

# THE Freethinker

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Only he who thinks is free and independent.  
—FEUERBACH.

## “The Ineffable Tom Paine.”

IT was not to be expected that the centenary of the death of Thomas Paine would be allowed to pass without a display of Christian charity from some quarter. The religious press has, generally speaking, maintained a discreet silence. Even the organs of the New Theology have pursued the same policy. On the one side, it was doubtless felt that the defamation of Thomas Paine had had its day; and, on the other side, that it would never do to confess the fact that he anticipated most of what is now trying to pass as “liberal” Christianity. But a protest against the Paine celebrations appears in the July number of that good old Tory periodical, *Blackwood's Magazine*. The writer of “Musings Without Method” has taken the matter in hand; his musings in this case being *not* without method, but deliberately calculated to blacken the memory of the great Republican and Freethinker.

This writer's point of view is very simple. He refers to “the ineffable Tom Paine” as Carlyle referred to “the unspeakable Turk.” He says that Paine had “the instincts of the true cannibal”—that he was “of those who know nothing and learn nothing”—that he had “nothing more than a glib eloquence to help him”—that he spent his life in trying to do injury to his native land—and that he “did a vast deal of harm” before death put an end to his mischief.

Now all this merely means that Thomas Paine and the *Blackwood* writer are not in intellectual agreement with each other. Such is the most charitable supposition. But there are indications that the writer may, after all, be simply arguing from a brief, and that his emotion is simulated. He certainly contradicts himself, as insincere people are apt to do. Very little reflection might have shown him that if Paine possessed “nothing more than a glib eloquence,” he could not have been “the master of a singularly energetic style.” The “glib eloquence” belongs rather to the critic than to the original. The passages he quotes from Thomas Paine are in striking contrast to his own crude composition, which has vigor without elegance, and passion without point.

Let us examine a few of this writer's charges against Paine. He says that Paine “fought with an energetic pen for the enemies of England, rebel or foreign.” But is not this the veriest nonsense? Paine fought for American freedom just as Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin did. They were all subjects of King George before the War of Independence; they were all citizens of the United States afterwards. Paine defended the French Revolution against Burke's attack. At that moment the relations between France and Great Britain were peaceful. It was after the execution of Louis XVI. that the coalesced monarchies of Europe declared war against the French Republic. Moreover, a very large part of the *Rights of Man* was concerned with the political and social condition of England, and set forth principles and projects of reform which have

gradually been wrought into the texture of its government and society.

It is nonsense also to say that when Paine returned to England from America he “escaped the gallows only by the customary forbearance of Englishmen.” He was in no more danger than any other subject of King George's who had fought for American Independence. It is likewise nonsense to say that Paine in 1792 “escaped from England, where a tardy justice had at last pursued him.” One might imagine that the “tardy justice” related to his actions in America; whereas the truth is that Paine was “pursued” for the authorship of the *Rights of Man* in England, and might have been transported or hung if he had not accepted an invitation to sit in the new French Convention.

The *Blackwood* writer disgraces both himself and the magazine by saying on the authority of “an agent of the British Government” that Paine, in his “flight” from England, presented “the very picture of a journeyman tailor who has been drunk and playing at nine-pins for the three first days of the week, and is returning to his work on Thursday.” This description is not witty,—it is senseless; the words convey no “picture” to the reader's mind,—they are the verbiage of ineffective malice. And just look at the spirit displayed by the writer who adopts it. The British Government tried to compass Paine's death for defending Republicanism; having failed to do this, it paid one of its own hirelings £500 to write a libellous Life of him under a false name; and more than a hundred years afterwards this scoundrel's libels are retailed as the voice of impartial history.

Paine's friends have praised him for “advocating the reprieve of Louis XVI.,” but this writer says that “the claim cannot be admitted.” And what reason does he give? He argues that Paine had “attacked kings for the mere fact of their kingship.” But this is only saying, in effect, that he was on principle a Republican. Paine acted nobly on that occasion. He begged the Convention to kill the king but spare the man. He besought the Republic not to imitate the bad example of Monarchy. He implored it not to stain itself with blood. He was not listened to. Extreme counsels prevailed. Louis was executed, and Paine nearly lost his own life by pleading for humanity.

Nothing that Paine “foresaw has come to pass.” Indeed! Not the United States of America? Not the French Republic? Not an understanding between Great Britain, America, and France? Not the abolition of negro slavery in the midst of civil war? Not the freedom of the press? Not the extension of the suffrage to the people? Not the increase of death duties? Not the tapping of the unearned increment? Not the progressive taxation of wealth? Not old-age pensions for the poor?

It is made a reproach to Paine that he attacked “the literal interpretation of the Bible.” Of course he did. It was more than a hundred years ago. And he was answered by those who defended the literal interpretation of the Bible. Paine and his opponents took the Bible to mean what it says. And the fact that the Bible now means anything except what it says is a proof that Paine's attack has completely triumphed.

G. W. FOOTE.

## Religion and the Struggle for Existence.—I.

To say that the enunciation of the principle of the struggle for existence was one of the most fruitful products of modern thought is to repeat something that is now almost a cant phrase. Unlike many cant phrases, however, it happens to be profoundly true. Not even the law of gravitation had a more profound influence upon thought than the principle of Natural Selection. And, unlike the law of gravitation, the principle of Natural Selection is one that defies disbelief once it is properly stated and clearly understood. There is nothing in the nature of the human intelligence that makes the rejection of the law of gravitation impossible. Whether atoms of matter do attract one another in the manner described by Newton's famous formula is purely a question of proof. It may or may not be so. But once it is understood what Natural Selection means, dissent is impossible. People talk of the proofs of Natural Selection! The thing is proven when it is stated. To say that a particular form of life survives, and to say that it survives because it is the fittest, are, properly understood, identical statements. For the only proof of its fitness is its survival. It survives because it is fittest; it is fittest because it survives. There may be discussion as to the *adequacy* of Natural Selection to do this or that. There can be no question of its truth. That is self-evident.

The bearing of this principle was quickly seen by both friends and enemies. In the first place it struck obviously at those explanations of the origin of the world, beginning with its fauna and flora, which were identified with the current religion. What Spencer called the carpenter theory of creation was put hopelessly out of court by the hypothesis that variation and survival were the really active forces in nature. Instead of admiring the ingenuity of a mechanician designing the inhabitants of a colossal Noah's ark, we had to work out all the details of a single, self-adjusting principle. Instead of applauding the goodness of a deity whose care for animate life was evidenced by the adaptation of organism to environment, we were taught to see how a Nemesis waits upon all maladaptation, and that each case of adaptation is a register of myriads of failures that preceded it. The theory left God with nothing to do. The statement made some half century since, that evolution turned God out of his own universe was only incorrect so far as it assumed the ownership of the universe by Deity. If he existed, it certainly turned him out. True, it was said that the theory left it an open question whether there might not be a God behind the evolutionary process. But a God who is merely behind things, a God who, so far as man is immediately concerned, does absolutely nothing, is not likely to trouble mankind for long.

One influence of evolution on religion was seen in the production of essays and sermons dealing with what was called the preparation in history for Christianity. These productions took, on the purely intellectual side, the religious ideas existing before Christianity, and argued that inasmuch as they resembled in some respects doctrines afterwards known as Christian, this was an evolutionary deity's way of preparing the world for Christianity itself, much as the eye in its present form is preceded by less perfect organs of vision. On the historical side it was argued that the widespread Roman Empire, the growth of one language as a vehicle of literary communication, the development of means of communication and transit in the empire, and the feeling of a common citizenship, was God's method of preparing the way for the conquest of Christianity. Of course, this was reading things backwards; but religious reasoning always proceeds in this manner. Scientifically, these people were unconsciously explaining the origin and development of Christianity. They were showing that the ideas and beliefs known as Christian were blends of religious beliefs current long before Christianity, as such, existed, and that

the triumph of Christianity was a sociological phenomenon no more demanding a supernatural explanation than does the development of the British Empire.

Certain of the more acute champions of Christianity soon based an argument in favor of their creed on Natural Selection itself. We admit, they said, the principle that it is the fittest which survives. But we are faced by the indisputable fact that Christianity has survived all those Pagan religions with which it was once in conflict. Its survival, therefore, argues fitness; at least, it was fitter to survive than other creeds, otherwise it would have disappeared long since. The evolutionist is, therefore, on the horns of a dilemma. Either he must disown his own philosophy, or he must admit the superiority of Christianity.

The issue is not so simple, nor is the victory so decisive as these controversialists imagined. In the first place, there is some confusion of terms. When they speak of "fittest" they really mean "best." But the two terms are not identical. "Best" implies a moral superiority; while "fittest" is a bare statement of fact without any necessarily ethical implications whatever. That Christianity—or to be accurate, the synthesis of pre-Christian beliefs that came to be called Christianity—survived is a fact, but its survival was no more a proof of its greater worth than the growth of the consumption bacilli at the expense of the human organism is proof of its greater human value. It was the disintegration of the old Roman civil life that gave Christianity its chance. It survived, not because there was no better ethical teaching in the field, but because it was better suited to the mass of the people to whom it appealed, to the few who wished to utilise it for their own ends, and because the social conditions were favorable to its growth.

In the next place, the Christianity that survives to-day is not the Christianity that survived some fifteen centuries since. Apologists pretend that the two are identical, but this is a mere controversial trick. Not only have various doctrines been considerably modified and others rejected, but the whole religious atmosphere has changed. What now has become of the belief in demoniacal possession, in witchcraft, or cures by relics or miracle? How many of the questions that then divided Christians into warring camps survive now? Most of these questions would now sound to Christians—even if they understood them—like matters that belonged to another religion altogether, if not to another world. As a matter of fact, if worthiness is to depend upon survival, the verdict against Christianity is clear. All that has really survived the centuries is the name and a certain number of qualities of a not altogether admirable description. But as a body of doctrines or beliefs we are not faced to-day with the Christianity of the fourth century, of the fourteenth century, or even of the eighteenth century. The pressure of civilisation would not be denied, and its influence has been shown clearly enough in the continuous "trimming" of Christian teaching to meet contemporary culture.

But in spite of modifications and rejections, it must be admitted that Christian teachings have shown some degree of persistence, often for lengthy periods, and this brings to view an important feature of Christian history. Life, whether it be a question of the organism itself or of ideas, is always a question of adaptation to environment. But in social life there is such a thing as an artificially maintained environment in order to give beliefs, that might otherwise die out, a lease of life. On the positive side a system of education to a given end with elaborate ceremonials, and on the negative side the careful exclusion of knowledge and of all influences calculated to shake the security of certain opinions, are all so many efforts to create and maintain an environment favorable to a particular set of beliefs. This policy is not confined to religion, but it is in connection with religion that we see it in its clearest and

most evil aspect. And it is a simple statement of historic fact that by far the larger portion of the energies of the Christian Church has been spent in creating an environment without which Christianity would have passed away with the disappearance of the conditions that gave it birth. The control of education by the Churches, the tabooing of certain scientific and ethical and social teaching, the suppression of heresy and Freethought, the guarding of the young both in the home and in the school from influences that would disturb their religious faith, are all examples of the means by which organised Christianity has striven to create an environment favorable to itself.

It is this that has always placed the Christian Churches in opposition to progressive thought. Instinctively it realised that every new idea, every progressive movement was a disruptive force in the environment it sought to maintain. Every change—social, moral, or intellectual—represented a modification in the environment which, if it persisted, necessitated a corresponding modification of Christian teaching. In many directions, and for considerable periods of time, the Churches were successful in their efforts; but in the end the teaching has had to give way, with the result that Christian history represents a series of losing engagements with developmental forces, destruction and wasted energy being the only results that could be placed to the credit of the Christian faith.

So far, then, as Christianity has survived, it does not argue that it survived because of its superiority over competing forms. There has, indeed, been no competition worth speaking about. A group of animals competing with other groups, individual animals competing against climate or difficulties in the way of getting food, survive because of some genuine natural advantage. In the contest of ideas and systems certain of them survive because they are, for the time at least, more in harmony with contemporary intellectual conditions. But the survival of Christianity was due entirely to the accident of its possessing power enough to crush its enemies with weapons that were really alien to the contest. In the early ages the criticisms of cultured pagans were not removed by adequate replies or by superior reasoning, but by the civil power of the Church ruthlessly stamping out their writing. A little later the dungeon and the stake served the same purpose still more effectually. And, later still, legal imprisonment and social boycott has enabled Christianity to secure a passing victory over its enemies. Tried by any reasonable application of the principle of Natural Selection, the survival of Christianity proves nothing—except how great an evil the accidental possession of power may be in unscrupulous hands. And if there is one thing more than another that clearly demonstrates its intellectual and moral unworthiness, it is that, in spite of all that has been, and is being done, Christian belief represents a declining force in the life of civilised mankind.

C. COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

### A Desperate Theodicy.

EVER since the belief in God as maker and ruler of the world first arose it has been found necessary to vindicate it against the criticisms of the intellect. From the beginning, until now, every theologian has been an official protector of the Supreme Being. It is universally acknowledged that the world is not perfect, and the problem is how to reconcile this fact with the alleged perfection of its creator and governor. The subtlest minds of the ages have been engaged on this gigantic riddle, and the ablest divines of to-day are endeavoring to justify their profession by working away at it with might and main. Leibnitz published his famous *Theodicee* in 1710, in reply to Bayle's contention that faith and

reason are utterly irreconcilable. Leibnitz wrote that ingenious work in defence of the belief in the justice and goodness of the Deity, and from his standpoint as a believer the only philosophical conclusion to which he could come was that this is the best of all possible worlds. He maintained that the Universe is essentially harmonious, and that by means of it God realises his end—namely, the manifestation and communication of his own perfection. But Leibnitz had to face the fact that this best of all possible worlds was full of evil. Here was a serious difficulty, and in his attempt to deal with it Leibnitz divided evil into three kinds. Firstly, there was metaphysical evil, or imperfection, which God unconditionally willed as essential to created beings; secondly, physical evil, which was conditionally willed as punishment, or as a means to greater good; and thirdly, moral evil, which was not willed, but merely permitted. The reason why moral evil was permitted was that it had been foreseen that a world with evil would be much better than any other possible world. On this point Leibnitz was not at all clear and convincing. Sometimes he spoke of evil as simply a set-off to the good in the world, which it caused to shine all the more brightly by contrast. At other times he confused moral with metaphysical evil, holding that it had only a negative existence. Evil actions, he taught, must be referred to men alone, only the power of action, which is good, being from God.

Leibnitz reasoned in a fatal circle; and it is no wonder that Kant published a paper in 1791 entitled *On the Failure of all Philosophical Attempts in Theodicy*. It is well known that Leibnitz must take rank with the most original and brilliant thinkers the world has seen, and yet his essay in Theodicy is admitted by all to have been a signal failure. So great a man failed simply because the task which he undertook to perform was an impossible one. Indeed, all vindications of God are bound to prove both futile and absurd. We will take a present-day instance. The Rev. Dr. David Smith, of Blairgowrie, Scotland, has a great reputation as a theologian of wide learning and deep insight, to whom thousands of perplexed and wavering Christians look for the due confirmation and intensification of their threatened faith in God and the Gospel. He has written a striking work on the life of Jesus, called *The Days of His Flesh*, which is regarded by many as a priceless treasure; and he is allotted a column in the *British Weekly*, in which he endeavors to meet the objections and solve the difficulties laid before him, week by week, by anxious inquirers or incipient doubters. As a rule, Dr. Smith writes lucidly and sensibly, especially on purely moral questions. But on July 1 his column was devoted to a discussion of God's relation to the suffering and cruelty so prevalent in the world; and it would be too much to expect that he should succeed where a much greater man completely failed.

The problem set before Dr. Smith was this: "Was God aware, before he created this world, of all the fearful things that would happen? Did he endow the cat and the tiger with the nature they possess—with such fiendish appliances for torturing other creatures?.....I am sure this kind of thing stops a great number of people from believing in a God of love, and makes them Atheists." Dr. Smith begins his reply by throwing the Bible overboard:—

"According to the teaching of the Scriptures, all this horror is the consequence of sin, and, in Pascal's phrase, 'testifies of a lost God.' All Nature, animate and inanimate, shares man's curse (Gen. iii. 17, 18), and is groaning and travailing in pain together with him, and crying with him for deliverance (Rom. viii. 19-23). This, however, is very far from being a solution of the problem."

What prevents the Biblical explanation from being a solution of the problem is the simple fact that it flatly contradicts the testimony of Science. "Fossil remains prove that long ere the appearance upon it of the present race of man this earth was the abode of ravenous and destructive monsters, more terrible than any now existent." Therefore "cruelty is not

limited to the sphere of human influence: it ranges where human sin has never reached." "The problem," Dr. Smith informs his correspondent, "is even more terrible than your statement of it makes out."

It is not often that an orthodox divine openly admits that the Biblical account of the horrible cruelties and evils of the world cannot be accepted; but in candidly making such a concession Dr. Smith unwittingly presents us with an illustration of how the Higher Criticism is gradually undermining the foundations of theology. Having thus rejected the teaching of the Scriptures on the subject, how does our divine dispose of his inquirer's difficulty? He candidly confesses that he cannot solve it. All he pretends to be able to do is to place before us "some considerations which seem to be helpful towards a solution." There are three such considerations, which we will now carefully examine.

The first consideration is anything but flattering to the Deity. Long before man appeared on it an awful curse rested upon the earth. Probably for millions of years it had been the scene of indescribably horrible atrocities. "Our planet," says Dr. Smith, "is incalculably older than our race, and there is no telling what earlier races may have inhabited it, or what previous and more terrible tragedies may have been enacted upon it." Poor God, how he must wince as he peruses such a scathing reflection upon his moral character. But the worst and cruellest is yet to come. The Universe proved one too many for its Creator—a machine over which the omnipotent machinist had no control. Omnipotence itself stood aghast at the results of his own creativeness. Generation followed generation, and race succeeded race, and the prospect grew blacker as millenniums rolled away. Then a bright idea occurred to the Deity. Could he not create a new and superior race which would help him to restore peace and order and happiness throughout the length and breadth of his domains? "Perhaps God created our race to be his fellow-workers in the redemption of the world, bearing vicariously the curse which rested on it." If that was the Divine purpose in the creation of man, how frightfully it must have been frustrated by man's subsequent sin and fall and disinheritance. The last race was a greater disappointment than any of its predecessors had ever been, and God must have been broken-hearted as he sat on his phantom throne, thinking about it all.

Such are the implications of the first consideration; and we shall see that those of the second are no better. It is quite impossible to understand how an intelligent person could for a second entertain the notion that God's character might be cleared by throwing the blame for all that is wrong in the Universe upon the back of second causes. And yet that is what is attempted by Dr. Smith's second consideration:—

"Is it true that God endowed savage animals with those fendish appliances for torturing other creatures? According to the evolutionary doctrine, organic peculiarities are developments induced by the pressure of the environment.....The tiger's fangs and claws are not original, but acquired. They are not endowments of the Creator, but evolutions of its own savagery."

If there be a God, he is as responsible for the environment as for the species upon which it presses; for the outcome of the evolutionary process as for the original forms that have been modified by it. Dr. Smith says that "the tiger's fangs and claws are not endowments of the Creator, but evolutions of its own savagery"; but whose endowment was the savagery that preceded and made possible the fangs and claws? If there be a God who is responsible for anything, it is he whom we must hold accountable for everything, for the "evolutions of savagery," as well as for the original endowments.

The third consideration is worthy of its fore-runners, for it is nothing but a miserable begging of the whole question. In his hurry to finish the article, the reverend writer must have forgotten what he had said in the earlier portions of it. There

he assured us that the most terrible tragedies had been enacted long before the appearance of man, and that the fangs and claws of the tiger were "the evolutions of its own savagery," but here he tells us that "animals are savage because their (human) masters are stupid or brutal." That is to say, the cat is savage and tortures a mouse or a bird so frightfully before killing it outright, because its master or mistress is stupid or brutal, and the tiger tears its victims to pieces because men do not welcome God's love and obey his law. Because the hen, partridge and the hare on the estate of the Quaker, Joshua Geddes, were so delightfully tame, our divine absurdly concludes that "suffering is contrary to the will and purpose of God." Dr. Smith also informs us that his dog no longer pounces upon and strangles rabbits, because long ago he discovered that his master disapproved of such murderous conduct; and the inference is that Dr. Smith showed his disapproval because he welcomed God's love and obeyed his law. The truth, however, is that the reverend gentleman's influence over his dog is due, not to his piety, but to his humanity, which is fully shared by men and women who do not believe in any God's love and law. Indeed, the result of man's interference is the elimination, to some extent, of the blunders committed by the Deity of Christian belief.

Surely, Dr. Smith's theodicy is the wildest and most reckless ever known, which proves that the vindication of an alleged just and good God is an entirely hopeless task. If such a God existed we believe he would be his own vindication, because he and all his works would be in perfect harmony.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Narratives in Genesis—VI.

### THE STORY OF CAIN AND ABEL.

(Continued from p. 444.)

THIS story, like that of "the Fall," is from the pen of the Yahvist writer; but, as we shall see, it seems to have been unknown to the later Priestly writer. According to the story, Adam and Eve, some time after leaving Eden, became parents of the two sons whom they named Cain and Abel. When these lads had grown up, Cain, the elder, became a tiller of the ground, and Abel a keeper of sheep. While thus employed, "in process of time" each of the brothers "brought an offering unto Yahveh"; but how they came to think of bringing offerings, or learnt that Yahveh would care to receive them, is not stated. Neither does it appear that either of the brothers knew what kind of offerings the god would be graciously pleased to accept. However, if they did not know, the writer of the story did; for in his days the sacrifice of a certain class of animals was in full swing. Bearing this fact in mind, we can easily predict what was likely to happen. Cain brought as an offering some of "the fruit of the ground"; Abel brought as an offering some of "the firstlings of his flock," and he did not forget "the fat thereof." Most mysteriously, the latter offering was in exact accordance with the following commands given nearly three thousand years after Abel's death:—

Dent. xv. 19.—All the firstling males that are born of thy herd and of thy flock thou shalt sanctify unto the god Yahveh."

Lev. i. 10, 12.—"And if his oblation be of the flock.....he shall cut it into its pieces, with its head and its fat: and the priest shall lay them in order on the wood," etc.

Abel apparently knew by intuition that these commands would afterwards be given; if he did not, the writer of the story knew—which comes to the same thing. When the god Yahveh beheld the two offerings "he had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." This preference seems rather hard upon Cain who,

no doubt, brought the best his garden could produce. Neither is any reason assigned for the rejection. In common fairness the god should have accepted both offerings, and then have given Cain a hint privately that he preferred a sacrifice that contained blood. This would have prevented the commission of the crime which the god knew would follow from his rejection. Cain, on seeing his offering contemned, was filled with jealousy against his brother, and one day, when the two were in the field together, he slew him.

Shortly afterwards, the God Yahveh appeared and asked Cain where was his brother. Cain, still angry, answered "I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?" Yahveh took no notice of this insolent reply; he was not at all sensitive, and, considering that Cain had committed the greatest of all crimes, he was remarkably lenient. The god, in his wisdom, inflicted a much lighter punishment on the murderer than on the murderer's parents, who had only been guilty of a trivial act of disobedience: but that was the Lord's usual method of administering chastisement. Yahveh first cursed the ground, so that Cain might have more labor in digging, and then decreed that the fratricide should leave his home and become "a fugitive and a wanderer" on the earth. The god had already cursed the ground on Adam's account, he now cursed it again on Cain's. The first curse had evidently not affected the earth much. Upon hearing his sentence Cain exclaimed "My punishment is greater than I can bear!" or, according to another version, he said: "Mine iniquity is greater than can be forgiven!" The sense of the two exclamations is not quite the same; but that is a mere detail. What is more certain is, that Cain further said: "I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that whosoever findeth me shall slay me." The fear here expressed is astonishing. Only two human beings, besides himself, were in the world at this time—his father and his mother—neither of whom would seek to harm him. One cannot help seeing that the writer of the story had in his mind a world in some measure inhabited; he could not, in fact, conceive of a world or a country without inhabitants, and, strange to say, the god Yahveh saw things in the same light, and so placed the murderer under his protection. Yahveh said: "Whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him seven fold." The god also "set a sign upon Cain, lest any finding him should slay him." (In A. V. "sign" translated "mark.")

What was the "sign" that could deter men, when the earth became more populated, from slaying Cain? Where was this sign? Was it something on Cain himself, a pair of horns, for instance, or a tail? Whatever it was, how were men to know the meaning of the "sign" unless Cain chose to tell them? The whole thing appears to be perfect nonsense. How, again, could the god take vengeance "sevenfold" on any possible slayer of Cain? The slayer had only one life to lose. Did the god intend to include in his "vengeance" the man's wife and family? Looking at the case of Achan (Josh vii. 24) and the multitude of women and children slaughtered by order of this deity (Josh. viii., x., xi.; Num. xxxi., etc.) it would seem that such was his intention.

The sentence on Cain, mild as it was, was not carried out. He was never a fugitive, there being no one to seek him out and bring him to justice and punishment. He simply went and "dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden." The word "Nod" means "wandering"; so that Cain, having been sentenced to be a "wanderer," went and lived in the land of "wandering." This looks very much like a made up story; but more remarkable is the statement that immediately follows. This reads:—

"And Cain know his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch" (iv. 17).

Here the sacred writer has been going a little too fast. He does not stop to tell us where Cain's wife came from. According to the story, only one woman

was in existence at this time—Cain's own mother—and nothing is said of Eve giving birth to any more children until about a century after Cain had left home. Whence, then, did Cain get his wife? It seems perfectly clear that the writer of the story assumed, as a matter of course, that Cain took a wife from one of the families of the people of the land where he went to live. From this point of view we can understand why Cain feared that men might kill him when they came to know the crime he had committed; but from no other. But for a statement in the next chapter, it might be inferred that Cain took a sister with him to the land of Nod; but this statement precludes such a proceeding. We turn, then, to chapter v., a document composed by the Priestly writer, who appears never to have heard of the affair of Cain and Abel. In this chapter the writer professes to give the descendants of Adam in a direct line down to Noah, the hero of the Deluge. He commences as follows:—

Gen. v. 1-8.—"This is the book of the generation of Adam.....And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth: and the days of Adam after he begat Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters. And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died. And Seth lived an hundred and five years, and begat Enoch: and Seth lived after he begat Enoch eight hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters: and all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years: and he died."

Thus, according to the Priestly writer, who evidently traced the descent through the reputed eldest sons, Adam's first son was Seth, born when he was 130 years of age, the birth of other sons or daughters being barely noticed. Moreover, the statement that the son was begotten in the likeness and image of the father is only made once—in the case of the first son born—the likeness in all the other cases being taken for granted. It seems perfectly clear, then, that the Priestly writer believed Seth to be the first son born to Adam and Eve, and that he had never heard the story of Cain and Abel—or, if he had, gave no credence to it.

Returning to the Yahvist narrative, it is obvious that if the land of Nod was an inhabited country, there could be no difficulty in Cain getting a wife, or in the wife giving birth to a son Enoch. The problem then would be, as to where the inhabitants of Nod came from. This, the inspired writer might say, did not concern him; he did not trouble himself about mere matters of detail. The writer, however, goes on to say that Cain built a city, and called it after the name of his son—Enoch. This is another of the writer's remarkable statements. That one man unaided, or even with the assistance of a son, should be able to build a city, is simply incredible. One would think that a log-hut would amply suffice for all his needs. But even the rudest building of this humble class would be beyond the power of a man with no other tools than a stick torn from a tree and a large stone. And while on this subject I may add that the writer's earlier statement as to the occupation of Cain—"tiller of the ground"—is not in accordance with fact. Land could not be "tilled" without implements for digging or turning up the earth, and there were certainly no such implements in the earliest days of primitive man: neither was there such a luxury as a log-hut. If the writer had said that Cain discovered and occupied a cave in the country to which he had gone, and that he lived on any fruit he was able to get, with an occasional rabbit or pheasant which he managed to kill, this would have been nearer the truth. But to say that a solitary, tool-less man, at this period of the world's history, actually built "a city," is really astounding. The Yahvistic writer knew no more of the past history of man than did his Priestly brother of the stellar universe. Ages must have elapsed, during which countless generations of families lived and died in scattered and isolated places in various parts of the earth, before the idea of building what is called a city could have arisen.

The Yahvist writer next gives a list of the descendants of Cain, which is not absorbingly interesting. Still, it serves to illustrate his powers of invention. "And unto Enoch was born Irad, and Irad begat Mehujael, and Mehujael begat Methushael, and Methushael begat Lamech." The last named descendant had two wives who bore him three sons—Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain—all three being many ages in advance of their time. Of these three men the writer says:—

"Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents and have cattle."

"Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ."

"Tubal-cain, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron."

Thus, in the seventh generation from the first primitive man, the human race had reached the stage of civilisation that distinguished the writer's time. To fully appreciate this writer's statements we must bear in mind that the archæological remains of far distant times have furnished us with evidence of the nature of the implements and utensils used by ancient man during three very long periods in the world's history—the Stone age, the Bronze age, and the Iron age—the first two of which carry us back to pre-historic times. During the earliest of these periods the process of working of metals was unknown, the implements used by the men of this era—chisels, axes, knives, hammers, etc.—being of stone (mostly flint) and of bone and horn. In the seventh generation from the first man this age can scarcely be said to have commenced; yet, according to the sacred writer, man at this early time could manufacture material for tents, could make instruments of music, and could forge all kinds of cutting tools and weapons in bronze and iron. Obviously, this portion of the narrative was written in moments when the writer was not fully inspired.

The story of Cain and Abel does not appear to have been known to the writers of the other books of the Old Testament. It is not once mentioned, or even alluded to, by any of them, though there were plenty of occasions when the character, conduct, or offerings of the brothers might have been referred to as a warning, or illustration, or a historical fact. Had these writers known of Cain and his crime, we should probably see the wicked spoken of as "children of Cain" or "sons of Cain" instead of "sons of Belial"; but neither of the brothers is once referred to. Such a conspiracy of silence stamps the whole narrative as a late fiction.

ABRACADABRA.

(To be continued.)

The *Humane Review* (quarterly) is always good, and the new (July) number is especially good. It opens with a very spirited article by Carl Heath on "Thomas Paine." This article does justice to Paine's character and achievements. It is extremely eulogistic, yet the eulogy is discriminating. We wish it could be widely read by the general public. Carl Heath, we are glad to see notices, and brands, ex-President Roosevelt's description of Paine as a "dirty little Atheist," which he says contains "three words and three falsehoods, as has been pointed out by Mr. G. W. Foote." Another excellent article is M. Little's "Religion of Suffering," which has words of praise for Jesus personally, but regards the modern world as lying in the shadow of his Cross. The notion that his sufferings are our atonement has made us "in all things reckon for our salvation on blood." Mr. H. S. Salt's article, "Some Thoughts on Lucretius," is written with scholarship, intellect, and grace. He holds that Lucretius is "a modern of the moderns" in his "passionate fidelity to the human race" and indeed "to all sentient and suffering life," and in his "hatred of all the superstitions and tyrannies that enslave it." We suppose it is Mr. Salt also who writes "A Lost Leader"—a very able and suggestive article on the passing of Swinburne, in which it is admitted that "in one point Swinburne seems to have remained constant to the end—and all honor to him for it!—namely, in his sympathies with free-thought."

## Acid Drops.

The Bishop of Salisbury treats Jesus Christ as a very old-fashioned and quite out-of-date personage. Jesus Christ taught that evil was not to be resisted. "If one smite thee on the one cheek," he said, "turn unto him the other also." But the Bishop of Salisbury will have none of this. Speaking at the meeting of the Upper House in the Convocation of Canterbury, he praised the patriotism of the German people, which he said was due to "compulsory military service." He was also of opinion that compulsory military service was "a political and social necessity" in this country also, "if the nation were to keep peace with Germany." Such is the upshot of the two thousand years' history of the Prince of Peace. A bishop of that holy religion says in effect: "Never mind Jesus Christ. Let us go on with the business. We have got to race Germany and win at the goal. Peace, did you say? Oh, yes! That's all right in its way. But the Lord Jesus Christ didn't understand the twentieth century. Every man must be a soldier. That is the gospel for to-day."

The Bishop of Salisbury is a priest of the Church of Christ. "What the devil does he do in that galley?" Isn't his proper place outside? Well, yes—and no. For he may quote Jesus Christ's saying that he came not to send peace but a sword, and that any of his disciples who hadn't one of those fighting tools should sell his clothes and buy one. Which shows what a beautifully consistent thing Christianity is, and how useful it is when you want to hurt somebody with it, or to live on it.

"With religion," the King said at Liverpool, "patriotism goes hand in hand." What sort of patriotism? The patriotism that makes callow boys play at being soldiers. The patriotism that snarls at every competitor in the world's great race. The patriotism that looks upon every other nation's strength as our own weakness. The patriotism of Jingo brag and bounce. The patriotism of hectoring and exploitation all over the "heathen" world. The patriotism of a hundred millions a year on war. This is the sort of patriotism that goes excellently well with religion. Not that it is King Edward's patriotism. We don't believe that for a minute. Like Omar Khayyam's Allah, "he's a good fellow." But he has to burn a candle to the Church.

Evidently a large section of the public is beginning to think that the less religion the better. The Lord Mayor, at the annual dinner to the Archbishops, Bishops, and clergy of the Church of England at the Mansion House, said that "Much had been done to brighten the services, but if he might make an appeal it would be for shorter services. Those who gave the shorter services were drawing the most merciful sermons."

The Athanasian Creed has been up for discussion again in the Convocation of Canterbury. The Bishop of Southampton said that the great majority of thoughtful and well-educated men objected to it. He might have added that the same men objected to Christianity altogether. The Archdeacon of Dorset said that it "grated on the consciences" of many. But the Archdeacon of Sudbury said that "many of them had a deep affection for this old war song of the Church." We believe this is true. "Disbelieve and be damned" was always popular with that type of religionist. The bulk of the clergy, however, are discreet men; they know when their interests are threatened, and they don't want to see their Church left high and dry. So the Convocation passed a resolution for excluding the "warning clauses"—commonly called the "damnation clauses"—and referred it to a committee to see how this might best be done. Poor old Athanasian Creed! Christianity is breaking up and perishing bit by bit.

We see that Mr. Horatio Bottomley, M.P., gave notice of a question to the Prime Minister on this question of getting rid of, or partially suppressing, the Athanasian Creed. Mr. Bottomley contends that the Prayer Book is part of Acts v. and vi. of Edward vi., chap. 1, and that no alteration can be made in it without the consent of Parliament. He wished, therefore, to ask the Prime Minister whether, before the resolution of the Convocation of Canterbury becomes effective, an opportunity would be afforded to Parliament to consider and ratify the same. Unfortunately we go to press this week before Mr. Bottomley's question will be reached.

Talking about Bishops, there is a story of one in Mr. C. O. Burge's new *Adventures of a Civil Engineer*. The right

reverend father in God had been staying a few days with his brother's family; he was what Kipling would call an absent-minded beggar, and "on leaving he kissed the housemaid and gave five shillings to his niece."

Mr. Burge tells another story of a rector who, at one of the three meetings of a confirmation class, said: "The week before last we took 'the World,' last week we spoke of 'the Flesh,' and this week we go to 'the Devil.'"

Having to remove a cemetery in order to build a railway station, at Sydney, Mr. Burge consulted friends of the dead as to where the bodies should be re-interred. A Baptist who had buried his Baptist father in the Baptist section of the cemetery, had since become a prominent Anglican, and he desired his father's remains to be promoted to the Anglican quarter in the new burying ground. The paternal remains offered no objection.

The following piece of news is taken from the *Ceylon Observer*, May 17, 1909:—

"DISTURBING DIVINE SERVICE ON BOARD H.M.S. 'HYACINTH.' Three men and a boy were charged to-day by Inspector Ashton (Harbor Police) at the instance of Rear-Admiral Slade for voluntarily causing disturbance to the crew of H.M.S. *Hyacinth* while they were lawfully (sic) engaged in divine service on board at 11-12 a.m. yesterday. Accused severally admitted the offence and said they were singing as usual whilst pulling past the vessel, and did not know there was divine service on board. They were fined *R5 each*. The boy being under sixteen years, was given *five cuts with a cane*."

This is how the British philistine goes about the world practising religious toleration. Three men fined, and a boy subjected to the degradation of flogging, for singing "as usual" in rowing past a British battleship. How on earth were they to know that "divine service" was going on in the ship's belly? If natives are to be punished in this way for such an offence they ought to have a proper opportunity of avoiding it. A conspicuous notice should be put up:—"God's on Board." Many white Christians would like to add:—"Pass along quietly, damned niggers."

How well the Gospel pays! Gipsy Smith has at his home an old knife which his father used when he followed his trade as a roving gipsy. "And now," says the Gipsy, "when I return from a great campaign I pick up the old knife, and say to myself, 'If it were not for the grace of God I would still be using this as a wandering gipsy.'" That is perfectly true. Preaching led his Master to his doom; it has given Gipsy Smith plenty of popular applause and a well-appointed, comfortable home. That old knife marks the difference Jesus and his Cross have made in his life.

The *Daily Chronicle* remarks that Birmingham used to be the great prize-fighting centre. Brummagem Pots were once famous. One of them was Bendigo, whose reputation was world-wide. In the Lord's good time he was converted and became a preacher of the gospel.

"'Wot's Atheists?' he asked once, on being told that a gathering of men he saw were of that persuasion. He was told, 'Don't believe in no God, don't they,' he shouted, 'here, hold my coat, I'll damned soon show them wot's wot!'"

Our contemporary is getting on. Fancy using swear-words like that! Has our contemporary no fear of the pit?

They have had a discussion at the Church House, Westminster, on what is "the will of God." It was at a meeting of the Representative Church Council, which opened with prayers and then got to business. Lord Robert Cecil, a pious gentleman, but not an ordained clergyman, and therefore not filled with the Holy Ghost, moved a resolution that marriage with a deceased wife's sister (whether allowed by the law of the land or not) was wrong and "contrary to the will of God." Chancellor Smith seconded, and then the fun began. We are bound to say, however, that the principal person concerned took no part whatever in the discussion. What was the "will of God" could only be definitely decided by "God" himself. We cannot, for the life of us, see what right a number of Anglicans, or other religionists, have to settle such a question. But the impudence of piety is proverbial. Well, the discussion went on, and Lord Robert Cecil's motion was opposed by the more wary clergy, who saw the awkwardness of declaring that marriage with a deceased wife's sister was against the will of God, when, as the Bishop of Birmingham observed, the "whole of the Western Church, leaving out England, did allow marriage with a deceased wife's sister under certain conditions." It would never do to set Church against Church as to what

was the will of God. People might be tempted to wonder if there was any will of God at all. So the more wary clergy blanketed Lord Robert Cecil, and the "will of God" part of the resolution was struck out.

The resolution as finally carried set forth that marriage with a deceased wife's sister was "contrary to the principles implied in Holy Scripture." Apparently, then, you may run contrary to the principles of Holy Scripture without running contrary to the will of God. Which, as Mr. Euclid says, is absurd. Unless, indeed, the Bible is *not* the Word of God—as a vast crowd of people are coming to believe.

The following item of news is cabled over from New York by the special correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle* (July 9):—

"The Salvation Army have introduced an innovation at Atlantic City, one of New Jersey's famous seaside resorts. For years the Salvationists have held services on the beach, but this year they have obtained permission of the authorities for those who frequent their services to wear bathing costume indoors. By this means they hope to obtain greater crowds of listeners among the thousands who bathe on the sands. They have rented the Beach Theatre, just off the three-mile broad walk, and hold services there practically all day. Sections have been arranged in the theatre for bathers whose costumes are dry and others whose are wet. It has become quite the fad for whole troops of bathers to come out of the water and attend the Salvationists' services just as they are, without waiting to change."

Who knows what we may see in time? It is not such a vast step from a bathing suit to the costume of the Adamites, Anabaptists, and other Christian sects, who emulated the primitive simplicity of Eden.

Mrs. Besant has been talking very big at St. James's Hall. "Theosophy," she said, "has to try to breathe into the artist the idea of the splendor of his calling, the divinity of his power." Fancy all the great artists waiting for Theosophy to blow them out in this way! Happily genius always has its own inspiration, without having to depend upon oriental moonshine. We note, also, that Mrs. Besant has been talking about inspiration, the last stage of which is that "where the inspirer takes actual possession of the body of the inspired." Well, there are plenty of cases of such inspiration in lunatic asylums, where plain John Smith affects to be William Shakespeare, or even Jesus Christ—and sometimes God Almighty.

Mr. Albert Dawson, the editor of the Campbellite or New Theology organ, is an enterprising man. His show includes Socialism, Spiritualism, Theosophy, Woman Suffrage, and other things. His policy is to patronise anything that has a "draw" in it, and thus float on a tide of prosperity to the harbor of a good paying success. He is undoubtedly a clever gentleman—in his way. Describing the Suffragette attack on Inspector Jarvis, he says that "Mrs. Saul Solomon was in some way responsible for his hat finding its way to the ground." If this gentleman were describing a domestic murder, for instance, he would probably say that the husband was somehow responsible for the wife's throat showing a solution of continuity. But why on earth isn't he clever enough to alter his silly standing announcement of an "exclusive article" every week by Mr. Philip Snowden, M.P.? We have told him before that an "exclusive article" is downright nonsense. What is meant is that Mr. Snowden contributes an article every week exclusively to Mr. Dawson's paper.

It may be well to have respect for God, and his bosom friend, the Rev. R. J. Campbell. But it is certainly well, also, to have respect for the English language. And there would be no harm done if a little could be spared for common sense.

We are indebted to the *Christian Commonwealth* for the news that Mrs. Pankhurst, before heading the last Suffragette raid on the House of Commons, exclaimed: "At such times as these we feel there are only two realities—the soul and God." The lady overlooked a third reality—Inspector Jarvis.

We are also indebted to the *Christian Commonwealth* for the information that "a boy who sticks a pin into another boy gives promise of being a finer man than he who sings demurely: 'I want to be an angel, and with the angels stand.'" We suppose it is the boy who has the pin stuck into him who is graduating for an early place amongst the angels.

We see a notice of a lecture by an art critic on "The New Theology in Art." This must be rather a barren topic. "Art in the New Theology" would be more fruitful. Some

people might think "art" a less accurate term than "artfulness," but they sometimes mean the same thing.

Mr. Gladstone approves of "blasphemy" prosecutions, on the one side; he also approves of Roman Catholic processions through the public streets, on the other side, and does not care if they break the law in doing so by carrying the Host, which is, further, a direct religious challenge to every spectator. But the right honorable gentleman is very careful that the Anti-Vivisectionists shall not wound the susceptibilities of the medical profession. In reply to questions by Lord R. Cecil and Mr. Walter Guinness in the House of Commons, Mr. Gladstone said that the processions of Anti-Vivisectionists on July 10 and 24 would be orderly, and the police had taken assurances that "provocative banners" would not be carried. Our brave Home Secretary takes assurances from the weak; the strong may do as they like.

The *Anti-Socialist* rejoices over "the example made of the Socialist Boulter, who was sentenced at the Old Bailey to a month's imprisonment for blasphemous and obscene language." We do not understand what Boulter's Socialism has to do with the matter. The mention of it is no doubt intended to raise an extra prejudice against him in the minds of our contemporary's readers. The same motive explains the introduction of the word "obscene." That word did not appear in Boulter's indictment. It was not mentioned during his trial. Mr. Justice Darling employed it, but shielded himself by not letting the public know the actual words that Boulter used, and thus preventing it from forming an independent judgment. We are not concerned to defend Boulter's use of the English language, but we do decidedly say that to prosecute a man for "blasphemy" and afterwards declare that you put him in prison for "obscenity" is disgraceful hypocrisy.

Mr. Justice Darling was only sentencing Boulter, who was tried sixteen months previous by Mr. Justice Phillimore. The *Anti-Socialist* is mistaken, therefore, in supposing that at future "blasphemy" trials the "offensive passages will not be permitted to be read aloud in court." They *must* be read aloud in court at the trial.

This mixture of ignorance and malice is followed by a cheap sneer at Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner who was "advertised to speak on the same platform as Boulter at a Secularist meeting in June." We do not dispute the statement. We merely ask when and where that meeting took place. Mrs. Bonner may have been "speaking not so very long ago at Heath Street Hampstead Baptist Church (*sic*)," but it puzzles us to understand how this could be an imputation on her or on the church. We believe Mrs. Bonner is *not* a Socialist. Even if she were, Anti-Socialists ought not to attack her with the *odium theologicum*. And if our contemporary means to fight Socialism in that way the sooner it is dead the better. Socialism is right or wrong, true or false, sound or unsound; and the discussion of *which* it is should be carried on with intelligence, fairplay, and good temper.

Professor J. M. Asher, of New York, being interviewed over here by the *Jewish Chronicle*, says that 90 per cent. of the million Jews in that city are likely to be lost to Judaism. Not more than 10 per cent. of the Jewish children there are in receipt of religious instruction of any kind. Education is secular, and religious instruction has to be provided outside, and this is not done. From other causes, too, religious interest is waning. It seems that a desperate effort is to be made to remedy this shocking state of things, and the true-blue friends of Judaism are looking round for a pious millionaire.

Rev. J. Thornton, the poor British Chaplain at Barcelona, has to exist on £350 a year, and to put up with something less than a two months' holiday. He really does not appear to be appreciated at his true value. Thirty-one people attended divine service under him the other Sunday, and he had to complain that they only contributed 14 pesetas (about 11s.) to the "plate."

All the Christian organs find that they must live on other things than Christianity. The *Christian World*, for instance, devoted its front page last week to Mr. Keir Hardie and Charles II., the Budget, and Woman Suffrage; and the next page to Financial Prospects, Four By-Elections, the N.L.F. Conference, State Pensions, Murders at the Institute, the German Political Crisis, and the Persian Crisis. Religion is represented by a final leaderette on the Calvin Celebrations.

Writing on John Calvin, the *Christian World* refers to his "seeming cruelties"—amongst which was the murder of

Servetus. Well, if burning a man alive, with green wood to prolong his agony, is a *seeming* cruelty, what would an *actual* cruelty be?

The Bishops have presented a petition against the Bookmakers. We suggest that the Bookmakers should present a petition against the Bishops. We should be happy to draw it up for them. It would show that gambling operations are countenanced in the Bible, and that the Bishops get a lot more money out of the public than Bookmakers do—and tell a lot more lies in doing it.

"You could see glory shining out of his very eyes." So said Mrs. Edmonstone, the mother of Alexander Edmonstone, who was executed at Perth Prison for the cold-blooded murder of a youth of fifteen, with the sordid motive of robbery. She saw him in his cell the day before his execution. He was quite happy. And the mother's words express all the rest. The murdered boy was quite forgotten—as usual on these occasions. Such is the sublime influence of Christianity even on the criminal mind.

"His Majesty kissed the Cross and was sprinkled with Holy Water." This tomfoolery is reported of the Czar at Poltava. Fancy a man like that at the head of a hundred and fifty million people! It is enough to make one shudder.

The Christian Conscience is a wonderful thing. Sunday was observed by more than a hundred churches in London—to say nothing of the provinces—as a day of prayer for Russia. God was asked to soften the Czar's heart, and to soften the hard fate of his political prisoners. Russia is a big and powerful country, and the Christian Conscience dare not do more (in England) than appeal to the Almighty. Belgium, however, is a very small country, and on Monday morning the newspapers published a manifesto by the representatives of the Christian Conscience in all the Churches, denouncing the Congo horrors, and calling, not upon God, but upon the British Government, to take active steps to put an end to them.

Thomas Baker has queer ideas of God. We admit that they are orthodox, but still they are queer. He was engaged on the Newport Dock Extension, and he left work half an hour before the catastrophe occurred. A feeling of nervousness came over him, and he told the ganger he was "off home." He was asked at the inquest on the victims of the disaster what made him go up out of the trench, and he replied that it must have been God who warned him. Mr. John Ward, M.P., who asked him the question, might have asked him another; namely, "Why do you think God warned you without warning anyone else?"

Christ Church, Burton-on-Trent, publishes a *Monthly Visitor*. We suppose it is conducted by the man of God who does duty in that establishment. It is a poorly printed little thing of four pages, and the intellect it displays is in keeping with its appearance. A considerable part of the space in the July number is devoted to a denunciation of "the Theatre," which the reverend editor clearly regards as a very dangerous rival to his own business. He quotes some Christian writers to the effect that the theatre is a sink of all iniquity. Yet, curiously enough, parsons get into the police-courts far more frequently than actors. But the reverend editor's highest flight of imagination relates to Shakespeare. He says that the greatest of poets "indulges in profanity and indecency to such an extent as to render his plays in the form in which he left them altogether unfit for general perusal." Surely the reverend editor has fallen into a confusion. He must really be thinking, not of Shakespeare, but of the Bible. That holy volume contains some of the baseliest things ever printed. Shakespeare cracks a joke now and then, but the Bible runs about in a state of aggressive nudity.

The Rev. Silvester Horne admits that "unless Christianity can offer to the nations a Gospel that will purge the imagination, refine the intellect, and lay a cleansing hand upon the very fount of passion—envy and hatred and emptiest Christian ideal of brotherhood is the vainest and emptiest mirage that ever concealed from pilgrim eyes the stern, barren desert of arid fact and reality." Well, not even Mr. Horne is audacious enough to maintain that the Gospel offered by Christianity has done the work which it is declared capable of doing, and which we assert it cannot do; and it inevitably follows that the "Christian ideal of brotherhood" answers exactly to the description of it supplied by the reverend gentleman. In other words, Christianity is the biggest social failure the world has ever seen.



**Mr. Foote's Engagements**

(Lecturing suspended during the Summer.)

**To Correspondents.**

**THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND:** Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £225 17s. 6d. Received since.—Robert Stirton and Friends, Dundee (quarterly) £1 17s. 6d.; R. B. and G. P., 5s.

**G. M.**—See paragraph.  
**J. M. M.**—Surely the Liverpool "saints" are capable of dealing with that stuff in the *Liverpool Magazine*. The Mr. E. G. Stafford referred to is a person of peculiar courage. He is always abusing Secularists behind their backs, but when he has an opportunity of facing them he does not show a very coming-on disposition. He lurked at the back of the hall when Mr. Foote was lecturing in Liverpool last winter, but one of the "saints" spied him and called upon him to stand up (it was discussion time) and oppose the N. S. S. President, whom he denounced so glibly in his absence. But the valiant "infidel slayer" did not rise to the occasion.

**T. LONSDALE.**—We overlooked your letter last week, but we answered another correspondent on the same question, as you probably saw. We imagine that *Forward* is run by the Hardies, who don't love us for keeping alive the fact that their father and mother were good Secularists.

**R. J. KAY.**—We have noticed it. Thanks.  
**J. M. MOSLEY.**—Letters or other things addressed to Mr. Cohen at this office would not pass through our own hands, but would be passed on to him by the shop manager. Pleased to see you interested in such questions.

**FAIR PLAY.**—Perhaps you will explain why imprisonment for debt is reserved entirely for the poor.

**STANLEY BROWN.**—Pleased to hear from one who was "once a Methodist local, but now, thank goodness, an Atheist." We note your appreciation of our "life and work," and that "it is impossible to say how" you "look forward every week to the *Freethinker*." Thanks for the cutting. See "Acid Drops."

**F. S. S.**—Thomson's ("B. V.'s") complete poems are published in two volumes at 12s. 6d. by Bertram Dobell, 77 Charing-cross-road, London, W.C. Mr. Dobell publishes in a very neat volume at 3s. 6d. Thomson's masterpiece, *The City of Dreadful Night*, followed by an extremely good selection of other poems, including his longest and finest narrative poem, *Weddah and Om-El-Bonain*. You could order through the Pioneer Press if you prefer.

**J. E. STEPHENSON** writes: "May I be allowed to express my appreciation of your paper? I have taken it about eight months and I would not like to do without it now. It has been a real help to me. I live in a small country town, where everybody is very 'good' and 'respectable,' and at times I feel very lonely."

**J. BLUNDELL.**—See "Acid Drops."

**L. D. HEWITT.**—It is impossible for us to deal with all cases of real or apparent interference with freedom of speech, however much we might wish to. Our special concern is with cases occurring under the Blasphemy Laws. Mr. A. H. Johnson, at Wimbledon, ought to be able to get help and advice from Socialist leaders and organisations. We do not see how the case can be reopened now.

**R. DANIEL** writes: "Freethinkers of the present day are too much given to forget that they owe the liberty to express their anti-Christian opinions to men of your stamp. I am inclined to think there would be more blasphemy prosecutions if G. W. Foote wasn't to be taken into account. If the bigots could just quietly put a Freethinker in gaol, without the trouble you would cause them, they would soon get rid of a lot."

**ROBERT STIRTON.**—It is all very well for you to write from Bonnie Dundee hoping we are "benefiting by the fine weather." There has been precious little of that sort of weather down here. The nearer the pole the hotter it is nowadays. People are wearing great coats as we write—and it is nearly the middle of July! We are keeping tolerably well, however, and hoping to see the sun again before we die. For the rest, thanks and best wishes.

**J. H. GARTRELL.**—You grasp the essence of the matter.

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

**G. W. ROE.**—Most of the Liberal papers are Chapel papers. Still, the mention of the *Freethinker* is an advertisement.

**G. PROCTOR.**—Glad to hear from a reader of this journal ever since its first number.

**B. SOPER.**—Hope acknowledgment is right.

**CHESTER KEITH** says: "I have been a regular reader of your delightful paper for more than a year, and I find myself looking forward to its appearance more eagerly week by week."

(Mr.) **IRVINE WILKINSON**, 3 Market-street, Dewsbury, will be glad to hear from "saints" willing to co-operate in forming an N. S. S. Branch in the Dewsbury, Batley, and Spen Valley district.

**J. CHICK.**—There is truth in what you say, but you forget that the Freethought party cannot choose who shall be attacked under the Blasphemy Laws.

**G. F. H. McCLUSKEY AND H. TUCKER.**—Glad you see "the logic of our position." That is the main point. For the rest, anybody can do his duty when it is agreeable. It is the disagreeable duty that tests one.

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

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

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

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**Sugar Plums.**

The National Secular Society's Executive, at its last meeting, requested the President to make a brief public statement with respect to the Society's action in the matter of the recent prosecution for "blasphemy." The Executive desires to emphasise the fact that the Society has been acting entirely on principle in doing its utmost to resist an application of the Blasphemy Laws. Mr. Boulter is not, and never has been, a member of the N. S. S. The Society is not in any way responsible for his advocacy; neither has it been in any way defending his particular methods of criticising Christianity and the Bible. To prosecute him for using "vulgar" or "improper" language in a place of public resort might have been justified in the interest of public peace and order. On that point the Executive is not called upon to express a definite opinion. But to prosecute him, as a Freethinker, for attacking Christianity in a blasphemous way, was an act of religious persecution; and all the fine names in the world cannot disguise the fact. For it is obvious that, under the Blasphemy Laws, it is only Freethinkers who are liable to penalties for "violent" or "shocking" language. Christians may be as "violent" and "shocking" as they please. This is grossly unfair, and to tolerate it is abject weakness.

Having made that point perfectly clear, however, the N. S. S. Executive conceives that it has a right to say something more. Mr. Boulter has had all the assistance it could give in defending himself against a "blasphemy" prosecution. No trouble, and no expense, has been spared. But now that the case is over, a new situation presents itself. It would have been bad form to offer any criticism while Mr. Boulter was doing his month's imprisonment. He is now a free man, and in no sort of danger, except what he creates himself. He understands now what imprisonment is; he also understands how the common law of blasphemy is likely to be applied. There is no compulsion upon him to use coarse expressions or to sail too near the wind. We do not mean that he is bound to speak so that no Christian could possibly complain of his expressions. There are many Christians who will complain of any expressions that are not flattering to their faith. What we mean is, that he ought to speak so as to command the respect of the general body of Freethinkers. If he does this, it will be very difficult to prosecute him again successfully. If he does not, he will make it difficult for others to assist him with any chance of success. The Freethought party, while ready to defend the right of free speech, may tire of prosecutions that could easily be avoided,—and avoided without sacrifice of principle or loss of dignity.

## The Parables.

THE Parables of the New Testament may be profitably studied by the psychologist and by the sociologist, for they express the views that are universally held in the lowest grades of society; and they give us proof (if any be needed) that the philosophy of the criminal and pauper classes two thousand years ago was exactly the same as we find among the thieves and beggars of the present day. It is only natural that this should be so, for robbery and beggary are the same in all ages, and must be animated by the same principles and governed by the same ideas. Thieving and begging are merely different forms of the same thing; the object of both being to obtain the property of others without giving anything in exchange; and the precepts of the Gospel are continually directed to this end. Thus we are exhorted "if any man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also." A professional thief could not have expressed it better. We are further enjoined "give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away"; for if the beggar could only get such an idea accepted and acted upon by the industrious and wealth-producing classes of society, the earth would soon become a pauper's paradise.

From an ethical point of view, the beggar stands on a lower level than the thief; for robbery demands sundry moral qualities, such as courage, adroitness, and skill, which are not called out by the trade of beggary. Students of crime have often expressed astonishment at the ability displayed by the criminal, and have remarked that if the thief had only directed his obvious talents to some honest calling, he could not have failed to make his mark in the world. Yet, when age creeps on, and his hand has lost its cunning and his brain its alertness, the thief descends into the sneaking beggar, and becomes a living illustration of our thesis that the mendicant is the more degraded of the two. The same truth is recognised in fiction. There are no romances about successful beggars; but there are many about successful pirates, brigands, and highwaymen. The mendicant is everywhere regarded as the most despicable of persons, and therefore it is quite in accordance with the debased moral tone of the Gospels to find that they everywhere adopt the beggar's standpoint in their views of the affairs of life.

It must not be supposed, however, that the beggar is in any way opposed to the thief. On the contrary, he rather admires him, as being a bold person engaged in a laudable endeavor to adjust the prevailing inequalities in the distribution of riches. Thus it is significant that the Sermon on the Mount, in discussing the commandments, carefully refrains from any mention of the precept "Thou shalt not steal." In other passages robbery is regarded as part of the heaven-sent constitution and course of nature. Treasures on earth have the drawback that they are liable to be destroyed by rust, or eaten by moth, or appropriated by robbers; and when the man goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho, he falls among thieves, much as he might have experienced any other natural accident, and not a word is said in condemnation of the footpads, or any attempt made for their apprehension.

The pauper is quite as greedy of money as the thief, and equally envious of its possessor; but neither of them have any idea of its value. The lower classes seem incapable of realising the meaning of any considerable sum, just as savages are incapable of counting above a given number. Such people will chatter about a hundred pounds, or a thousand dollars, in a way which betrays that they have never seen such a sum, and would never know what to do with it if they had. The same vagueness prevailed among the Evangelists, more especially Matthew, whose imagination ran chiefly upon "talents"; much as the British pauper will babble about millions. We must not forget that money was far more valuable in antiquity than it is now; that is to say it had a

greater purchasing power, so that the Gospel figures are really much larger than they seem when expressed in modern currency. The standard coins of that age were the Roman denarius and the Greek drachma, which may practically be taken as identical in value. From surviving specimens they were silver coins having a mean weight of sixty grains. The talent was 6,000 denarii, or £187 10s. in English money.

What then are we to say to Matt. xviii. 23? We are told of a king who calls to account one of his slaves, who owes him the enormous sum of 10,000 talents, or £1,875,000 sterling. Is it conceivable that a mere slave could possess any such sum? The slave being unable to pay, the king orders him to be sold, together with his wife and family, and all his property, in order to discharge the debt. As, however, the man, and probably his wife and family, were already the king's slaves, the monarch would simply be exchanging his own property into ready money, and would be no richer than he was before; while, as the slave had just confessed that he had not sufficient to pay the debt, it was quite useless to sell his property in order to discharge it. The whole story is a grotesque absurdity, and could only have been framed by one who had no idea whatever of large sums of money, nor any clear notion of the effect of a commercial transaction. But a greater surprise is to follow. The slave having begged for mercy, the king, with that magnificent generosity which is only to be found in fiction, graciously cancels the whole debt of two millions sterling. Even an English Chancellor of the Exchequer would never do that.

This shows us another side of the pauper mind. He looks upon borrowing as a variant form of begging or stealing. The honest man, if he has borrowed anything, will take extreme care of it, and will submit to any loss or inconvenience in order to restore it safe and sound to its owner. But the thief and beggar would regard the honest man as a fool. When the pauper borrows anything he has no idea whatever of giving it back again. He considers it the bounden duty of the owner to cancel the debt, and thus turn it into a free gift. This species of dishonesty seemed so natural to the Evangelists that they introduced it into the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." In other words, "We have allowed ourselves to be defrauded, therefore let us defraud thee."

This same doctrine of the forgiveness of debts and other moral obligations is further enforced in the well-known parable of the Prodigal Son. After the prodigal had run away with part of the family property, and squandered it upon harlots, he comes back again; and instead of being called to account, or asked how he proposes to repay, he is welcomed by his fond and foolish father and decked with the best robe. We do not realise in these days of cheap clothing the value of the best robe, though the attentive reader of the Bible will soon learn, if he looks for it, the extreme scarcity and costliness of garments at that period. A ring is placed on the prodigal's finger (an unnecessary piece of ostentation), and, to crown all, the fatted calf is killed. Travellers tell us that even now in Syria it is very rare for the natives to eat flesh meat. On very special occasions a sheep may be slaughtered as an extraordinary treat; but in this parable it is not a sheep, but the much more valuable calf that is devoted in order to welcome back the spendthrift rascal. The honest hardworking brother, who has stopped at home to look after the family, is not even invited to the feast, but comes in accidentally, and finds the merrymaking in full swing; and he is, very naturally, highly indignant at all this expense being incurred for the worthless prodigal, whereas he himself has never had even a tough and tasteless goat given him to feast his friends upon.

To show the curious perspective of the pauper mind, we have, side by side with this, the story of the woman who possessed ten drachmas or denarii, and had lost one. She therefore calls upon her neighbors to rejoice with her, because she had found

it again. It need hardly be said that there is a significant difference between the returned prodigal and the recovered denarius. The piece of money was the same value when it was found as when it was lost. But what shall we say of the Prodigal Son? He has made the discovery that it is easy to borrow from his relations and squander their property upon vicious pleasures; and we all know what happens in such cases. The prodigal comes back as often as his relatives will endure him; and not only is he a burden on them, but he takes every opportunity of carrying off their property by begging or stealing, and spending it in debauchery, until the whole family is ruined. His father and brother suffer all the misfortunes entailed by the prodigal's misdeeds, without sharing in any of the gratification that the prodigal may derive from the society of his harlots. Thus the woman who recovered her tenth piece of silver had her wealth restored again, while the family that welcomed back its prodigal only laid itself open to further disgrace and further losses.

In the Prodigal Son we have the man who wasted his family's substance in riotous living. In the parable of the Unjust Steward we are introduced to another rascal, who had wasted his master's substance; and the Evangelist goes on to relate the cunning scheme by which this steward proposed to provide for his own future. He admitted to himself that he was too lazy to work and disinclined to beg, so he entered into a conspiracy to defraud his employer. The details are not stated very clearly, but we are apparently to understand that the master's property was farmed on the *metairie* system, by which the lord received a certain proportion of the crop. Accordingly, the steward took advantage of this arrangement, and altered the deeds, so that each tenant had a less quantity of corn, oil, etc., to deliver than he had bargained for under the lease. Thus, not only was the landlord defrauded of his just rent, but the tenants had lent themselves to be parties to a crime, and thereby laid themselves open to being blackmailed by the discharged steward, who could go round and live upon them on the strength of his guilty knowledge of the fraud which had been committed upon his late master.

It is sometimes supposed that the unjust steward expected that the tenants would maintain him out of mere gratitude for the service he had rendered them. But such a view can only be held by those who are ignorant of the workings of the pauper nature. The pauper expects other people to assist him, but it is quite a different matter for him to assist others. The Evangelist's view of the question is given in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

A certain wealthy man had a beggar at his gate, who was maintained by the scraps from the rich man's table. We are not told why Dives kept the useless vagabond. It may have been a piece of ostentation similar to that practised by the prelates of the Middle Ages, who loved to have a crowd of filthy diseased beggars at the doors of their palaces in order to advertise their charity to the neighborhood. The Evangelist elaborates the picture with care. The beggar was a frightful object, in the last stages of leprosy. His body had broken out into running ulcers that discharged a foetid matter, the stench of which attracted all the pariah dogs of the district. This disgusting object was a danger to the whole community, for such leprosy is contagious, and there was no knowing where the contagion might spread; and the mere existence of the noisome beggar prevented some better man from living in the world. However, in the course of time Lazarus ended his useless life, and was carried into "Abraham's bosom." Although this phrase is a familiar one, we often lose sight of its true meaning, notwithstanding the well-known passage in John xiii. 23. We must remember that the ancients were not in the habit of sitting upon chairs, as we do; they reclined at table, and when the place was crowded the guests practically lay on one another's breasts. Therefore, when we are told that Lazarus was received into Abraham's bosom, we are to understand

that he was received as the chief guest at Abraham's banquet, and was given the place of honor—next to the patriarch. In the meantime Dives also died, and found himself in Hades suffering an intolerable thirst. As, therefore, the positions of the two were now reversed—Lazarus feasting at Abraham's table and Dives being in want—it was the proper thing for Lazarus to requite the generosity of Dives by relieving him. But what does he do? Nothing! Although Lazarus had subsisted on the morsels from the rich man's table in this world, yet in the next he will not give a drop of cold water to alleviate another's misery. Thus people who complain of the "ingratitude of the poor" may at least have the consolation of knowing that the same ingratitude was characteristic of the same poor in the time of the Evangelists.

In the foregoing parable the rich man and Lazarus are placed side by side in a kind of natural association; it being the constant idea of the begging fraternity that the "rich" exist for the sole purpose of supporting the "poor" in idleness, selfishness, laziness, and vice. By the "rich" the thief and the vagabond mean everyone who has, through fortune, or through his own exertions, raised himself above actual destitution. If the pauper be asked how the wealthy obtained their riches, his answer will show that he has no idea whatever of obtaining property except by begging, swindling, or stealing. Honest industry is a thing entirely beyond his comprehension. There are two parables from which we may gather the evangelists' ideas of "trading." Unfortunately we are not told what they traded in. Probably the writers of the Gospels were afraid their readers might get rich too quickly if they knew. Matthew's story is, of course, about talents. He had a constitutional difficulty in thinking of any sum less than a talent. He relates that there was a certain man who had ready money capital to the extent of about £1,500 (a very considerable sum in those days). He distributed this among his slaves, and went abroad. We are not told how long he was away, nor whether the slaves were expected to earn their own livelihood during their trading; but at any rate on his return two of them had managed to double their money; or make a profit of one hundred per cent. The evangelist Luke is much more moderate in his money affairs. His wealth of imagination, or imagination of wealth, was more under control; and in his version of the story the talents are reduced to *mina*. A *mina* was a hundred denarii, or about £3 2s. 6d. A certain well-born man (*anthropos tis eugenes*) was called to receive a kingdom; and before starting he gave each of his ten slaves a *mina* apiece. We have had no experience ourselves in receiving kingdoms, so cannot say how long the operation would take; but, judging from the story, it did not occupy much of his time. On his return he called the slaves to account, and the first one had multiplied his capital by ten. He had gained a thousand per cent. A second had gained five hundred per cent. After such an exhibition of the financial ability of that household, we can sympathise with the annoyance of the well-born man when he found that the last of the slaves, being a lazy rascal, had contented himself with wrapping his hundred denarii in a cloth, and taking care of them.

Just as traders can make fabulous profits at will, so the Evangelist imagines that employers can pay any wages they choose. We have the story of a man who owned a vineyard. It never struck the gospel writer that the object of owning a vineyard was to grow grapes and make wine. If the expenses of growing the grapes and pressing them is greater than the value of the wine, the business is a failure, and will speedily end in bankruptcy. But such sordid calculations have no weight in the pauper mind. He only realises that the farmer is somebody with money to hand round. So this particular farmer is represented as going out at daybreak and engaging laborers to work in the vineyard at a denarius a day. The pay seems very high for that age and country; but it may have been the vintage, when the work

was heavy and labor scarce. At any rate, the farmer engaged other laborers at various hours, but when pay-time came he gave each of them a denarius, quite irrespective of whether they had worked the whole day or only a small part of it. From the industrial point of view, the conduct of the farmer was absurd; but the story is sufficient to show the workings of the pauper mind. The thief or the beggar is quite unable to understand the object of honest industry. If by any chance he is compelled to do any kind of work, he is firmly convinced that it is only a disagreeable burden put upon him by miserly people, who wish to throw difficulties in the way of obtaining alms from them; and there is nothing the mendicant hates so much as miserliness—in other people. The Evangelist is continually exhorting us not to lay up treasures upon earth where they will decay, and we are requested to consider the foolishness of a certain rich man who had had a good harvest, and began to think of building bigger barns to put it in, not knowing that he was fated to die that very night, and leave all his harvest uneaten. This is precisely the improvident idea that travellers remark among savages. When the savage finds himself in possession of a good store of food, his only idea is to gorge himself to bursting point, with the result that he quickly passes to the other extreme of starvation. The pauper is merely the savage who has survived into a civilised community, and we may trace in him all the weaknesses and vices of his savage ancestry. Not the least remarkable of these are his improvidence and wastefulness, and his impatience of frugality in others; for the pauper never reflects that if other people do not gather and save there will be nothing in the world to beg or to steal; and the beggar and thief will be the first to starve, because they produce nothing, and can only exist by preying on the fruits of others' industry.

CHILPERIC.

### Boulter's Blasphemy.

THERE is nothing easier, in the discussion of a blasphemy prosecution, than to appeal to mob-prejudice,—and there is nothing more subversive of truth and justice.

One has become accustomed, in the columns of *John Bull*, to the breezy expression of sane and unconventional views without too tender a regard for orthodox opinion.

It is with some measure of surprise and regret, therefore, that one finds its usually sensible and original contributor, Mr. Theodore Dahle, voicing the canting views of pious bigots.

As one who has listened to the somewhat florid oratory of Harry Boulter, I am bound to agree with Mr. Dahle as to its intemperate nature. Unfortunately, it was not always above suspicion in other respects.

Had Boulter been prosecuted on the charge of indecent language, it would have been a different matter altogether. But we must remember that he was charged with blasphemy, which, on the face of it, is an impossible crime to an Atheist. To blaspheme, one must at least believe in the existence of the God whom one denounces. An Atheist merely ridicules an idea.

When a missionary condemns heathen gods as senseless idolatry, he is, from the heathen's standpoint, committing blasphemy; but from the missionary's point of view it is nothing of the sort.

Blasphemy is merely a case of geographical prejudice. The impiety for which Socrates was condemned to drink hemlock he would have committed with impunity in England to-day. Here the Bible deity alone is sacred; but to the Atheist the Christian Savior is only a Jew, and what is worse—or better—a dead Jew. Mr. Dahle attempts to parallel the case with criminal libel, but no such analogy really exists.

When I libel my fellow citizen I am libelling one who lives under, and pays for, the protection of the State,

and is therefore entitled, either by nationality or by virtue of the payment of taxes, to the services of its Courts of Justice; but when I libel a god the case is on a different footing.

Gods are not taxpayers, nor have any to my knowledge taken out nationalisation papers, and are therefore not entitled to the protection of the State.

A deity is supposititious—correct or otherwise—and ideas can have no claim to sovereignty in the intellectual world. All have a right to express their opinion of an idea; and it is simply monstrous for the majority to imprison a man for controverting a popular opinion. The law which enables them to do so is a remnant of ecclesiastical supremacy, spiritual and temporal, and as such it should be relegated to the limbo of forgotten absurdities. It is a mere trade protection act of parsons, and a disgrace to the Statute Book. When we read history we are shocked at the tortures and atrocities perpetrated in the name of religion by the Inquisition for heresies which to-day form part of the orthodox creed; we are revolted by thoughts of the burnings at Smithfield and elsewhere for what we should to-day consider to be old-fashioned ideas; yet history teaches us nothing!

Our Galileos, our Brunos, our Thomas Paines, are still subject to odium and persecution.

We still boycott a man like G. W. Foote, one of the bravest soldiers in the army of liberty and human emancipation, because he speaks out truths—and speaks them brilliantly—upon which all the intellectual giants of the age agree.

The Blasphemy Law is a continual menace to such men as this—to Mr. Foote it is the instrument which struck him silent for twelve dreary months in Holloway Castle—and it is a dastardly weapon in the hands of cowards, bigots, and retrograde priests.

ALFRED GERMANY.

### Correspondence.

#### A NONCONFORMIST ORACLE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—May I suggest that you over-rate the influence of that universal provider of religious sensationalism, the *British Weekly*? During the last fifteen years its importance as a journal even among religious circles has visibly declined. The editor poses as a mentor on every conceivable subject, with the result that the paper is an amazing hotch-potch. It is, of course, impossible for any individual to be a specialist or expert in twenty different subjects, but that is what the *British Weekly* affects. I have just seen an issue, and it is a formidable conglomeration. To cite the subjects discussed is to bring to your notice the scum-mings of half-a-dozen cyclopaedias thrown together haphazard. We have the following diverse subjects "treated." I hope the readers are "treated" too:—

History of Methodism and Calvinism.—The new Socialism.—Thinstory of the Annie Swan type.—Articles on the Budget, the Liberal cave, Lord Rosebery's speech, Primitive Methodism, "Gipsy" Smith.—Hymn and Prayer for Sunday afternoon.—Answers to perplexed inquirers by Rev. Dr. Smith.—"British Table Talk" (oh, thou shade of Hazlitt!) comprising paragraphs on Lectures and Sermons, Sunday-school Campaign in South Africa, College work, Canadian Presbyterianism, etc., etc.—Hash of local news from the Churches in Scotland and Ireland.—Serial Story.—Bible Essays, Sermons and Sermonettes.—Correspondence, including letter on "Meredith's Optimism" (!) and "The Revival of 1850." (Is it necessary to explain that the latter has no reference to Darwin's great work?)—There are also topics discussed under "Church and Fireside," "The Woman's World," the Religious visit to Germany, Current Chat, the Bisteddof, Claudius Clea, Rambling Remarks, A Ministerial Miniature (why "A" ?), Christian Endeavor, Hatches, Matches, and Despatches, Problem and Puzzle competitions, Ladies' Column, and numerous advertisements.

And this wonderful collection of the pearls of wisdom may be had at the popular price of one penny! Freethinkers not debarred as purchasers.

It is really amusing to see how artfully the prominence is given in this indigestible concoction to the names and doings of clergymen. One can almost see the hands of the clerical editor behind the scenes working the wires that make his puppets dance. The layman gets his pill well coated with sugar, and joins in the ecclesiastical jing-a-ring with tolerable

complacency. But the humor! The scintillating wit of the *B. W.*! Care has to be taken not to make it too strong for Sunday, and that may be a reason why chestnuts have to be served up so often. This week we are told with a due amount of circumstantial Christian gaiety—which is really a fearful and a wonderful thing—of an old man who went to the vestry to thank the clergyman for his sermon, which had comforted him in his loss. The cleric assumed, in view of his sermon, that it was his wife the old man had lost; but that worthy, as he was departing, made it clear that it was his old mare! Some critics may be disposed to hint that that may have been the old man's term of endearment for his missis. In any event, it is kind of the *British Weekly* to bring back to us what we remember to have heard in varying forms in the early days of childhood, when we paddled and waded in "Cool Siloam's shady rill." It is a lovely story, but it has done so much service that it ought to receive some rest and leisure in its declining days. It deserves it. The moss has grown over it. It is now very near the hither brink of "Cold Jordan."

The Rev. David Smith, D.D., is a beautiful contortionist. A good time for contemplating his mental involutions, evolutions, and revolutions is after you have been at an acrobatic performance. The acrobats will prepare your mind for Dr. Smith. I do not know any perplexed believers who have appealed to this oracle, and consequently am unable to say how his "answers" are received. But I think it may be said, judging by the inquiries and answers themselves, that Mr. Smith need not be regarded as a particularly dangerous enemy of Freethought. Indeed, in some respects, Freethinkers may have reason to be grateful for him. He offers very different explanations to perplexed believers that they would have received seventy years ago.

And those illuminating "Problems of Conduct"! An Annie Swanny book is offered to the sender of the best solution every week. *Punch* started some illustrations of similar problems, but the *B. W.* was the initiator of this tasteful idea, and *Punch* could not keep it up for more than a few weeks. Still the *B. W.* competitions go on, and this week the "prize" goes to a parson for answering in the affirmative the question whether a doctor and his wife should call upon another doctor and his wife, the latter lady having been a barmaid! We are getting on.

SIMPLE SANDY.

"VICARIOUS SUFFERING."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

Sir,—The interesting article of July 4 by Mr. John S. Clarke surely turns on the old question of "Vicarious Suffering." Mr. Clarke quotes from the poet Shelley, "The name of God has fenced about all crime with holiness," adding suggestively it "is terribly true." Quite so; but one would be glad if Mr. J. Clarke would inform us if one natural law would be suspended even for a day by closing churches and ignoring the Gospels. The plain truth would seem that pain and suffering did not thwart the progress of the human race.

Again, Mr. Clarke complains of the "murderous imprecations" of the Psalmist. Well, considering the 150 Psalms were composed centuries prior to the Cross, one would feel surprised at any more merciful views maintained by a king surrounded by hostile tribes or treacherous sons.

The very errors—if errors they are—in the Old Testament are, to me, the best proofs of the truth of the Bible. Forgery would, no doubt, represent every utterance of a Hebrew as saintly. Not so. Elijah, Peter, even philosophic Paul, were quite as human as ourselves.

We fully allow "priestcraft," as such, has been a very qualified blessing, but if Mr. Clarke will read the late Bishop Lightfoot on the question he will find that no "priesthood" was ever intended either by Christ himself or by Paul. No mention of a "priest" is to be found in the New Testament at all, except in the sense that all converts are "priests," both men and women. This view, we fear, is nowadays far from popular in certain quarters, but it is supported by Dr. Ryle, Bardsley, Lightfoot, the present Bishop of Durham, all the responsible leaders of modern Nonconformity, and by William Booth.

GEO. H. P. BARLOW.

The wiser men are the more humbly will they submit to learn of others: they do not disdain the simplicity of those who teach them: they are willing to lower themselves to the level of the husbandmen, of poor women, of children. Many things are known to the simple and unlearned which escape the knowledge of the wise. I have learnt more important truth beyond comparison from men of humble station who are not named in the schools than from all the famous doctors. Let no man therefore boast of his wisdom or look down on the lowly.—*Roger Bacon.*

The Death of George Meredith.

THE Master pass'd away:  
Death set her arms about him, and he stopp'd  
Out of the fight, and slept;  
His head lies pillow'd now upon her breast,  
And he who wrought so greatly in his day,  
Who with all error waged a noble strife,  
Who never sheath'd his sword, nor sought for rest,  
Has yielded up his life.

Mourn not for such an end  
To such a man: although perchance his heart  
From life were loth to part,  
His mighty spirit knew no taint of fear:  
Death seem'd to him as a beloved friend  
Calling a child to rest from pleasant play;  
Too early comes the summons, yet most dear  
The voice that calls away.

But rouse your fiercest ire  
For those who mutter'd spells he scorn'd to trust  
Above the Master's dust:  
The crafty crew, they fear'd the scathing pen  
That on their kind pour'd words of living fire;  
But when his lips were hush'd, his fingers still,  
Upon his coffin'd clay these coward men  
Were bold to work their will.

In life they could not daunt  
His mind with terrors of a ghostly world,  
Idly their threats were hurl'd:  
But, as foul vultures feed upon the dead,  
Or vampires love the midnight graves to haunt,  
They wrought on him in death what he abhor'd,  
Chanted and mouth'd and mumbled o'er his head—  
And no protest was pour'd.

When shall the world arise,  
Arm'd for the truth, and strong in reason's might,  
These cunning foes to fight?  
Shall we speak falsity for fear or ruth,  
Or even by silence give assent to lies?  
Up with the flag, flash out the trenchant blade,  
And till we conquer in the cause of truth  
Let not the fight be stay'd!

CHESTER KEITH.

The Priest and the Past.

AWAY with childish creeds of old,  
Let man face life and death as man  
The knell of superstition has tolled,  
The best age comes since the world began.

What fools we've been to accept the priest,  
To believe for the sake of believing, till  
The truth is, of all things, the last and least;  
Till truth is nothing, and faith is will.

We build him churches at vast expense,  
Worship, obey him, forgive his crimes,  
Feed and clothe him, and be his defence,  
And sing his praises in glowing rhymes.

And what is it all about, this fuss?  
What has he done for his fellow men?  
Made each of us fearful, credulous,  
Of some dream-city a citizen.

And we have forsaken life's real things,  
To follow a will-o'-the-wisp afar:  
The memory of it, how it stings!  
Our wasted lives we bring to the bar.

Away with the childish creeds of old,  
Let man face life and death as man.  
A brighter future has unrolled,  
Priestless and un-Christian:  
An age of duty, nobly bold,  
Christless, cosmopolitan.

JULIAN ST. OREY.

To be able to distinguish the movement which covetousness causes from that brought about by principle, to combat the one and second the other, is the genius and the virtue of great revolutionists.—*Victor Hugo.*

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday and be marked "Lecture Notice" if not sent on postcard.

### LONDON.

#### OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain) : 3.15 and 6.15, G. A. Aldred, a Lecture.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park) : 3.15 and 6, W. J. Ramsey, Lectures.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road). 11.30, Miss K. Kough, "Women of the Bible."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill, Hampstead) : 3.30 and 6.30, C. Cohen, Lectures.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park) : 11.30, H. B. Samuels, "Why I am an Atheist."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford) : 7, R. H. Rosetti, "Jesus Christ, the Unknown Jew Boy."

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Spouters' Corner) : 11.30, Mr. Rowney, "The Supposed Resurrection of Christ."

WOOLWICH BRANCH N. S. S. (Beresford-square) : 11.30, Howell Smith, B.A., a Lecture.

#### COUNTRY.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square) : 7, H. Percy Ward, "Aked and Rockefeller."

#### OUTDOOR.

BRISTOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Durdham Downs) : 7.30, B. G. Brown, "Life, Death, and Immortality."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Edge-hill Lamp) : Wednesday, July 21, at 8, H. Percy Ward, a Lecture.

WIGAN BRANCH N. S. S. (Market-square) : Monday, July 19, at 8, H. Percy Ward, a Lecture.

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*Secretary—E. M. VANCE (Miss).*

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