidence. They had followed Mr. Boulter all the way to Clapham Common and taken reports of his lectures there. Now they could not have done this except on the orders of their superior officer; so that the pious North London policeman is allowed to patrol the whole metropolis in the interest of Christianity. And the pious Chief Commissioner of Police lets him do it. It is a shameful state of affairs, and a decent Home Secretary would put a stop to it.

Thousands of people have been flocking to see the Pope's grand motor-car just presented him by an American millionaire, said to be Mr. Pierpont Morgan. The poor "Prisoner of the Vatican" can't ride about Italy, but he enjoys a spin round the Vatican Gardens. From which we see how shockingly he is "cabined, cribbed, confined."

Always beware of people with the Spirit of the Lord upon them. Mrs. Pankhurst addressed the Suffragettes at Caxton Hall before their last raid upon the House of Commons. Her husband the late Dr. Pankhurst was a Freethinker, though he never gave much advertisement to the fact. Mrs. Pankhurst seems to be of a more pious turn of mind. She told the assembled Suffragettes that the chimes of Westminster would soon be heard (at 8 o'clock), and she quoted from the late Archdeacon Farrar, who said that they went to the tune—

"Lord, through this hour
Be thou our guide,
So be Thy power
No foot shall slide."

This is not very lofty poetry, and the Suffragettes might easily get a poetical sympathiser to improve upon it for the next occasion. But it was good enough for Mrs. Pankhurst; she was quite taken with it. "Our feet," she exclaimed, "shall not slide to-night." Then the Suffragette leader went forth at the head of a fighting detachment, and came at last to Inspector Jarvis barring the way to the winning post. Him she saluted with a sounding smack on one side of his face, and a louder one on the other side, while one of her lieutenants pulled off his cap and threw it on the ground. Inspector Jarvis couldn't fight a woman, of course, so he stood bolt upright and swallowed his gruel without flinching. Had he known that Mrs. Pankhurst had been communing with the late Archdeacon Farrar, and filling herself up with pious doggerel, he would perhaps have guessed what was coming, and taken the necessary precautions.

Enthusiastic piety is not inconsistent with cool discretion. Mrs. Pankhurst took care not to hit a woman her own size. Had she done that the crowd would probably have had a beanfeast. She struck a big man, and the crowd was disappointed.

Mr. R. J. Campbell has been denouncing the Czar of Russia and all his works in connection with the Emperor's visit to England. We have no great fault to find with what he said concerning the evils of the present state of things in Russia; our criticism is rather with what he did not say. And what he did not say touches the real kernel of the situation. The Czar and his supporters do not so much make evil government possible, as evil conditions make possible the existence of the governing class and its works. For over eight hundred years the Russian Church has been dragging the minds of the people into habits of slavish obedience to the governing powers. God and the Czar have been more or less identified in the popular mind, and are so still. The Russian peasant is not, and never has been, in revolt against the Czar. His rebellion has a much more limited application. The Czar is part and parcel of his religion, and he only rebels against the former when he has lost faith in the latter. The men who are making for better days in Russia are, in the main, those who have never been Christians or have ceased to be such. So far as we are aware, there is a general agreement among close students of Russian history and Russian affairs that it is religion which has kept the mass of the Russian people as they are, and that the power of religion must be broken before reform can be permanently assured. The lesson of Russian history only repeats that of every country in the Western world.

A correspondent asks Mr. Campbell whether there is any reason for believing that people who do not pray are worse off than those who do. Mr. Campbell replies, Certainly there

is reason for so believing, but guards himself, in a way, by saying we must be clear as to what is meant by praying. "All people," he says, "pray in the sense that all people desire something in life, and set about getting it." Well, if that is all that prayer means, it hardly seems worth while discussing it. All people desire food, and set about getting it; but one hardly expects to find eating a dinner identified with an act of prayer. And, of course, if prayer only means desiring something and trying to get it, then we all pray, and there cannot be any better or worse connected with it. But as a matter of fact, prayer does not consist merely in desiring something, but in desiring it through a particular channel. The essence of prayer is the granting of something by a power superior to man, and which would not be granted in the absence of petition. Prayer has no other significance or importance apart from this. Mr. Campbell's definition is one that is framed for people who see the absurdity of expecting any supernatural intervention in natural affairs, but who wish to retain the old forms and the old habits. These pseudo-philosophical explanations of religious beliefs do not express the groundwork of such beliefs; they are merely an illustration of the shifts and evasions to which apologists are put who lack either the courage or the clear-headedness to face facts.

Mr. Campbell professes to be in favor of ignoring theology in Socialist and political associations, urging that people of all creeds and of no creeds ought to be able to work harmoniously together for the good of the community. In a recent reply to a correspondent he violently condemned those who object to the presence of religious people, especially of clergymen, in the Socialist movement. But Mr. Campbell forgets that he himself is the chief sinner in this respect. He cannot refer to unbelievers at all without employing insulting language. He invariably bears false witness against them. "Do not tell me," he says, "you do not believe in God; you do—you cannot help it." Does he really imagine that he knows better than they what they believe or do not believe? He claims the Socialist movement as a distinctively Christian movement, and thereby excludes non-Christians from the right of taking part in it. Such an arrogant attitude is intolerable, and he must not wonder if sometimes he gets paid back in his own coin.

A fortnight ago, we referred to some observations by "Quartus" in the *Manchester Examiner* on the carrying of the Host by Roman Catholic processions. That writer took the position that carrying the Host was an open challenge to non-Catholics in the public streets, and should not be allowed. We said that we agreed with this position. We took it up, indeed, last year when Mr. Asquith stopped the carrying of the Host in connection with the Eucharistic Congress at Westminster. There was a reply, however, to "Quartus" by a Catholic priest, who argued that worship of the Host by Catholics in the public streets need cause no embarrassment or inconvenience to other people. But he was answered by the Rev. Charles Travers, of Fulwood, Preston, who gave the following pertinent illustration:—

"Three or four years ago, I was staying in a small town on the banks of the Rhine. I stood one morning outside the hotel, the river being just across the road. A Roman Catholic procession was passing. The Host was being carried. I kept my hat on, but was forced to remove it and to beat a retreat into the hotel by a very hostile demonstration on the part of the men in the procession."

That sort of thing is sure to happen where the Catholics feel strong enough to show themselves in their true colors. They are not to be trusted in anything they say—as Catholics. They will sing small when they must, and loud when they can. The proper way to treat them is to give them strict justice—no less, and no more. Give them an inch beyond it, and they will start striving for a yard.

We did not suspect the Rev. John Clifford, the Rev. John Monro Gibson, the Rev. C. Silvester Horne, and the Rev. Robert F. Horton, of being humorists. But this is a world in which one lives and learns. Those four gentlemen have issued a novel proposal. They want to soften the heart of the Czar, and the hard fate of his political prisoners, and this is how they suggest doing it. In a letter to the newspapers they say:—

"We feel constrained to invite the Christian Churches of this country to set apart the whole, or part, of Sunday, July 11, for earnest supplication to God, that by His wise and mighty spirit the hearts of those responsible for the treatment of the prisoners may be softened, and that the prisoners themselves may be comforted under their sufferings and given a happy issue out of all their afflictions."

When the Czar reads that he'll have a fit—of laughter. The quartet of reverend humorists ought to do a turn at the Hippodrome.

The dear *Daily News* publishes this holy proposal "with a sense of gratitude." There is really nothing else to be done, it says in effect, so let us have a day of prayer. To the Russian sufferers the friends of the Nonconformist Conscience will cry "God help you!" How much "gratitude" will the Russian sufferers feel for that?

The way in which "God" allows his name to be bandied about in these comic performances reminds us of Stendhal's saying: "The only excuse for God is that he does not exist."

Rev. A. J. Waldron is fond of blowing his own brass trumpet. He does a lot of it in an article on "Fighting the Freethinkers" in that profound organ of Christianity, the *Sunday Circle*. The following is a delightful specimen of his itinerant music:—

"The best place I know for a meeting is in a London park; it is simply splendid! In Brockwell Park, South London, where I have been for years during the summer months, we get as orderly and as intelligent an audience of a thousand or more as gather in any church in London. Of course, it did not start like that. The first time I went to Brockwell Park the Atheist platform was surrounded by a very large crowd. I came to spy out the land, and seeing the crowds of people, I there and then determined to hold a meeting; so I borrowed a ginger-beer box from one of the stalls outside the park, and held forth. Soon I had nearly all the crowd gathered from around the secularist platform, and shortly afterwards their lecturer as well. I invited questions, and got several; and then I asked for opposition, and the secularist lecturer accepted the challenge.

When I stood up to reply, I said, 'The Lord hath delivered this man into my hands.' He did not wait for all my reply, but fled from the park amidst the jeers and laughter of the crowd. That was the first and last lecturer that has ever opposed me in Brockwell Park in the sense of a man who came directly from their platform. I have had opposition, but even that has now collapsed, and we are stranded in our delightful isolation. If only the clergy would train themselves to this work, they could drive the open-air propaganda of infidelity out of the field."

This is so like Waldron, even to the one thing lacking—the name of the Secularist lecturer whom Waldron and the Lord defeated between them. The last sentence insinuates what, of course, he dare not allege, that he has driven "the open-air propaganda of infidelity" out of Brockwell Park. To put it mildly, he hasn't. To put it still more mildly, his accuracy is worthy of his religion.

Truth will out. While the notorious Torrey was in England all the religious papers were writing up his mission and pretending to believe his "faked" statistics of conversion. Now that he has departed, with little apparent prospect of his return, the same papers and people—in writing up his successors at the game—point out what a terrible failure he was. The Rev. F. C. Spurr, who recently received a "call" to Melbourne, says that he felt depressed on finding preparations for a mission in that city, as he "remembered, all too well, the Torrey meetings in London." Like most religious acts of repentance, this comes rather late. If the men who saw what an arrant humbug Torrey was had had the honesty and courage to speak out, a wholesome lesson might have been given to those professional pandorers to crude religious emotionalists. As it is, they assist, by their silence, to debauch the public mind, and profess clearer insight when no good is to be done by the profession.

"Thank God," said the husband of one of the delegates to the "American Women in London," "we have nothing in England so bad as that." The reference was to the conditions of child labor in the United States. But why thank God? If God has anything to do with the matter, why not blame him for permitting child labor under demoralising conditions in the States? After all, if there is a God, we presume he has as much to do with affairs in America as he has to do with them here. And it is either selfishness or stupidity to lose sight of suffering in the contemplation of our own comparative happiness.

Apropos of God and Children. A discussion has been going on in Tennessee, U.S.A., as to whether all "infants dying in infancy" are saved or not. One minister endeavors to clear up the matter by explaining that the Bible does not teach us that they will be saved, but permits us to hope that they are. And he explains: "If the Bible taught that all infants dying in infancy are saved, it would tempt parents to kill their children." Now here is a pretty picture of God, and the influence of religion on parents. Conceive a God who would send little infants to hell because they had not passed through some mysterious nunnery in a church or chapel. Talk about blasphemy! Why the wildest blasphemy ever

uttered was complimentary to deity at the side of this. And what a purifying thing Christianity must be if it would induce parents to kill their infants! The imbecility of such a belief almost passes comprehension. And yet there was a time when such doctrines were generally believed, and were discussed with the utmost gravity. The real value of such discussions is, that they help the world to realise what Christianity was before it came under the influence of Free-thought and modern civilisation.

It is a pity that a man with so much of the mountebank in him as Mr. G. K. Chesterton should be chosen to write in the *Contemporary* on George Meredith. Mr. Chesterton maintains, of course, that Meredith believed in a personal God. Mr. Clodd says he didn't. His writings say he didn't. And both are better authorities than "G. K. C."

Manchester University has honored itself by conferring the degree of Doctor of Letters upon Mrs. Sidney Webb. But what would Paul say? He who suffered not a woman to teach; he who told women to learn in silence—of their husbands. Fancy some women with no better sources of information!

The Rev. Westbury Jones, M.A., President of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, declares that "the fact of God, the fact of the Bible, the fact of the Church, and the fact of Christ are things which cannot be shaken." But the reverend gentleman is wholly mistaken. God, the Bible, the Church, and Christ are not historically established facts, but theological dogmas notoriously insusceptible of verification. Mr. Jones and his brethren may still preach them with the old conventional cocksureness, but they cannot really be blind to the undeniable fact that the intelligence of the age is becoming growingly atagonistic to all such superstitious crudities.

The Rev. Dr. Warschauer retorts on the Christian Scientists that if drugs cannot cure they cannot kill. Will, therefore, some follower of Mrs. Eddy show his faith by swallowing a dose of cyanide of potassium? We agree in the pertinence of the query, although it should have come from someone other than a Christian minister. For the New Testament certainly holds out the promise. "In my name" people might safely drink deadly things. There is therefore an obvious retort for the followers of Mrs. Eddy to a Christian. Both creeds teach the same absurdity, and there is an old saw concerning the wisdom of those living in glass houses not throwing stones.

In the *Baptist Times and Freeman* the Rev. B. G. Collins presides weekly at a "Wayside Well," out of which he offers copious draughts of spiritual water for the refreshing of the saints. The water supplied is of a somewhat peculiar flavor, and we must pronounce its quality more or less doubtful. For example, last week Mr. Collins assured the troubled and distressed among his readers (the metaphor is conveniently dropped) that God is the soul's Divine Wooer, but reminded them that he cannot successfully compete with the soul's false lovers without taking her clean away into solitude in the desert, whither the others cannot, or will not, follow her. All we wish to say is, that, if this be true, we do not admire the Divine Wooer, and are quite sure he would thank Mr. Collins if he refrains from any further reference to him. Whether or not the down-on-their-luck saints are comforted by such miserable stuff is another matter.

Mr. G. W. Forrest's *Life of Field-Marshal Sir Neville Chamberlain* contains some striking instances of the horrors of warfare. Take the following from the story of the fight at Istaliffe (Afghanistan):—

"At one place my eyes were shocked at the sight of a poor woman lying dead, and a little infant of three or four months by her side still alive, but with both its little thighs pierced and mangled by a musket-ball. Further on was another woman in torture from a wound, and she had been exposed to the cold of the night without any covering; she clasped a child in her arms, and her affection appeared only to be increased by the agonies she endured."

Dear dark-skinned mother! Hers was the holy love that saves, and shines brightest in the blackest misery. In the mother's heart—not in faith or fighting—lies the salvation of the race. That poor Afghan mother needed no Christian missionary to teach her the true religion. She had it, by nature.

"How can God be damaged by greater knowledge of his universe?" asks the *Christian Commonwealth*. Our contemporary misses the point, or rather assumes the point, at issue. It is the title deeds that are called into question. One wants to know that this is "His" universe, or that there is any god to own it.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

(Lecturing suspended during the Summer.)

To Correspondents.

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £222 7s. 6d. Received since.—Col. B. L. Reilly, £1; "Tome" (S. Africa), second subscription, £2 10s.

G. BRADFIELD.—Your letter in the *Cheltenham Examiner* settles your opponent. You say he has not replied. We don't suppose he will. He has got all he asked for—and more.

E. C. ROUND.—Much obliged for the extract.
H. A. LUPTON, subscribing to the Defence Fund, says: "I quite agree with you, and trust the necessary amount will be forthcoming immediately."

E. J. JONES.—Rome is growing, as you say, but not so much in numbers as in wealth, influence, and "cheek." That it has to be fought, we quite admit; indeed, we have always said so. But we cannot get up any sympathy with the Orangemen. They simply oppose one bigotry with another. It is the fanatical Protestants who do all the defaming and persecuting of Secularists in Liverpool. Just as it is a fanatical Protestant policeman in North London who has been allowed to revive the Blasphemy Laws.

B. L. REILLY (New Zealand).—The Shilling Month Fund closed some time ago. We have put your cheque to the President's Honorarium Fund—subject to your approval. It is pleasant to know we have interested readers at such a distance.

WILLIAM BOOTH.—We have duly received your "Private and Urgent" circular asking us to contribute towards the £4,000 you want for your "New Home For Poor Men" in Blackfriars-road. We have nothing to give for such a purpose. We would rather see your old "homes" closed than a new one opened. Why don't you answer Mr. Manson's indictment? And why do you call it a "benevolent and philanthropic" effort to give poor men a shelter for 5d. a night? You simply trade on a big scale—with other people's capital.

A. E. S.—You must remember that religious people have many motives for subscribing to religious objects, while Freethinkers have only one motive for subscribing to Freethought objects—pure disinterestedness.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

W. H. MORRISH.—Pleased to have the opinion of a veteran stalwart like yourself that we have "acted very well and wisely in the Boulter case." Glad to hear, too, that the Secularists had such a good and orderly meeting that Sunday evening on the Bristol Downs, with Mr. Brown lecturing in good form.

"Tome" (S. Africa), adding liberally to his 1909 subscription to the President's Honorarium Fund, says he hopes to do the same each year. "I have read the *Freethinker*," he says, "since June, 1906, when I was last in England, and I can assure you that it has been a good friend to me ever since." This correspondent is anxious to visit England again to hear Mr. Foote lecture, and, if possible, to attend "that Annual Dinner."

BATTERSEA FREETHINKER.—Outside societies are not debarred by the law from adopting the Principles of the N. S. S. word for word, but it is rather confusing and does not show much originality.

A. L. (Glasgow).—Thanks for copy of the *Socialist Forward*. We do not know who "Kanet" is who writes on "The Importance of Nothing." We should say it is a subject on which he is an authority.

J. ADAMS.—We note that you admire our action in the "blasphemy" case.

W. A.—Cheques or postal orders should be made payable to G. W. Foote, and crossed for safety. Post Office Orders should be made payable at London simply. Glad to hear from one who has never missed a number of the *Freethinker*.

S. JACOB.—Too late for this week; perhaps next.

A. VALIANS (Ogmore).—Our good wishes to the few "saints" in your Welsh village. Write to the N. S. S. general secretary (Miss Vance) if you want to form a Branch.

SIDNEY COOK.—Pleased to hear that the North London Secular Society desires to "express appreciation and thanks for the magnanimous way in which" we, "in conjunction with the N. S. S., have conducted the defence of Mr. Harry Boulter, and also provided in a generous way for Mrs. Boulter and the children during the sentence." We note that the £2 5s. you send for the Fund is the balance from your Fund for protest meetings, etc.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The "Blasphemy" Defence Fund.

D. D. B., 10s.; Robert Avis, 10s.; H. A. Lupton, 5s.; Elizabeth Lochmere, 5s.; Mrs. A. J. Rogerson and Husband, 8s.; T. T., 2s. 6d.; G. White, 5s.; F. Smallman, £2; A. E. S., 2s.; E. J. Baskerville, 2s. 6d.; W. H. Morrish, £1; W. P., Smith, 2s.; J. W. de Caux, 2s. 6d.; Albert Howe, 2s. 6d.; W. H. Harris, 1s.; C. Shepherd, 1s.; R. H. Side, 5s.; J. Lazarnick, 5s.; J. Adams, 2s. 6d.; W. A., 5s.; W. A. Yates, 2s.; W. H. B., 2s. 6d.; W. Dodd, 5s.; North London Secular Society, £2 5s.

Sugar Plums.

The *Blue Grass Blade*, Lexington, Kentucky, is "pleased to observe that Editor G. W. Foote, of the London *Freethinker*, is making a vigorous protest against the mummeries attending the Meredith funeral, and defending his memory from orthodox assault."

The *Journal de Charlevoi* notices the upshot of the Boulter case and pays a tribute to the action of the National Secular Society in the matter. One of our contemporary's observations is very pertinent. "The Liberals," it says, "have returned to power with a three hundred majority. What droll Liberals the English Liberals are!"

Mr. S. H. Swinny, the editor, has a good article on the life and work of Thomas Paine in the July number of the *Positivist Review*—calling him "a true pioneer of the Religion of Humanity." Mr. Philip Thomas, an Ethicist who has become a Positivist, writes on the St. James's Hall commemoration, which he says "was a benediction to everyone who took part in it." But why did he not mention the fact that it was organised by the National Secular Society? And why did he not stumble on the name of a single N. S. S. speaker? A stranger might imagine from Mr. Thomas's remarks that Paine's writings had just been introduced to the public. Mr. Swinny, at least, knows a great deal better than that.

The Birmingham Branch had a very successful picnic on Sunday to Kinver. The party had a splendid time, and included, to everybody's pleasurable surprise, the veteran Mr. Ridgway. A good distribution of Freethought literature was made during the day.

We are rather late in the day in noticing the discussion on Secular Education at the Annual Conference of the Postmen's Union. But better late than never. We see by the *Postman's Gazette*, which has been forwarded to us, that Mr. H. Fields (Leeds) moved a resolution protesting against "the inclusion of secular education in the Labor Party's program," on the ground that it was "outside the limits of a practical Labor policy" and "a violation of the religious and conscientious principles professed by many in the rank and file of the movement." Mr. Parsons moved an amendment that "religion was a purely private matter" and "should be taught children by their parents and guardians and by the churches and various religious agencies of the country." After an animated debate, both the resolution and the amendment were defeated. The Labor Party's policy therefore holds the field—as before.

Mr. J. C. Brown, editor of the *Postman's Gazette*, who took part in the debate, boldly said that "there was no connection whatever between religion and morality." "Simple Bible teaching as he knew it," he said, "was as full of contention as an egg was full of meat. Anything that was true in the Bible was not new, and anything that was new was not true. Any moral principles of any value inculcated in the Bible could also be found in the works of the heathen philosophers."

Mr. F. J. Gould, who is on the Education Committee of the Leicester Town Council, recently moved that the Navy League maps should be removed from the schools as "suggestive of party politics" and "out of harmony with the principles of international peace which should be fostered by the school-teaching." Mr. Gould quoted "blessed are the peacemakers" and "peace on earth, good will towards men," and said that in *these respects* he supported the Bible. But it was apparently in those respects that the Christian members did *not* support the Bible. Mr. Gould and his seconder—a Labor member, like himself—were the only ones who voted for the resolution. The Church parson voted against it. The Catholic priest more discreetly remained neutral. We may sum up by saying that the *honors* were with Mr. Gould—the *tricks* with his opponents.

There has been a poor response to our appeal for the sum of £27 8s. to cover the recent expenses incurred by the National Secular Society in the Boulter case. The subscriptions we have received are acknowledged elsewhere. We hope the sum required will be made up by next week, when we shall have something to say on the general subject.

A Correction.

WE are informed that the editor of the *Academy* was not the writer of the article in *La Revue Blanche* referred to by a correspondent in a letter headed "The *Academy* and Mr. Harry Boulter" which appeared in our last issue. We sincerely apologise, therefore, for allowing his name to be associated with it in our columns. Mistakes will sometimes occur in the correspondence department of public journals. We hope it might almost go without saying that we deeply regret this one. The editor of the *Academy* has said some nasty things in his own paper about the *Freethinker*, but we bear him no special grudge on that account, and we should be ashamed in any case to strike deliberately below the belt.

G. W. FOOTE.

What a pitiful ideal is the average Christian's definition of "Heaven." A region of perpetual indolence—golden streets, golden crowns, white robes and harps, no soft darkness, none of the sweet rest made grateful by cessation from healthy activity, only incessant light and ceaseless flight upon unpracticable wings. Surely, those who have missed the earthly heaven of wholesome work, welcome repose, the joys of mutual love and the harmony of friendship, the beauty of truth, should be accorded some more substantial consolation than this fatiguing and unsatisfying prospect of questionable bliss. Even the jaded laborer, or the most disillusioned of fashion's votaries, could hardly desire the deprivation of all variety, and the everlasting sameness of occupation and attire, promised to the believers in all the unreasoning impossibilities of the "Ancient Faith."—*Libertas*.

When a thing is sacred to me it is impossible for me to be irreverent towards it. I cannot call to mind a single instance where I have ever been irreverent, except towards the things which were sacred to other people.....Whatever is sacred to the Christian must be held in reverence by everybody else; whatever is sacred to the Hindu must be held in reverence by everybody else; therefore, by consequence, logically, and indisputably, whatever is sacred to *me* must be held in reverence by everybody else.—*Mark Twain*.

Everything grand possesses a sacred horror. It is easy to admire mediocrities and hills, but whatever is too lofty, whether it be a genius or a mountain, alarm when seen too near. An immense height appears an exaggeration. It is fatiguing to climb. One loses breath upon acclivities, one slips down declivities, one is hurt by sharp rugged heights which are in themselves beautiful; torrents in foaming reveal the precipices; clouds hide the mountain tops; a sudden ascent terrifies as much as a fall. Hence there is a greater sensation of fright than of admiration. What one feels is fantastic enough—an aversion to the grand. One sees the abyss and loses sight of the sublimity; one sees the monster and does not perceive the marvel.—*Victor Hugo*.

The Narratives in Genesis.—V.

THE FALL OF MAN.

(Continued from p. 428.)

THE story of "the Fall" is from the pen of the Yahvist writer, and has to do with Yahveh elohim—the god Yahveh—commonly called "the Lord God." This deity, having made a man out of clay and vivified him, "planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed" (Gen. ii. 8), to whom he gave for food the fruit of every tree in the garden—save one. Respecting this tree the god Yahveh said: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." After this the god made "every beast of the field and every fowl of the air," but perceiving that none of them was fitted to be a companion for the man, he "caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man," and while in this condition took from him a rib, out of which hard material he made a nice, soft woman. If this account be true, we might perhaps expect to find man with an odd rib, or with one less than woman; but this is not the case: both sexes have the same number, twenty-four, twelve on each side of the chest. Moreover, though the man had been in a "deep sleep," he knew when he awoke what had been done; for he said, upon seeing the woman, "This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called man-ess [Issh-ah] because she was taken out of man" (Ish); which is a truly remarkable fact—or fiction.

From the narrative which follows it would appear that before "the Fall" some of the animals then created were endowed with the gift of speech, and of these "the serpent was more subtil" than any of the others. One particular serpent knew of the prohibition concerning the eating of a certain tree in the garden, and, meeting the woman alone one day, began to talk to her, and succeeded in persuading her to taste of the forbidden fruit; after which the woman gave some to her "husband," and he ate also. It is not stated that this newly wedded pair went through any marriage ceremony; apparently they had not. However, as soon as they had eaten this magical fruit, their eyes were opened and they saw that they were unclothed. There were no people in the world at that time to look at them, and they had seen each other often before; but now they were ashamed, and "they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons." Whence they obtained the needles and what substitute they used for thread, the writer does not tell us. They appear to have known by intuition that a number of small scraps could by a certain process be made into one long and wide piece. Some people hold that a very long period must have elapsed before primitive man could have made such a discovery; but that is a mere detail which we need not consider.

After this unintentional act of disobedience the newly married pair heard "the voice of the god Yahveh walking in the garden," and being somewhat doubtful as to his intentions hid themselves among the trees. The god, not seeing anyone, called to the man, "Where art thou?" Both then came out, and stood before him. In this they acted imprudently; they should have remained in their hiding-place, where probably the god would never find them, or not until his anger had cooled: for the writer tells us elsewhere that this deity several times repented, either of what he had done, or was about to do. Unfortunately, the erring pair were not aware of this fact, and so began to excuse themselves, the man putting the blame on the woman, and the woman accusing the serpent. After hearing these excuses the god turned to the serpent, who was standing near balancing himself on his tail, and said to him:—

"Because thou hast done this, Cursed art thou above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat, all the days of thy life."

Prior to this time the serpent used to go about either on his head or his tail, though how he managed his

progression is a mystery; probably he turned a kind of somersault, going alternately on his head and his tail, in a series of leaps. As regards the eating of dust, the curse pronounced upon this reptile had no effect; serpents live upon small animals which they swallow whole. The other part of the curse, however, was more effective: serpents no longer hop along on their heads or tails. But the god Yahveh had not yet done with this animal. He now further decreed that from that time forth there should be "enmity" between the posterity of the woman and all the serpent race; that men should from that day regard serpents as venomous reptiles, and strike at their heads whenever they came across them; while, by way of revenge, serpents should "lay in wait for" men and bite their heels: all of which afterwards came to pass.

Christian commentators and others pervert this passage and give it a totally different meaning. They introduce an evil spirit called Satan into the narrative, and represent "the seed" or posterity of the woman as referring to one person only. In so doing they ignore the fact that no such personage as Satan is so much as once mentioned in the narrative, nor even in any of the five books of the Pentateuch, and also that every person born since "the Fall" is, or was, "the seed" or posterity of the first woman. According to these perverters, Satan was the tempter under the form of a serpent, and "the seed of the woman" was Jesus Christ, who, they say, "bruised" Satan's head by saving people from his clutches; while the Devil in return "bruised" the Nazarene's heel by inciting his countrymen to crucify him, and by causing many of his followers to be persecuted. This, it is scarcely necessary to say, is perfect nonsense.

The word "bruise" in the passage (Gen. iii. 15) is incorrect, as our English revisers knew perfectly well. We find the passage quoted by two second century writers, Theophilus of Antioch and Irenæus. The first renders the word "watch"; the second "be on the watch for": which readings are many centuries earlier than our oldest MS. The passage should read: "I will put enmity between thee [i.e., the serpent] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it [the woman's seed] shall watch for thy head, and thou shalt lay in wait for its heel."

The idea in the mind of the writer may further be seen from the following passage in the same book:—

Gen. xlix. 17.—"Dan shall be a serpent in the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse's heels, so that the rider falleth backward."

It will thus be seen that there is no room for Satan in the narrative. The serpent was selected as the tempter because it was "more subtil" than any of the other animals created. Jesus Christ (or his biographer) also believed in the wisdom attributed to this reptile; for he is represented as enjoining his disciples to be "wise as serpents" (Matt. x. 16).

Returning to the narrative in Genesis, the god Yahveh having cursed the serpent—he did not curse Satan—proceeded to pronounce sentence on the woman. The god is reported to have said:—

"I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception: in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

There are people in the world who say that a god who could for such a trivial offence increase and multiply a woman's agony at such a time could not himself be a benevolent being; but this opinion is not shared by good, orthodox Christians, we may therefore set it down as an atheistic and carping criticism.

The same deity, it is further recorded, also pronounced sentence on the man (whom the Yahvist writer here, for the first time, calls "Adam"). The god is represented as saying:—

"Cursed is the ground for thy sake: in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: thorns also and thy nose shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken."

Only a god who could see in his mind's eye the ploughing and sowing, the reaping and threshing, which formed part of the agricultural labor a hundred or more generations later could have given utterance to the foregoing curse and prediction. We cannot, however, credit the god Yahveh with such foreknowledge. A god who did not know, and could not foresee, that serpents never did, and never would, draw sustenance from dust, could have no intelligence or foresight whatever. We are thus thrown back upon the writer of the story, who, there can be little doubt, merely committed to writing an old legend he had heard narrated in his day. As to the source, this was in all likelihood Babylonian, though up to the present no tablets corresponding to the story of the Fall have been unearthed. The locality of Eden is stated in Genesis to have been "eastward"—that is, eastward of Canaan—and two of the rivers which watered it are there said to have been the Tigris and Euphrates: these indications point to the neighborhood of Babylon.

The penalty for eating the forbidden fruit could not, as we have seen, be mistaken—"In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." This prediction, like that made to the snake, was not fulfilled. Adam is stated in Gen. v. 5 to have lived to the incredible age of 930 years. However, if the god did not put the man to death as he had threatened, he at least took the precaution of turning the pair out of the garden; for, it appears, there was another tree growing there called "the tree of life," which possessed the magical virtue of rendering whoever ate of it immortal, like Yahveh himself. The god also took the further precaution of placing outside the garden "the Cherubim" and "the flame of a sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." There was thus no means of re-entering. This is not a story from the *Arabian Nights*, but, as many may be surprised to hear, a real, certain, undoubted, historical fact; in proof of which I may say that the cherubim were not a species of angels, as some people think, but a pair of gigantic man-headed winged bulls, like those set up by the ancient Assyrians as guardians of gates, etc., and called by the same name as that in the Hebrew story—*kiribim*. If this proof should appear inconclusive, it at least tends to show whence the fiction was derived. The Lord, in fact, borrowed a pair of these recognised guardians of the gates of Assyrian palaces and their under-world to "keep the way" of the entrance to his garden, and, later on, placed another pair in his temple to keep watch over the safety of his sacred ark (2 Chron. iii. 10-18).

Two other minor events remain to be noticed. Before expelling the two sinners from his garden the god Yahveh "made for Adam and for his wife coats of skin, and clothed them." This was really very good of him, more especially as he had to kill some of his newly created beasts to do so. We are also told that before leaving the garden "the man called his wife's name Havvah; because she was the mother of all living." The word *havvah* (translated "Eve") means "living" or "life." The writer appears to have forgotten that no human beings were in the world at this time, save Adam and his wife, and that many years must elapse before the first woman could be called "the mother of all living." This portion of the narrative was evidently written from the Yahvist writer's own point of view, and was, no doubt, composed during one of the intervals when he was not under the influence of the spirit. The only difficulty is to discriminate between the inspired portion of his writings and his own crude ideas; this is not at all an easy task, for the two are so marvellously alike that they are almost, if not wholly, indistinguishable.

There is one point I omitted to notice connected with the creation of man. This is the following:—

Gen. i. 26-27.—"And Elohim said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.....And Elohim created man in his own image, in the image of Elohim created he him; male and female created he them."

From this statement we learn that Elohim was him-

self shaped like man; that he had head, body, limbs, hands, feet, and vocal organs; though of what his body is composed still remains a mystery. Many Christians, however, do not believe the words of this sacred writer; they say that man merely resembled Elohim in being endowed with reason and intelligence, in being created originally pure and sinless, and in possessing an immortal soul, besides a lot of similar nonsense. These objections are a clear perversion of the words of the sacred writer, who was obviously speaking of man's physical conformation, and not of any mental or moral qualities he might possess. The creator could have made man, for instance, in the image and likeness of an elephant or of some other animal; but instead of doing so he created him in his own likeness. That this was the Priestly writer's meaning is proved by that writer himself, who says:—

Gen. v. 8.—“And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth.”

Here we have precisely the same expression, the reference being undoubtedly to bodily form alone, not to intellect or any of the virtues. The writer, of course, meant the same in each case. Seth was begotten in the image and likeness of his father; Adam was created in the image and likeness of Elohim: all three were man-shaped. It would, I know, be more correct to say that man created Elohim and all the other gods in his own image and likeness; but both statements come to nearly the same. The gods were created when men imagined them to exist; we have no sign of their presence before.

ABRACADABRA.

(To be continued.)

Thomas Paine on “Blasphemy.”

BLASPHEMY is a word of vast sound, but equivocal and almost indefinite significance, unless we confine it to the simple idea of hurting or injuring the reputation of anyone, which was its original meaning. As a word, it existed before Christianity existed, being a Greek word, or Greek anglo-fied, as all the etymological dictionaries will show.

But behold how various and contradictory has been the signification and application of this equivocal word. Socrates, who lived more than four hundred years before the Christian era, was convicted of blasphemy for preaching against the belief of a plurality of gods, and for preaching the belief of one god, and was condemned to suffer death by poison. Jesus Christ was convicted of blasphemy under the Jewish law, and was crucified. Calling Mahomet an impostor would be blasphemy in Turkey; and denying the infallibility of the Pope and the Church would be blasphemy at Rome. What then is to be understood by this word blasphemy? We see that in the case of Socrates truth was condemned as blasphemy. Are we sure that truth is not blasphemy in the present day? Woe, however, be to those who make it so, whoever they may be.

A book called the Bible has been voted by men, and decreed by human laws to be the word of God; and the disbelief of this is called blasphemy. But if the Bible be not the word of God, it is the laws and execution of them that is blasphemy, and not the disbelief. Strange stories are told of the Creator in that book. He is represented as acting under the influence of every human passion, even of the most malignant kind. If these stories are false, we err in believing them to be true, and ought not to believe them. It is, therefore, a duty which every man owes to himself, and reverentially to his Maker, to ascertain, by every possible inquiry, whether there be sufficient evidence to believe them or not.

My own opinion is decidedly that the evidence does not warrant the belief, and that we sin in forcing that belief upon ourselves and upon others.

Religion is a private affair between every man and his Maker, and no tribunal or third party has a right to interfere between them. It is not properly a thing of this world; it is only practised in this world; but its object is in a future world; and it is no otherwise an object of just laws, than for the purpose of protecting the equal rights of all, however various their beliefs may be. If one man choose to believe the book called the Bible to be the word of God, and another,

from a convinced idea of the purity and perfection of God, compared with the contradictions the book contains—from the lasciviousness of some of its stories, like that of Lot getting drunk and debauching his two daughters, which is not spoken of as a crime, and for which the most absurd apologies are made—from the immorality of some of its precepts, like that of showing no mercy—and from the total want of evidence on the case, thinks he ought not to believe it to be the word of God, each of them has an equal right; and if the one has a right to give his reasons for believing it to be so, the other has an equal right to give his reasons for believing the contrary. Anything that goes beyond this is an inquisition.

If the Bible be the word of God, it needs not the wretched aid of prosecutions to support it; and you might wish as much propriety make a law to protect the sunshine, as to protect the Bible, if the Bible, like the sun, be the work of God. We see that God takes care of the Creation he has made; he suffers no part of it to be extinguished; and he will take the same care of his word, if he ever gave one. But men ought to be reverentially careful and suspicious how they ascribe books to him as his word, which from this confused condition would dishonour a common scribbler, and against which there is abundant evidence, and every cause to suspect imposition. Leave then the Bible to itself. God will take care of it if he has anything to do with it, as he takes care of the sun and moon, which need not your laws for their better protection.

—From the “Letter to Mr. Erskine.”

Correspondence.

STANDS SCOTLAND WHERE IT DID?

TO THE EDITOR OF “THE FREETHINKER.”

SIR,—As I sit at home this Sunday evening, listening to a church bell discoursing a few bars of a pantomime song very popular a few years since, called “On the Benches in the Park,” I am reminded of a decision I recently made to write you a few lines on the advance of Freethought in Scotland.

The absence of superficial evidences is no proof of inactivity, and need not therefore be a reason for disappointment. But I take leave to say that the existing economic conditions have produced a good many half-baked Christians and half-baked Agnostics. There are a good many people with a foot in each camp, and some of those who are wholly on the side of Freethought are prevented by domestic or business considerations from declaring themselves openly and giving active help to the cause.

I wonder if it would not be possible for those who can defy publicity to inaugurate a scheme of interruption in church. Such methods need not be roughly or discourteously employed. They could be employed in such a way as to show that the intention was not to cause disorder or to break up the meeting—similarly, indeed, to the pertinent interruptions to which we are accustomed at other public gatherings. Of course, it is right to point out that the Established Churches have a legal protection that Nonconformist and Dissenting bodies do not enjoy. Interruptors of the Established Church clergy are liable to prosecution for breach of the peace.

The indication of a weak place in the armor of the enemy is often helpful, and I desire to say that what I am most impressed by in the case of the Scottish clergy generally is their conception of Divinity, which shows that they worship and serve a partial and biased God. As in other Protestant communities, there is, of course, a tendency to ignore the wrath and exalt the love of God; and Scottish Churches, notwithstanding the curses and lamentations of a faithful minority, have at length, over the whole country, accepted the help of all kinds of secular agencies, as they well know that is the only means whereby they can retain the allegiance of their younger adherents. Dogma in Scotland is moribund.

We ought to get the most reliable representation of God from his own family circle, and his Scottish children are careful to insist that, after creation, his two great works for humanity are (1) the revelation of himself in Christ and (2) their “redemption” through Christ's death. But the fruits of these works are only available to those whom God has chosen to endow with the faculty of spiritual discernment. Is this partiality or is it not?

Again, Scottish orthodox people seek to bolster up their faith by declaring that the rewards of religion are not merely in expectancy. They are to be had even in the life that now is. Scottish Christians are metaphysical gymnasts, and they avoid the inevitable conclusion that wealth must be the hall mark of goodness by diving into mysticism.

The popularity of the Psalms of David in Scotland is proverbial. Those containing expressions which condone cupidity and selfishness are special favorites. "Thou hast spread a table for me in the midst of my enemies." "We are his sheep, he doth us feed."

It is notorious that in Scotland, churches prove to be happy hunting-grounds for ambitious and clever professional and business men. Men have doubled and trebled their businesses through their church connections. Many of the less-knowing sheep are readily shorn or fleeced, and parsons are regular in their demands for cash—clothed in the form of loving exhortations to give cheerfully and liberally to God.

The Spirit of God, we are told, is as powerful as ever it was, and is daily working wonders. It is said to effect the most miraculous changes in individual lives. But the suitable material of intelligent infidels is passed over and neglected. We hear of the reclamation of dissolute persons who, after their "conversion," get a good living by Christian preaching. These persons are advertised frequently as reclaimed Atheists, though the fact was that before they entered the fold of the Church they had no ideas, either one way or the other, about religious questions.

The painful efforts recently made by prominent theologians in Scotland to show that there is such a thing as "a reasonable faith" are proof of the fact that dogmatic religion is losing its hold. Christian faith involves belief in, and acceptance of, certain fundamental doctrines without any exercise of the reasoning faculties, and to speak of such a faith being reasonable is a contradiction in terms. Such a proceeding, indeed, is a confession and acceptance of partial defeat. The breaches in the walls of orthodoxy are there, to be seen by those who will see them, and the gratifying thing is that some of the breaches have been made from within! Witness the heresy hunts of the past few years. In the Established Kirk we had the case of Robinson of Kilmun and the Resurrection, and in the former Free Kirk we had the cases of Dods and Bruce and Robertson Smith. Of the last mentioned it was said by the late Dr. Begg that if Smith's views became the views of the Church then he trembled for the Ark of God.

Yet old institutions die hard. They will, in the case of Christianity, retain a certain amount of vitality so long as people decline to use their mental powers independently of any authority. When all people have dispensed with spiritual advisers and ready-made convictions and views, and set themselves to think for themselves, ecclesiastical corporations will have ceased to exist.

Thanking you for your continued service in stimulating people to independent thought.

SIMPLE SANDY.

THOMAS PAINE AND PAUL LOUIS COURIER.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

Sir,—The article in the *Times* of the 8th ult. on Thomas Paine recalls to my memory a passage in *Courier's Pamphlet and Pamphlets* (1823), which I venture to put into such English as I can for the information of your readers:—

"Happy is America in our days, and Paine who saw his country free, having more than any other helped to liberate it by his famous *Common Sense*, a pamphlet of four pages. For at the first beginnings of the American revolution all the States, towns, and townships were divided in opinions; some siding with England, faithful, not without cause, to the lawful government; others dreading failure to achieve independence, and fearing to lose all by striving after the impossible; many spoke of compromise, ready to put up with a sober liberty even though it might be quickly modified or suspended; few dared to hope for a happy outcome from wills so discordant.

One sees in this state of things what the written word can effect in a country where everyone reads, what a new power it is, and how far greater than that of the platform. A few words of a speech may chance to be remembered by a few of its hearers, but the press speaks to a whole people, to everyone at once, when they all read as in America, and of the printed word nothing is lost.

Paine wrote; his *Common Sense*, uniting all minds with the party of independence, decided this great war which, finished there, goes on in the rest of the world."

SIRIUS.

FLOGGING FOR PRISON OFFENCES.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

Sir,—Referring to Mr. Herbert Gladstone's recent defence of secret floggings in prisons for breaches of prison discipline, will you allow me to point out that since he became Home Secretary he has rarely interfered with the sentences of "visiting justices" except on medical grounds, and he always attempts to make out that the offences for which the punishment of the "cat" or birch is imposed are of a brutal and murderous character.

A short time ago a man, who was tried and convicted by a secret court at Princetown, was actually flogged for having thrown an eight-ounce bread-loaf at "an offending warder," and at Wormwood Scrubs, just before Christmas, a flogging was inflicted upon a man for breaking out of the ranks on the way to chapel. This man was in bad health at the time, and he died shortly after he had received the punishment. Furthermore, we have the testimony of Dr. Arthur W. Thomas, an old prison surgeon, that "nearly every assault on a warder is provoked by gross bullying or cruelty."

In view of the anti-flogging utterances of Mr. Asquith, Lord Morley, Mr. Haldane, and other members of the Cabinet, it would seem to be the duty of this Liberal Government to abolish the barbarous and disgusting practice of flogging—a punishment which has been abandoned in the majority of civilised countries, including France, Germany, Italy, Holland, and Japan.

JOSEPH COLLINSON.

A NOTE FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

Sir,—I was pleased about Meredith's letter to you, more especially when (a few days after the arrival of the *Freethinker*) I saw that he was ill—I was afraid this illness would be his last.

Here, in South Africa, where youths are punished for playing cricket "in public" on Sunday, and where many "Freethinkers" become uncomfortable at the mention of the word Atheist, we need the gospel of Freethought *badly*. The churches are very powerful, and have nearly everything their own way—e.g., this town belongs to the Dutch Reformed Church, and no property can change hands without the Church receiving 15s. (more or less), etc., etc.; if the municipality wishes to buy out the Church interest, the municipality will have to pay the Church about £10,000 (more or less), and this represents a very large sum at present. The D. R. Church in the town is, however, in debt to the extent of nearly £6,000. The Wesleyan Church, which comes next in importance, is also in debt. While, besides these two, there are an Anglican Church which looks like a "fowl-house" and two "colored" churches,—at least one of which I believe to be under the direction of the "Ethiopian" movement. This last is part church ("for colored people only") and part secret society (ditto). We will probably hear more of it in five to ten years time. Whether "The Order of Ethiopia" has anything to do with it or not I have not yet been able to discover.

There are no "Salvationists" in the town, and only about eight "Roman Catholics," of whom four men are, or have been, drunkards. The population of the town is about 2,000.

Speaking of South Africa generally, the two Churches with the largest following, viz., the Dutch Reformed and (a considerable distance behind) the Wesleyan, are both losing ground. The Anglican is getting on better than the Wesleyan, and the Roman Catholics are gaining ground (in both senses).

Christian Science seems to be doing well "in parts," while Spiritualism is in about the same state as elsewhere (except U.S.A.). We are not troubled with Theosophy, but the Salvation Army, up to the present, has done very well.

In conclusion, it may be worth while to write the following: My brother, while recently travelling by train in a remote part of India, was accosted by the Anglican Bishop of that part. The Bishop asked to what religion my brother belonged, and on being told that my brother "had no religion," produced his Bible and began to read extracts! My brother, who has taken prizes for "Bible knowledge" in an Anglican school, replied by reading, to the Bishop, other extracts! This and the discussion which followed reduced the poor man of God to tears! On parting the Bishop said, bitterly, "I hope I shall never see you again"; to which my brother, who is quite young, replied, "Well, I am not a Christian, but I wish you a very pleasant journey, and I hope that we shall meet again soon." They did meet again, and my brother now conceitedly believes that he has shaken the good Bishop's faith.

Many Anglo-Indian Christians were surprised that a young Afrikaner should have no religion, and the same people were amazed that an Afrikaner should shake hands with Indians who had treated him courteously.

"J. DE B."

I have long felt that only in Union could Religion properly exist; that this deep, mystic, immeasurable sympathy, which man has with man, is the true element of religion; that indeed the Communion of Saints spoken of in the Creed, is no delusion, but the highest fact of our destiny.—*Thomas Carlyle* (1831).

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.

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

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road). 11.30, C. Cohen, "Looking for God."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill, Hampstead): 3.30, F. A. Davies, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford): 7, F. A. Davies, "Reconciling the Scriptures."

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

WOOLWICH BRANCH N. S. S. (Beresford-square): 11.30, W. J. Ramsey, "The March of the Israelites."

COUNTRY.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7. H. Percy Ward, "Protestant Savages—Wise and Otherwise."

OUTDOOR.

BRISTOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Durdham Downs): 7.30, B. G. Brown, "Modern Rationalism" (a Review). Thursday, July 15 (Haymarket), at 8, "The Blunders of Religion."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Edge-hill Lamp): Wednesday, July 14, at 8, H. Percy Ward, a Lecture.

WIGAN BRANCH N. S. S. (Market-square): Monday, July 12, at 8, H. Percy Ward, "Protestant Savages."

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