

THE Freethinker

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Fear is the father of lies.—INGERSOLL.

Freethought and the Law.—II.

I.

LORD COLERIDGE'S statement of the Common Law of Blasphemy had one immense advantage for Freethinkers, which I shall deal with presently. But it did not free us from danger. It exposed us to a more subtle peril. We escaped the rocks only to fall into the whirlpool. For as the law now stands, Blasphemy being in the *manner* and not in the *matter* of an attack on Christianity, all the prosecution has to do is to fling about such words as "indecent" and "obscene,"—then to put selected passages from a book, a pamphlet, an article, or a lecture, into the hands of the jury and say "Gentlemen, how do you like that?" If they happen to be Christians, as is very probable, it is a million to one that they will not like it; and that fact is apparently sufficient to justify them in finding the defendant guilty of "blasphemy"; and their finding him guilty of blasphemy entitles the judge to give him anything up to (say) twelve months' imprisonment. Under such a law a Freethinker is very much like a sheep in the hands of butchers. How can he defend himself against the charge that he has outraged Christian susceptibilities? In a certain sense, that is what he intended to do. Such a vague indictment makes it more difficult for him to defend himself, and easier for them to find him guilty. If the crime were in the *matter*, they would have to be openly bigoted and intolerant to find him guilty; but as the crime is in the *manner*, they can be privately bigoted and intolerant while publicly flattering themselves that they are friends of free discussion. They are only protecting the "decencies of controversy." And they will never trouble to consider why the "decencies of social as well as in religious discussion, or why the "decencies of controversy" are only to be enforced upon Freethinkers, and not upon Christians and other religionists.

I do not overlook the fact that the latest victim of the Blasphemy Laws suffered only one month's imprisonment; and I am quite ready to admit that this might be the limit of any other "blasphemer's" penalty just at present. But would it be so in a time of reaction? While the Blasphemy Laws exist we are always in danger, and we can never tell the extent of it. The worst "blasphemer" may get a month in a quiet time; a moderate "blasphemer" may get six or twelve months when bigotry happens to be rampant—as it has a way of being every now and then. Our safety lies in the destruction of these persecuting laws. They are like the rod of chastisement hung up behind the door. Christians will not throw it away in repentance and disgust. They say that they do not wish to use it, but they like to see it hanging up. It gratifies them to know that they can use it again whenever they are in a bad temper. They will take it down again when the psychological moment arrives, and woe betide the Freethinker on whom they apply it. They are not to be trusted. We must get the rod out of their custody. That is to say, we must get the Blasphemy Laws abolished.

We can never breathe freely till then. Those who can breathe freely, if there are such, are simply those who feel that they are in no danger themselves, and have not sympathy, imagination, and courage enough to care for the danger of others.

A disposition has been shown by some so-called Rationalists, who in this follow the contemptible example of the Unitarians, to tolerate the Blasphemy Laws as a check on the exuberance of more forward sceptics. A meaner attitude than this it is difficult to conceive. It has not a single redeeming virtue. One may understand a cultured and practised controversialist advising a less literate and raw beginner to mend his manners, with a view to becoming more persuasive; but to connive at his being handed over to the common enemy, whose "feelings" they say he has "outraged," so that *they* may try him, sentence him, and punish him, is a proceeding which one would have to ransack the dictionary for proper words to describe.

Those whose attitude I am condemning may tell me that they are opposed to the use of "indecent" language by Freethought speakers. So am I. But I am opposed to the use of "indecent" language by *any* speakers. I do not see why Freethought speakers should be singled out as if they were the only ones who *could* be guilty of this offence. Moreover, I say that the word "indecent" should be strictly defined if it is to denote a crime. A lady whose dress is cut half-an-inch lower than the ladies' dresses to the right and left of her is called "indecent." A man who picks his teeth with a fork is called "indecent." One who eats with his knife is called "indecent." The word is used to describe all sorts of actions that are simply indecorous. We want something more definite in a criminal prosecution. Nor is that all. I object to Freethinkers being prosecuted for "indecent" language under cover of the Blasphemy Laws. If a law against "indecent" language is necessary, let it be clear and simple, and let it apply to all who write and speak in public, whatever subjects they deal with. While it is enforced only in *religious* discussions, and is applied only to *Freethinkers*, I say it is nothing but hypocritical persecution, and that those who "do not see it" are wilfully or judicially blind.

II.

With regard to "ridicule," it is utter nonsense to declare that Christianity may be attacked in every way but that. Ridicule cannot be accounted a crime unless its subject is above criticism. *Faith* may punish ridicule, but not *Reason*. Ridicule is a *form* of reason. It is what logicians call the *reductio ad absurdum*. Ridicule is no crime in science, philosophy, politics, or social life. Why? Because all these subjects may be freely discussed. And if you say that religion, too, may be freely discussed, you cannot make ridicule a crime in that either.

Besides, what is "ridicule"? A smile is ridicule to a hyper-sensitive person,—and a smile easily passes into a laugh. We might say, metaphorically, that ridicule is a smile or a laugh in words. How broad a smile, then, and how loud a laugh, is permissible? Would any sensible man—anyone but a dull pedant or a pompous fool—undertake to decide such a question? One can only shudder at the fatuity of leaving such a question to juries, judges, and—policemen.

I venture to quote in this connection a passage from an anonymous article (really written by John Stuart Mill) in the *Westminster Review* of July, 1824. Richard Carlile was then in Dorchester Gaol for publishing Paine's *Age of Reason*. William Campion, John Clarke, William Haley, and T. R. Perry, were in Newgate for three years each for the same crime; R. Hassell and W. Tunbridge for two years each; and William Cochrane and John Christopher for six months each. James Affleck was in prison for three months at Edinburgh. James Watson, H. Boyle, and Joseph Rhodes, had just been released after serving sentences of twelve months, eighteen months, and two years respectively. Carlile's wife and sister had recently suffered imprisonment for two years each. Those were the times! And there were finicking Rationalists, or whatever they called themselves, even then who affirmed that all these persecuted men and women were only in trouble for "indecent" publications or "ridiculing" the solemnities of religion; although the lineal descendants of those superfine sceptics do not mind publishing now, and even with quite a jubilant flourish, the very writings which all those brave pioneers were imprisoned for circulating. For circumstances alter cases, and—the danger is past. But young John Stuart Mill (he was then only eighteen) was made of different stuff. He spoke out boldly against the Blasphemy Laws. He particularly objected to controversialists being punished because they lacked the polish, and the masterly irony, of a Gibbon or a Hume. The following passage is as pertinent now as it was eighty-five years ago:—

"To declare that an act is legal, but with proviso that it be performed in a gentle and decorous manner, is opening a wide door for arbitrary discretion on the one part, and dissatisfaction on the other. The difficulty is greatly increased when the act itself is offensive to those who sit in judgment upon the manner of its performance. If the proposition that Christianity is untrue may be legally conveyed to the mind, what can be more absurd than to say that to express that proposition by certain undefined and undefinable selection of terms shall constitute a crime."

That passage hits the central absurdity and dastardliness of the Blasphemy Laws. And I cannot help saying, at this point, that although I have not the slightest desire in a general way to sit in the House of Commons, I should very much like to be there for just one day, in order that I might be able to tell the Christians in that assembly how absurd and how dastardly their Blasphemy Laws are. I say their Blasphemy Laws, because their Christian forefathers originated them and they maintain them. And if they ask me how I know this, I reply that when Charles Bradlaugh brought in a straight Bill to repeal those infamous laws, only forty-five members of the House of Commons—and that number included non-Christians—followed him into the "Ays" lobby on the final division. Not even his powerful influence and persuasiveness could induce more of them than a paltry forty-five to vote for placing Freethinkers and Christians on the same level of justice as English citizens.

III.

The ground on which I stand, on which I have always stood, and on which I trust I shall be found to the very end, was admirably indicated by Buckle in his splendid vindication of freedom of thought and speech in connection with the Pooley case in 1857. "Every man," Buckle said, "has an absolute and irrefragable right to treat any doctrine as he thinks proper, either to argue against it, or to ridicule it." As long as people are not compelled to read or hear they have no right to complain. They cannot claim a vested interest in ideas, and demand that the views which have the honor of their adoption shall be revered and privileged. I, for one, have never admitted their claim, and I never will. I shall continue to treat it with the scorn and contempt it deserves.

Bishop Hinds, of Norwich, who was a remarkably rare sort of a Christian, being a believer in absolute

freedom of discussion, called the Blasphemy Laws "persecuting statutes, fit only to bind demons." "To enforce them," said Professor Hunter, at the time of my prosecution, "is to invoke all that is just and honorable in public opinion to demand their destruction." He did not foresee that the invocation would elicit such a miserable response. Christians have taken the latest "blasphemy" prosecution very quietly. Papers like the *Christian World*, the *Christian Commonwealth*, and the *British Weekly*, have let it pass without notice. The orthodox world is, in many respects, far more cowardly than it was in 1883. Several influential Nonconformists, and some influential Churchmen, protested against my imprisonment. But what Christian has opened his mouth against the Blasphemy Laws during their recent revival? Even the Freethinkers in the House of Commons have been dumb dogs. I have always said that the Freethought party must expect no service from Freethinkers who go to parliament. I put phenomenal men like Bradlaugh aside; they belong to no categories and conform to no general laws. I speak of ordinary men, and I say that it is foolish to expect them to pursue a successful career as politicians and at the same time to emphasise their heterodoxy by fighting for the rights of Freethinkers. The political atmosphere is not one in which intellectual integrity flourishes. "Politics, sir," an election agent says in one of George Meredith's novels, "Politics, sir, is climbing the greasy pole; mutton or no mutton, there's grease for certain."

My conclusion is, and it is not a new one, that the Freethought party will get very little help from Christians of any kind, or from "public men" of any description, in their fight against the Blasphemy Laws. They will have to rely upon themselves. And in view of this fact I hold—and this is not a new opinion either—that the only way to kill the Blasphemy Laws is to accept the bigots' challenge every time they throw it down. Those who complain that the battle thus entered into is not the one that we would choose for ourselves are simply wasting their breath. We never can choose the ground of battle; that is always chosen by the enemy; our only choice is to fight or not to fight. If we do not fight, we connive at the continuance of laws which insult and oppress us. If we fight, we give the bigots trouble and expense; we rally a certain amount of public opinion to our side; and we help to abolish those odious laws by frustrating their application. When the bigots find that the attempt to enforce their old persecuting laws is unprofitable, when the cost is greater than the gain, when the imprisonment of the victim is too small to satisfy Christian malice or compensate for the investment of money and effort, their wretched laws will fall into desuetude and thus become practically obsolete. The rule of decay in such matters was excellently stated by Ingersoll. The Church, he said, never left off burning people alive because she was ashamed of it; she left off burning people alive when there were too many people who objected to being burnt alive. And thus we come to the bed-rock conclusion that, besides opposing every attempt to enforce the Blasphemy Laws, the only way to destroy them is to go on making Freethinkers. When there are too many of us to be persecuted our persecution will cease. Not till then. I repeat—Not till then.

IV.

The upshot of the recent "blasphemy" case is that the liberty of Freethinkers is still threatened. I pointed out when Mr. Boulter was arrested that "blasphemy" prosecutions had nearly always succeeded. It is true that of the three juries before whom I defended myself in the spring of 1883, two did not agree to a verdict, and were discharged. But the scoundrels who prosecuted me had me all the same, for one jury did agree, and I was found guilty. It was a selected jury, I know, but it did the business, and the "authorities" generally succeed in doing what is necessary to their own ends. I was pretty certain, therefore, that Mr. Boulter would be

convicted. The "authorities" held too many trump cards to lose the game. While it is possible to get twelve bigots, fools, and time-servers in a jury-box no Freethinker who may be prosecuted is safe. Our safety is only assured when we can rely on finding at least one Freethinker on the jury. One will do. The jury must be unanimous. The twelfth man is like the thumb. There is no grip without it. And in such cases a disagreement is, practically, the same thing as an acquittal.

But if the recent "blasphemy" prosecution shows that our liberty is still threatened, it also shows that our funds are perfectly secure. This is a paradox, but it is true,—as I shall proceed to show.

There is a certain poetical justice in the fact that the Secular party in general, and the National Secular Society in particular, have incidentally gained a very valuable return for a heavy expenditure in defending Mr. Boulter *on principle*; for it must be remembered that he was not, and never had been, a member of the Society of which I have the honor to be President. Mr. Boulter has gained something too, but on that point I need not expatiate. The party's gain is immense. By engaging the services of distinguished counsel at the trial, we gave it an importance which it had otherwise lacked. Mr. Justice Phillimore, instead of uttering a few severe words, and perhaps indulging in the cant expressions of "indecent" and "obscene," as he might have done if the prisoner had been left to himself, was obliged to deliver a careful summing-up, and in doing so he was obliged to make a deliberate statement of the Common Law of Blasphemy. Precisely what I foresaw happened, although I had not the concurrence of our legal advisers in the expectation. They rather favored the view that Lord Coleridge's judgment in 1883 was merely a genial and unimportant episode in the history of the Blasphemy Laws. I held that it was all important. The Common Law consists of cases and judgments, and it consists of nothing else. How was it possible then, I asked, for any single judge, on his individual responsibility, to upset Lord Coleridge's judgment, and to tell a jury that a Lord Chief Justice's statement of the law of "blasphemy" was false and ridiculous? Mr. Justice Phillimore did nothing of the kind. He held Lord Coleridge's judgment (his lordship published it himself in pamphlet form) in his hand, and began his charge to the jury by reading from it *the Common Law of Blasphemy*. As I sat and listened, I felt that this was a great triumph for Freethought. Paradox as it was, it was true that if our liberty was still in danger our funds were absolutely secure. Lord Coleridge's judgment stood—as firmly as the rock of Gibraltar. After a lapse of twenty-six years it had been accepted as a matter of course. Thenceforth it could never be questioned. This was a glorious gain. *How glorious* I can only show by going back along the stream of time.

V.

After my release from prison in 1884 I was for many years incessantly active, editing my paper, producing much of its contents with my own pen, writing a large number of books and pamphlets, lecturing all over the country, and even doing a fair measure of political work. Charles Bradlaugh was our leader, and I left the leadership to him. But he resigned the leadership in 1890, through broken health, and in 1891 he died. I did not seek the leadership, but Bradlaugh nominated me himself, and I accepted the post, and have filled it to the best of my ability ever since. Bradlaugh was still a member of our Society during the last year of his life, and I had several conversations with him (for he was always kind and obliging) on party affairs. He was of opinion that we could not obtain legal security for funds and property without the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, and I bowed to his judgment, as he had a big, strong brain and knew a hundred times more law than I did. But after his death, when I was left alone, I began to see that the greatest men are not infallible. They leave something to be discovered even by their inferiors. It

dawned upon me that Lord Coleridge's judgment at my trial opened a new epoch. He had laid it down that the fundamentals of religion might be attacked without committing a crime. Was it not possible to frustrate the disabling effect of the Blasphemy Laws by means of an Incorporated Society, whose Memorandum of Association should fall within the limits of Lord Coleridge's judgment? I brooded over the idea for a long time, and at last I saw, or thought I saw, the possibility of doing the thing. I sketched out my plan slowly and carefully, first drafting the Memorandum of Association, and then the main provisions of the Articles, which were designed to secure all the advantages, without any of the disadvantages, of a Trust. Then I sought legal assistance, but solicitor and counsel were both against me, and so was Professor Hunter, the great jurist, whom Bradlaugh had advised me to consult. Their heads were as good as mine—Professor Hunter's a good deal better; but they had not given the subject the attention that I had, and I did not despair of converting them to my opinion. I did convert them all,—and the result was the Secular Society, Limited, which I registered in 1898, a year or so after the Memorandum and Articles had been printed.

Some people—I am sorry to say that the late George Jacob Holyoake was one of them—were always talking about "constructive" Secularism, without ever constructing anything. It was left to me, the leader of militant (some call it "vulgar") Freethought, to do this bit of constructive work. Everybody said it was impossible. Some critics were not very polite in expressing their hostility. I had plenty of other trouble at the time, as some of my old friends will recollect, and I was in a position of great loneliness; but I had been in greater loneliness in Holloway Gaol, and in the darkness of interminable winter nights in the solitude of my prison cell I had learnt the sternest lesson of self-reliance. My dear old friend and colleague, Joseph Mazzini Wheeler, who did not live to sign the Memorandum and Articles, as was intended, was walking homeward with me one Wednesday morning after we had seen the *Freethinker* through the press. We had reached Holborn (I could almost point out the spot), and he was mentioning some extra impertinences at which I only smiled, when he suddenly stopped, and putting both his hands on my shoulders, and looking me in the eyes, exclaimed: "George, I admire you more than ever. You seem to me like the captain of a ship in a storm; passengers and crew are spitting in your face, and you hold on steadily to the wheel." It was a superb compliment,—more than the truth, but not without truth. All I could say was, "Dear Joe!" And his eyes filled with tears. I can see them now. Not for a moment have I ceased to love that heart of gold.

I fear I have been betrayed into what some may call a weakness. But I am human, and I do not wish to be otherwise; and there are times when a touch of nature is better than a thousand arguments.

VI.

Well, the Secular Society, Limited, was established, and it has been the financial salvation of the Secular movement ever since. It has even been copied, and imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. "All can grow the flower for all have got the seed." Not that I complain of this. I am glad to know that my unpatented plans are useful to other "advanced" movements.

Hostile criticism of the Secular Society, Limited, has been silenced by the course of events. But there is an indirect, or allusive, criticism of it in the second volume of Holyoake's *Bygones Worth Remembering*, published as late as 1905, which is calculated to mislead the unwary. In a spirited chapter on "Penal Christianity" the veteran Secularist denounced the Christians for their mean treatment of Freethinkers. They persecuted Freethinkers and they robbed them. "No higher criticism," Holyoake said "can condemn Christianity, as it is self-condemned by resting on predatoriness. No person who

does not stand on the Christian side can leave property for promoting his views, as a Christian can for promoting his." Following this mistaken utterance, came a reproduction of the Liberty of Bequest Bill, which Holyoake busied himself about, although it never came to anything. Even in 1905 he regarded this Bill as necessary before property could be held legally for Freethought purposes. I had already told him that he was mistaken, and I suppose he felt that he ought to say something in justification of his own view. And this is what he said:—

"A theory has been started that by registering an association, under the Friendly Societies Act, it would legalise its proceedings and eventually repeal all the laws confiscating bequests. No case of this kind has come before the higher courts. To do the Government justice, I know no case in which the Crown has interfered to confiscate a bequest on the ground of heresy in use. Members of families, legally entitled to the property of a testator, may claim the money and get it. If the family enters no claim the bequest takes effect. In the meantime the state of the law prevents testators leaving property for the maintenance of their opinions."

Now this is absolutely and hopelessly wrong. It shows that Holyoake could not, or would not, see the real facts of the case. And it is really very curious that when he wrote that passage he was actually Chairman of an Association formed on the model of the Secular Society, Limited,—an Association which was inviting sympathisers to remember it in their wills, and telling them that this could be done with perfect security.

Holyoake started this criticism absurdly. I did not register a Society that was to legalise illegal proceedings. That would have been idiotic. I started a Society with perfectly legal objects. It was to do precisely what Lord Coleridge had declared that every Englishman had a legal right to do. But I never could get Holyoake to see this. When I put it right under his nose he looked another way. I do not know whether his age was the explanation, or whether he was nettled at my having "stolen a march" upon him. But I had *not* stolen a march upon him. I waited for years to see what his Liberty of Bequest Committee would do. I should have been glad if the veteran had been able to associate his name with a successful effort in the direction he contemplated. I saw no reason, however, for waiting indefinitely; and when it was obvious that his project had missed fire I proceeded, as I had a right to proceed, on my own lines.

All that Holyoake said about the members of testators' families upsetting bequests to such an incorporation as the Secular Society, Limited, is founded upon ignorance of the law. It was not right for him to say it. He knew that I denied that a bequest to the Society could be challenged in that way. But he took no notice. He simply went on repeating his blunder. His last sentence, indeed, was quite grotesque. The statement that Freethought testators could not leave property for the maintenance of their opinions was made in the very face of the fact that *they had done it*, again and again, through the Secular Society, Limited.

This, then, is what I have to say in conclusion. The Blasphemy Laws still exist. They have been revived, and they are operative. The liberty of Freethinkers is still in danger. But the Statute may be ignored, and the Common Law has changed. Lord Coleridge in 1883, and Mr. Justice Phillimore in 1908, have laid it down that the fundamentals of Christianity may be attacked. Freethinkers must, if Christians must not, respect the "decencies of controversy." But this concerns the *manner* and not the *matter* of the attack. Consequently, although the Common Law of Blasphemy may be invoked to send obnoxious Freethinkers to prison, it cannot be invoked to prevent Freethinkers from leaving property for the maintenance of their opinions.

Lord Coleridge's judgment stands as firm as Gibraltar. And on that rock the Secular Society, Limited, is built.

G. W. FOOTE.

Woman Suffrage at the Methodist Conference.

FIFTEEN years ago a proposal to admit women as delegates was brought before the Methodist Conference at Birmingham. The proposal was summarily sat upon. A year later the same proposition was made to the Conference at Plymouth, and in spite of its being supported by so prominent a Methodist as the late Hugh Price Hughes, it was again rejected. The suggestion that women should be allowed to enter the Conference doors as the equal of men was scouted as unscriptural, revolutionary, etc., and they were, so far as the Methodist Conference was concerned, relegated to the position of inferiority and subjection assigned them by Christian tradition and teaching. This year the same proposal was brought before the Conference sitting at Lincoln, and, marvellous to relate, was carried. A body of Christian ministers and delegates decided that women might be admitted to attend on an equality with men, without impairing the morality of the attendant males, or weakening their religious efficiency. A wonderful advance! and an indication of what dare-devil reformers are developed by Christian influences.

One purpose, at least, has been served by this resolution of the Conference. It has enabled the *Methodist Times* to publish a leading article which, as an example of unctuous self-righteousness, deserves all the publicity that it is possible to give it. The *Methodist Times* is probably correct in calling the passing of this resolution one of the most remarkable in the transactions of the Conference. Its remarkable character is, however, due to considerations not altogether flattering to Christians in general. Looked at historically, it is remarkable only in the sense that it would have been remarkable had the slave-owners of the Southern States of America voluntarily liberated their slaves, or if the once famous Barbary pirates had suddenly relinquished their calling and settled down to lead the lives of peaceable citizens. In other words, giving women the right to attend a Methodist Conference on the same conditions as men is remarkable solely on account of the right being conceded in a Christian assembly. In other assemblies it would have been remarkable had any distinction been made. In a Christian gathering the non-assertion of the inferiority of woman is a fact worthy of being recorded. Why it has not been asserted, is a circumstance that calls for explanation.

As I have said, a few years ago this same resolution was indignantly, piously, rejected. One need not on special grounds regret its rejection. What is known as the Woman Movement began outside the Churches, it developed outside the Churches, its principal and most strenuous advocates have always been Freethinkers, and had the Methodist Conference accepted the proposal fifteen years ago it would by this time have claimed to be a pioneer in the agitation. As it is, one of the most striking features of the agitation is that no appeal has been made to the Scriptures—by its friends, at least—and no pretence has been made that the movement rested on religious grounds. And this, in piously hypocritical Britain, is also worth noting. The movement for the legal and political equality of the sexes went its way unassisted by religion; the men—who are quite erroneously represented as the less sentimental of the two sexes—displaying the logic, until by sheer pertinacity it has made itself something of a force in the social and political world. Those whom the course of events had compelled to submit to women acting as writers, speakers, and teachers, made a last stand against women being permitted to vote. The reason direct power obvious to the meanest understanding. Keener wits would have seen that here, as in many other cases, the indirect power is really the most effective, and that permitting women to teach but

forbidding them to vote is indeed straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel.

A few years since the Churches in this country discovered the social question, and, like a hen hailing the arrival of its first egg as a unique event in natural history annals, they began to preach as though the need for social reform had never before been voiced. Ignoring the fact that the social question had always been with us, and that the net influence of centuries of Christianity had been to accentuate its gravity, they claimed for Christianity the sole and exclusive power to solve social problems. And as the Woman question is part of the larger social question, it has naturally happened that the development of interest in the one has led to a corresponding growth in the other. The *Methodist Times* is good enough to remark that the altered feeling of the Methodist Conference reflects the changed attitude of the nation as a whole; but it properly adds that the revolution in the opinion of the Conference is greater than in the community at large. Much greater; for while the subordination of women in the community is largely unconscious, and wholly the result of historical causes, while in no wise essential to the structure of society, the subordination of women in the Christian Churches is deliberate, conscious, and an expression of direct and unmistakable teaching. No religion has ever taught this principle more emphatically than has Christianity, and no religion could quote a longer array of eminent writers against the equalisation of the legal and political status of the sexes.

Not that the *Methodist Times* would admit this; on the contrary, with the usual readiness to forget what it is not profitable to remember, it speaks of the Conference resolution as proving that—

"the underlying and permanent ideal of the Christian Church has been disentangled from the temporary limitations which restricted its realisation in New Testament times. The emancipation of woman has been the work of Christ, and the Christian Church should be the first to welcome and take advantage of this great fact."

One feels inclined to compliment the *Methodist Times* writer on the effrontery of this passage. The writer may, of course, have a greater knowledge than I of the subterranean beauties of Christianity, but, whatever its "underlying" ideal may have been, its expressed teaching has constantly been that woman is more or less a possession of the male, and always his inferior. And the proof of this is seen in the fact that wherever the influence of the Christian Church can be traced in modern European law it is wholly in the direction of restriction. The growing freedom of women in the old Roman Empire received an abrupt set back with the conquest of Christianity. Her social and legal freedom was swept away, and even in religious matters, instead of the honored position held by woman in the Pagan religions, she became a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water in the Christian Churches. The evil influence of Christian teaching on the position of woman was not even limited to Christian countries. Professor Becker, in his *Christianity and Islam*, does not hesitate to ascribe the unsatisfactory position of women in Mohammedan countries as largely due to Christian influences. He says:—

"The social position of the woman.....is so much worse in the traditional Mohammedanism as compared with the Koran that the change can only be ascribed to the influence of the civilisations which the Mohammedans encountered. The idea of woman as a creature of no account is certainly rooted in the ancient East, but it reached Islam in Christian dress and with the authority of Christian hostility to marriage."

The remark about the temporary limitations of New Testament times is a form of apology often met with, and it is quite Christian in its character. I defy any fair-minded reader to go through the New Testament and to conclude that its teachings on the position and function of woman is of a merely temporary character. St. Paul's teachings that man was not made for woman, but woman was made for man,

that man is the head of the woman as Christ is the head of the Church, that wives are to obey their husbands as Sara obeyed Abraham, are either true of, and applicable to, all times, or they are wholly false and mischievous. That women are to keep silence in the Church, that they are not to be permitted to teach, are, again, obviously teachings that were intended to apply to women at all times. And the proof of the correctness of this assumption is that the Christian Church gave them this interpretation, and continued to give them this interpretation, until modern thought became powerful enough to make Christians ashamed of such teachings, although it was not strong enough to inspire them with the courage to throw them altogether overboard. And so, with that moral insincerity characteristic of a Christian training, they go on claiming, on the one hand, that New Testament teaching was for a special people and a special set of circumstances, and, on the other, that it is a moral guide for all times and all peoples.

Unctuous to the last, the *Methodist Times* concludes that with the woman question, "as in other concerns, we believe that the Christian Church should not only lead, but also prepare, the way for the State." And the implication is that it has done so, and in thus acting is carrying out its legitimate work. Nothing, however, could be wider of the truth. The function of the Church in all ages has not been to lead the way, but to apologise for, and support, every interest that was wealthy enough to purchase advocacy or powerful enough to make its support worth having. The crusade against slavery, against child labor, the struggle for the right of combination among working men, the fight for a democratic franchise, for the equality of the sexes, and for a free press, all grew to maturity without the least assistance from the Churches—often in the teeth of their opposition. The very conception of the modern state is alien to Christianity. Only when movements have vindicated their vitality, and shown themselves strong enough to stand alone, do the Churches step in and seek to control forces they can no longer hope to crush. The whole policy of the Churches has been a narrow-minded opportunism in sociology, in politics, and in intellectual matters. That this policy has not been discarded the *Methodist Times* article bears ample testimony.

C. COHEN.

What is Superstition?

SUPERSTITION is one of the words which it is most difficult, intelligently, to define. The dictionaries supply us with four or five definitions of it. According to some lexicographers, superstition is "that which remains when its companions are dead." "Superstition," say others, "springs from religious feeling, misdirected or unenlightened." Others assure us that it means "the worship of a false god or gods," while others still describe it as "fear of the gods, or excessive veneration." In some languages the parallel word signifies "useless belief" or "credulous religion." What a man understands by superstition depends very largely upon his attitude to the supernatural. In the estimation of scientific people the belief in extraordinary events, such as virgin births and resurrections, or in charms, omens, and prognostics is unfounded and superstitious. To Protestants, the celebration of Mass, praying to the Virgin Mary, and praying for the dead, are highly superstitious practices. Generally speaking, every religious person regards all beliefs not held by himself as so many superstitions. One popular writer charges the Church of the past with having "preferred the wonderful to the plain statement," and at one time with having "made salvation depend on believing what was false."

Let us now consider this whole matter from the standpoint of non-supernaturalists. To these there are no degrees in superstition. All supernatural beliefs are equally superstitious. Theologians are

often exhorted to make their theology rational; but the strength of theology lies in the fact that it is not rational. A rational theology would be a contradiction in terms. To say that "theology has at last entered, with the other sciences, into the realm of observation and experiment," and that "its authority henceforth will be founded, not upon the *ipse dixit* of popes or of councils, but on the verdicts of trained research" is to utter sheer nonsense, because theology treats of subjects which, by their very nature, elude all observation and experiment, and cannot be subjected to any "trained research." It is needless to state that Deity is not an object of observation and experiment. Your most "trained research" cannot be brought to bear upon the Holy Ghost. Take the following passage from a recent deliverance by Professor Peake:—

"We might, of course, ask whether each of the persons in the Trinity possessed, in virtue of his intrinsic being, each of the attributes which belong to God considered as a unity. We ought, perhaps, not rashly to assume that omniscience is a quality possessed by each of the persons of the Godhead in his own right. Of course, in virtue of the mutual indwelling and perfect communion of life which exists in the circle of the Godhead, the omniscience of the Father would be shared by the Son and Spirit" (*Christianity: its Nature and its Truth*, p. 256).

By what conceivable process could the truth or falsehood of that extract be experimentally established? How could "trained research" get at it at all? The doctrine of the Trinity belongs to a sphere concerning which no information is obtainable for love or money. It is very true that "all over the world are to be found men who, inspired with the passion for knowledge, sit at the extreme of the known and wrestle with Nature for yet more of her unknown," but it is also true that the men who do that are scientists, not theologians. The scientific method is only of service in the study of Nature; it is of no avail whatever in dealing with Nature's alleged Maker and Ruler. Indeed, it is an undeniable fact that in proportion as the scientific method is employed theology becomes discredited.

The mischief with theologians is that one never knows where to find them. What they pretend to be supremely anxious to find is the truth, "the truth about life, about themselves, about the spiritual realities." Now, the truth about life and about ourselves has nothing to do with theology. It can be discovered only by "trained research," by "observation and experiment," by a faithful application of the scientific method. But the so-called truth about "the spiritual realities" belongs to an entirely different category, in which the scientific method is worse than useless. And yet this is spoken of as the only saving truth worth winning "by the travail of one's own thought and conscience." It turns out, however that this truth is nothing but theology in a new suit of clothes, theology masquerading as science and seeking to bamboozle the simple-minded and unthinking masses. In the last analysis, "the truth about life, about ourselves, about the spiritual realities" is, according to the theologian, the truth about God and his relation to the Universe; and the one business of life is the "practice of the presence of God." But the presence of God is not a truth won from Nature by wrestling with her, but an article of belief based on the belief in the existence of God. All this glib talk about God and his presence and the practice of his presence, of which we hear and read so much, is the emptiest twaddle conceivable. It is superstition in all its glory—and shame.

Now, superstition, the belief in dieties and their supposed activities, in incarnations and their alleged effects on human life, is largely answerable for the present backward condition of the world. It is well known that India was never so prosperous and progressive and peaceful as during the short period of the ascendancy of Primitive Buddhism. "J. B.," of the *Christian World*, after quoting a paragraph from Newman with which he totally disagrees, says, with an implied sneer, "Even Buddhism can teach us better than that." So it can—and does; but surely

"J. B." must know that the moral code introduced by Buddha is second to none, and that under King Asoka it bore magnificent fruit in the lives of the people. Slavery was abolished, hospitals for man and beast were established in all parts of the country, wars ceased, and the royal law of love was glorified on all hands. Asoka did for Buddhism what Constantine did for Christianity; but unprejudiced students of history need not be told how marvellously superior, morally, the former was to the latter. Asoka conquered by love, and Constantine by the sword. Now listen to the rule of life laid down by the Master, by which Asoka shaped his conduct as a monarch:—

"As a mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects her son, her only son, so let him [the good man] cultivate love without measure towards all beings. Let him cultivate towards the whole world—above, below, around—a heart of love unstinted, unmixed with the sense of differing or opposing interests. Let a man maintain this mindfulness all the while he is awake, whether he be standing, walking, sitting, or lying down. This state of heart is the best in the world" (*Rhys David's Early Buddhism*, p. 61).

Here is another Golden Beam from the same source:—

"Our mind shall not waver. No evil speech will we utter. Tender and compassionate will we abide, loving in heart, void of malice within. And we will be ever suffusing such an one with the rays of our loving thought. And with that feeling as a basis we will ever be suffusing the whole world with thought of love, far-reaching, grown great, beyond measure, void of anger or ill-will."

As to the exceeding beauty of that teaching there can be no doubt; but the most noteworthy fact is its entire independence of theology. Buddha did not claim to have received it by revelation from above, but to have evolved it out of himself by honest thinking. He denied the existence of the soul, condemned the hope of immortality, and had no use whatever for a deity. It was his joy while he lived to have worked out his own salvation without the least assistance from outside, and the burden of his strenuous preaching was an emphatic insistence on the duty and privilege of self-reliance in conjunction with self-denial. His gospel announced the glad tidings of "salvation merely by self-control and love, without any of the rites, any of the ceremonies, any of the charms, any of the priestly powers, any of the gods, in which men love to trust." To him all theologies alike were superstitions to be got rid of as speedily as possible. It cannot be said that he succeeded in wholly weaning the people from their blind reliance upon ghostly beliefs and hopes, nor can it be affirmed that his philosophy of life was permitted long to retain its original simplicity and purity. The old superstition was too deep-seated in the popular mind to be utterly and finally overthrown at so early a point in the world's history. But the fact remains that early Buddhism was, and still is, through its Scriptures, a mighty protest against all forms of superstition. It represents the noblest accomplishment of Freethought in the Orient.

In the West to-day Christian theology, in its totality, must be pronounced a degrading superstition, which we should earnestly endeavor to demolish with the greatest possible expedition. "J. B." himself admits that, in the forms of which he disapproves, it has wrought incalculable harm; but we stoutly maintain that, even in the form in which "J. B." gives it his blessing, its influence upon character is bound to be injurious. Belief and trust in any god cannot but demoralise the conscience. Faith in a Divine Savior, who never saves, has retarded by many centuries the salvation of society. Constantly waiting on, and for, a Holy Ghost who never comes has seriously kept back the true spirit of humanity, "J. B." deploras the social and moral backwardness of Christendom. Emerson is right when he says that "the standing army, the arsenal, the camp, and the gibbet do not appertain to man"; and "J. B.'s" only hope of deliverance from them is in a revived Christianity, forgetting that

these barbarous developments have been most closely allied with, and constantly utilised by, Christianity in all the periods of its history. Buddhism, the Humanitarianism of ancient India, repudiated them both in theory and in practice. Secularism, which is the Humanitarianism of the West in the twentieth century, advocates the complete repudiation of the Christian superstition, that mankind may have a chance of developing their own resources and applying them to the practical and rational settlement of all social, political, and moral questions which are now setting individuals and nations together by the ears.

J. T. LLOYD.

Acid Drops.

The seizure of *Justice* at the Trafalgar-square demonstration against the Czar, is one of those high-handed acts for which the London police are becoming too famous under the present pious Chief Commissioner. This gentleman sanctioned the late "blasphemy" prosecution, and he permits scores of policemen—who ought to be catching thieves and murderers—to prowl about Freethought meetings all over the metropolis taking down "wicked passages" from the lecturer's lips. The seizure of *Justice* only goes a little further in the same direction. We are not aware that the police have any legal right to seize and destroy newspapers in this country, and it is a great pity that the legality of their action has not been tested in the courts.

Mr. Will Thorne, M.P., asked the Home Secretary a question on this subject. Could he give any explanation of the action of the police? Mr. Gladstone has the mind of a prison governor, and always sides with the "authorities." It was he who disgraced the Liberal Government by sanctioning the late "blasphemy" prosecution. His reply to Mr. Thorne was characteristic:—

"The police seized, without using unnecessary force, certain papers which contained pictorial and press matter of a nature calculated to provoke a disturbance of the peace. Their action, in my opinion, was fully justified."

Of course it was. But what a confession for a Liberal Home Secretary! Mr. Thorne very properly put another question. "Am I to understand," he asked, "that the freedom of the press is entirely in the hands of the Chief Commissioner of Police?" Mr. Gladstone answered: "No; but—" And the "but" destroyed the "No." For this is what followed: "When the freedom of the Press is abused the police have to act in the execution of their duty." This hopeless imbecility was cheered by a number of legislative fools. Is it possible to conceive anything more stupid? The police do not control the "freedom" of the Press, they only control its "abuse"! How much sense is needed to see that the two things are identical? If the police, without judges and juries, are to decide what is an "abuse" of the freedom of the Press, they obviously have the freedom of the Press in their hands. We are not surprised that Mr. Will Thorne blurted out: "Would it not be as well to wait until the Czar has come before you adopt Russian methods?" Some creatures cried "Order!" at this. It is a pity they cannot be sent to Russia.

Now we have a word for the Socialists. They have to thank themselves a good deal for the police seizure of one of their newspapers. It is one of their failings that they seldom recognise attacks on freedom unless they themselves are the victims. They made no protest worth speaking of when the police revived the Blasphemy Laws: and Harry Boulter was a Socialist as well as a Freethought lecturer. Perhaps they begin to see now that Thomas Paine was right when he said that the best defence of one's own liberty is the defence of another man's when it is attacked. The Socialists practically winked at the insolent action of the police in the "blasphemy" case, they saw no danger in the aggressive piety of the Chief Commissioner of Police, or in the danderheaded officialdom of Mr. Gladstone. When the police, and the Chief Commissioner, and the Home Secretary give them a turn, they scream. Why didn't they scream before?

What with the weather, and the floods, and the earthquakes, this poor old planet is feeling the blessings of "Providence" just now. We are having a most wintery summer all over Europe, but we are better off than they are in Manchuria, where a flood has destroyed a thousand people at one place called Kirin. Seven thousand houses were submerged on July 31, and the water was still rising. Mexico

has been visited by an earthquake; more than 1,000 people have been killed, besides the injured, and the damage is calculated as at least £2,000,000. In Japan a fire at Osaka, a big commercial city with a million and a quarter inhabitants, has burnt out an area of four square miles, and destroyed 13,000 houses. Good old "Providence"!

"Nature is a vast argument for the existence of God," says the Rev. B. G. Collins in the *Baptist Times and Freeman*. Cardinal Newman, a much greater man, was forced to confess that Nature is "a vast argument" for Atheism. And, surely, unprejudiced observers of natural phenomena have no choice but to frankly admit that the Cardinal was right, and Mr. Collins wrong.

More "Providence." Rev. George C. Sumner, assistant curate at Littlehampton, was knocked down and killed by a Brighton-Portsmouth express at a level crossing. One would think that an active and intelligent Deity would take more care of his "inner circle." For the reverend victim of this accident was ordained to the Lord's ministry and "filled with the Holy Ghost."

It was shocking weather for the poor trippers on Bank Holiday. Mr. Keir Hardie explains that "the heavens were draped with grey" because the Czar was "received" at Cowes. We understand now. Still, it was rough on the trippers. But none of the gods have any humor—not even Mr. Keir Hardie's.

That wicked Frenchman, M. Blériot, flew across the Channel on a Sunday. It is a wonder that the Sabbatarian God of England let him get through. We hope that Deity will keep a sharper lookout over the three-mile radius. Meanwhile, we are delighted to see that an old clerical friend has induced Sir William Hartley to stipulate that his prize of £1,000 for an aerial journey from Liverpool to Manchester cannot be won on a Sunday. It is high time, indeed, that the birds stopped flying on the Lord's Day. We suggest the passing of a law to that effect.

It will be remembered that we had to correct the statement that Mr. Harry Boulter's sentence would date from the opening of the Old Bailey sessions, and that it would therefore work out at only thirteen days' actual imprisonment. Some malicious critics (the world is too full of these people) tried to make out that we invented the thirteen-days' story in order to minimise Mr. Boulter's penalty; and this in spite of the fact that we merely repeated the statement made by the officers of the Court in the presence of Mrs. Boulter as well as in the presence of Miss Vance, Mr. Cohen, ourselves, and others. Since his release, Mr. Boulter has written to the Clerk of the Court for an explanation, and has received the following letter from that official:—

Central Criminal Court,
Old Bailey.

July 23, 1909.

Sir,—

In reply to your letter of the 23rd inst. I beg to say that when Mr. Justice Darling on 9th June sentenced you to a month's imprisonment I assumed that he intended that sentence to be computed from the first day of the session and the usual formal order of Court was issued. I was however the next morning informed by Mr. Justice Darling that I had mistaken his intention which was that you should have a month's imprisonment from the date on which he passed sentence and the order of Court was amended accordingly.

I am,

Your obedient servant,
H. K. AVORY.

(Clerk of the Court).

Mr. Harry Boulter." This shows that Mr. Boulter's imprisonment would have been only thirteen days if special directions had not been given by Mr. Justice Darling.

Who is the Rev. A. J. Waldron's fogleman? We suspect it is a very near relative. Every now and then stories appear in the press about this comic-opera man of God, celebrating his physical prowess and his intellectual capacity for flooring "infidels." These stories get more and more romantic. We see a column is devoted to him in *M. A. P.* under the heading of "A Fighting Parson," the first paragraph of which contains a decided novelty. It states that Waldron "was at one time himself an unbeliever and a follower of Charles Bradlaugh." We invite him to say *when* and *where*, and to give the name and address of anyone who ever knew him as a Freethinker. We understand that Waldron does not drink, but evidently he dreams.

We are treated to another story of how Waldron triumphed over an Atheist in "a big debate in a North-country town." Waldron referred to a passage in the *Descent of Man* where

Darwin says that "a belief in God is essential to the highest forms of morality." The Atheist denied that the passage was on the page mentioned, but Waldron took up the book and read the passage out. The audience was disgusted with the Atheist, and "Atheism in that town received a severe blow." Now this is a very pretty story. All that is wanted to complete it is the name of the North-country town, the name of the Atheist, and the date of the debate. We invite Waldron to give them. We also invite him to give a precise reference to the passage in which Darwin says that "a belief in God is essential to the highest form of morality." We shall take care that he has a copy of this week's *Freethinker*, and we shall give him a reasonable time to respond to our invitation.

"J. B.," of the *Christian World*, deals the Church of God a fatal blow when he says that "the love of truth seems to be one of the latest of human acquisitions." The observation is in full harmony with fact; but inasmuch as "J. B." is a clergyman, the Church has good reason for exclaiming, "Save me from my officials."

Poor old Aesop was "only a Pagan," the Rev. Dr. David Smith informs us, and yet, by some strange accident or providence, "he taught many truths in his homely fashion which Christians may profitably lay to heart." What a wonder! Just think of it; Homer, Hesiod, Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero, Virgil, Cæsar, Seneca were "only Pagans." Who would dream of comparing them with the very humblest of Christian authors?

Dr. Smith has a most apt illustration of God's method of answering his people's prayers. A little girl was "greatly distressed by her brother's indulgence in the cruel sport of bird-trapping. One night when she was repeating her prayers at her mother's knees, she added a petition of her own: 'And, dear Lord Jesus, please don't let Johnnie catch the poor little birds to-morrow morning; and I am sure you won't. Amen.' 'Mary,' said her mother as she tucked her into her crib, 'why wore you so sure that Jesus would hear your prayer, and not let Johnnie catch the birds?' 'O you see, mother, after supper I went down the garden and smashed the trap.'

"Who are you," cried the Rev. Mr. Aked the other Sunday, "to say that God has spoken his last word?" Very appropriately might the congregation have turned the tables on the preacher, and demanded, "Who are you to say that God has ever spoken his first word?"

Torrey and Alexander parted company some time ago. Alexander is now touring with Chapman. They have been missioning at Melbourne with indifferent results, but, judging by a letter printed in the *Daily News*, they are doing better at Sydney:—

"Hardly six weeks ago Australians were wholly taken up with Anglo-German affairs and Dreadnoughts; to-day Sydney is on its knees before God praying. The Town Hall, Pitt-street Church, and every available place is crowded with men and women crying out for God. Business places give an extra half-hour at midday, when every place is filled. I tried one day to get into the Town Hall; it was impossible to get near it, and yet there was perfect silence and order. People can talk of nothing else. What does it mean? Two evangelists came from America, not orators, but very quiet men, and they have set Sydney on fire. They have a message from God. Earnestly they tell the multitude that God is their father, and He loves them; they point out the sinfulness of sin, and ask men to repent. Men of every class stand side by side to be prayed for. Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

We have heard all this sort of thing before. It does not show the strength, but the weakness, of Christianity. The people who are shaken up in this way by professional revivalists are not "infidels." They have been brought up as Christians, yet it needs a costly apparatus of excitement to remind them that they are Christians. They will soon forget it again.

"Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." No doubt. We have heard that too. He has been passing by ever since we can recollect. Some day or other he will be told to "pass along." Or, as they put it in East London, "Outside!"

William John Gray, clerk, of Nag's Head-road, Ponder's End, is doing two months for stealing money from a provident society of which he was formerly secretary. He had been for many years a deacon at the Congregational Church. There is no moral in the circumstances—as there would be if he had been a Freethinker. So many Christians get into trouble!

The *Daily News* tells us that Willesden, though the poorest parish in the diocese of London, is trying to raise £300 to build a mission, £150 to restore a chapel, and £700 to clear off a debt on the vicarage. Nearly twice as much money is to be spent on one house for the vicar as on both of those intended for God. If there is a building debt of £700 on the reverend gentleman's house, it is reasonable to suppose that it cost more than double that sum. Jesus taught the blessings of poverty, and had not "where to lay his head." The professional expounder of his doctrines wants a £1,500 house and as big a salary as he can get to live in it.

It is only during his holiday," a religious weekly says, "that Dr. Clifford finds time for novel reading." Goodness! Doesn't he read the Gospels?

General Booth is the boss advertiser in England, and perhaps in the world. Barnum, Buffalo Bill, and other great showmen, living and dead, are not in it with him. His reception at Lincoln, for instance, was splendidly stage-managed. The mayor, the aldermen, and the town councillors all graced the show. But common decency might have suggested that the poor devils in Lincoln Prison should not be molested. Considerations of this kind, however, do not weigh with William the Conqueror. He had a go at the poor devils in the prison chapel on Sunday morning, addressing them as "My friends." We should like to have their candid opinion of the performance.

Rev. Josiah Nix held forth last Sunday morning at Victoria Hall, Sheffield, in connection with the Wesleyan Mission, on "Does God Sing?" This is a good idea. We suggest that the enterprising (and inquisitive) Nix should deal with further questions of the same kind, such as—"Does God smoke?" "Does God play billiards?" "Does God play the banjo?" "Has God bought a teddy bear?" There is no end to this vein. It is practically inexhaustible. We congratulate Nix.

Mr. John M'Cormack, the celebrated Irish tenor, who is so well known at Covent Garden, was to have sung at the Pavilion, Portrush, on Sunday afternoon, but he missed the train from London and could not fulfil the engagement, and 1,500 people were keenly disappointed. No doubt the local clergy are rejoicing. They denounced this wicked Sunday concert beforehand. One of them declared that "those who promoted and those who attended the performance would bear a heavy responsibility." Perhaps so. But we fancy the responsibility was less felt than the disappointment. We pity the poor clergy, however; it must be sad for them to see their monopoly of the blessed Sabbath invaded by rival entertainers.

One day, at the recent Wesleyan Conference, there occurred what was termed "a heart-scorching conversation" about "the work of God." Several men of God took part, and each one had a wonderful tale to tell. All had been eminently successful, and proudly related what "grand work was going on" everywhere. One, however, excelled all the others in the boldness of his utterance. The Rev. Ensor Walters, of Sheffield, "had had extraordinary proof of the miraculous power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." In the church with which he was associated "the work had been simply miraculous." And yet we flatter ourselves by saying that this is not a superstitious age. It is true that judging by the report in the *Methodist Times*, Mr. Walters was not once cheered; but then similar sentiments expressed by the others, in somewhat more modest language, were frequently punctuated by the most enthusiastic applause, which shows that the audience were hopelessly steeped in the darkest superstition.

A number of pious gentlemen of what is called "position" are appealing for £150,000 to establish a Christian University in the Celestial Land. Their object is to "naturalise Western knowledge and Christian ethics in China." The Chinese will get all the Western knowledge they want without the assistance of these pious gentlemen. Christian ethics they don't want. They are a fairly moral people now, and why go further and fare worse?

"Everywhere the Chinese are most courteous and respectful, when treated with kindness." So writes the Rev. F. B. Meyer from Canton. Christian lies about the Chinese are gradually perishing. Mr. Meyer adds that the Chinese "dearly relish humor." Missionaries have generally represented them as solemn devils.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

September 5, 12, 19, 26, St. James's Hall, London.
 October 3, Glasgow; 10, Leicester; 17, 24, and 31, St. James's Hall, London.
 November 7, Manchester; 14, Liverpool.

To Correspondents.

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £229 19s. 6d. Received since.—Rev. U. Dhammaloka (Rangoon), 10s.; Joseph Rogers, 4s.

F. J. VOISEY.—Thanks.

J. BURNELL.—It may be, as you say, that a Branch of the N. S. S. would do well at Brighton; but attempts in that line hitherto have not been very successful. The mental and moral atmosphere of such places is not too favorable to Freethought. Thanks for your letter.

TULLOCK ARD.—Meritorious, but harsh.

J. A. BATES.—The Voltaire story is quite imaginary.

GEORGE MOORE.—Glad to hear that Mr. Wishart had good meetings at Nelson, considering the wretched weather, and that the police were helpful against threatened violence. Please note that Tuesday morning is late for paragraphs. We are always saying so.

A. D. M.—Sorry to hear the weather has been so "indescribable" in Germany—apparently worse than it has been here. It must be very bad for you. Mr. Foote will be writing you very shortly.

N. LEVY.—Your envelope bears the Edinburgh postmark "10.30 p.m., Aug. 2" and the London postmark "10.15 a.m., Aug. 3." It was delivered here at 12.15. This is not the "first post on Tuesday." We strain the point for you *this* time, but—

T. W. HOUGHTON.—See paragraph. Thanks.

JOSEPH ROGERS.—Glad to know that you and your wife "have a warm corner in your hearts for Mr. Foote."

E. SLADE.—It is not for us to say what *you*, or anyone else, can logically believe in. We see no evidence of supernatural power ourselves, either with evolution or without it. The only thing that could prove supernatural power is a miracle, but miracles are dead, and the supernatural is joining it.

G. D.—Your suggestions are welcome and shall be considered. Thanks. It is news to us that the speaker you mention has been a supporter of the N. S. S. Are you not mistaken? We have not been approached, and our address is no secret.

E. CASTEL.—Thanks.

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

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

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

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

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Sugar Plums.

Owing to the Bank Holiday affecting all business arrangements, this week's *Freethinker* contains less than the usual supply of paragraphs. The opportunity has been taken, therefore, to print the whole of the second part of Mr. Foote's article on "Freethought and the Law," which we believe most of our readers will find both important and interesting, in spite of its great length.

London Freethinkers should make a note of the Sunday evening lectures, under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd., at the beautiful new St. James's Hall during September and October. The lecturers will be Messrs. Foote, Cohen, and Lloyd. A full advertisement of the course will appear in our next issue.

The editor of the *Positivist Review* makes amends for the fault of a contributor who, in the July number, wrote on the great Paine Celebration at St. James's Hall, on June 8, without mentioning the National Secular Society or so much as stumbling on the name of a single N. S. S. speaker. At the end of the August number we see the following editorial paragraph: "The London meeting in commemoration of the Centenary of Thomas Paine, described in the last number of this *Review*, was organised by the National Secular Society." This looks a little staring, of course, but it was all that the editor could do in the circumstances.

A correspondent (native) writes from Burma asking us to send him a specimen copy of the *Freethinker* "if there is no objection." We are afraid that this "if" is a result of Christian insolence in "heathen" lands. We beg to assure this correspondent, and all others in Asia, that we recognise all good men and women as of the same "country"—namely, the world. Mankind should be brethren. There are differences in mental power in all families, and yet their members are brothers and sisters; and why should it not be the same with the great human family? Not, of course, that mental power is confined to any one nation—or color; it is scattered over *every* nation of every color. For our part, we are happy to say that we have appreciative readers all through the East; and we regard this fact as showing that Freethought, hand-in-hand with Humanity, is going to renew and unite the world.

With reference to the trouble in priest-ridden Spain, it is pleasant to hear from the *Daily Mail* correspondent that "religion is on the wane in Barcelona," and that "soldiers, as they embarked at Barcelona for Melilla, threw in the sea the medals of the Virgin which the pious ladies of the city had solemnly distributed amongst them a few moments before."

It is rather odd to see a "Rev." subscribing to the President's Honorarium Fund, but *this* "Rev." is a Buddhist, and orthodox Buddhism has no theology. Rev. U. Dhammaloka, writing from the Tavoy Monastery, Godwin-road, Rangoon, informs us that the Buddhist Tract Society celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the death of Thomas Paine. He also informs us that he has "arranged with the different booksellers of Rangoon" to keep our publications on sale. We beg to thank him for his good services.

Ingersoll has been dead ten years. How the time flies! It seems but yesterday that we said "good-bye" to him in the midst of his delightful household. We do not bewail that he was mortal. We rejoice that he lived. We salute his great and noble memory—and we send our love to the delightful household, which is just as he left it, for death has never visited it since.

SHAKESPEARE'S RELIGION.

There is undoubtedly a religious atmosphere in Shakespeare, but it is the religion of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful; without dogma and without miracle, and as comprehensive, as true to nature, and as closely in harmony with the rationalistic interpretation of the universe as his own drama. Has not Goethe, in defining his own religion, defined also that of Shakespeare? "Man is born," writes Goethe, "not to solve the problem of the universe, but to find out where the problem begins, and then to restrain himself *within the limits of the comprehensible*." This is precisely what the great Englishman, whom Goethe so sincerely admired, did. He "restrained himself within the limits of the comprehensible," which is a beautiful way of saying that he was practical and not speculative, scientific in spirit and method, and not theological. He abstained from the unprofitable pursuit of the gods, whom the Bible says in one place "no man can find out by searching," and devoted himself to the study of man and his world. This is the religion of sense. There is everything in Shakespeare about man, and every bit of it is serious; but there is nothing of any consequence in Shakespeare about God or gods. It is a matter of regret to the theologian that the great poet should have permitted the secular interests of life to engage his exclusive thought, but we rejoice in the fact that Shakespeare could not be tempted into the dusty and winding paths of theology which lead nowhere. As truthfully as the great Voltaire, the glorious Shakespeare, poet, philosopher, historian, could say of the founders of isms, and the inventor and maker of gods, "they have troubled the earth, and I have consoled it."—*M. M. Mangasarian*.

The Triumph of Evolution.

NO other change in man's thoughts concerning the world in which we live has ever been witnessed which in any way compares with the marvellous mental revolution accomplished in fifty short years by the doctrine of Darwinism and Descent. But although the efforts of the evolutionary scientists and philosophers have been crowned with such signal success—so far crowned that the intellectual world has been convinced and converted to the truth of evolution—the overwhelming mass of the population remains as yet untouched by a mental advance without parallel in the history of mankind.

Before the publication of the *Origin of Species* the mythical creation narrative contained in the Book of Genesis was received as literal truth, even by educated men. But after the appearance of the famous "Origin" this was no longer possible. The antecedent discoveries and deductions of the geologists had deepened the doubts previously engendered by the revelations of the astronomer's telescope, and now the hand of science was laid upon the sacred and mysterious ark of life itself.

It is a circumstance well worthy of remembrance that the conquests of modern science commenced, not on the solid earth, but in the starry heavens. The early astronomers were assailed by the fanatical and bigoted antagonism of the clericals and the clerically minded. But truth does sometimes triumph, and the victory of the astronomers helped to prepare that more easy path which the geologists subsequently followed. The steady growth of enlightenment which accompanied the development of the modern rationalistic spirit, in its turn prevented all *physical* interference with the biologists when their time arrived for presenting their philosophy to the world.

Much progress had been made in the intervening years, and it was possible to discuss the problem of the genesis of species without any fear of popular violence or clerical animosity. A group of brilliant thinkers, writers, and investigators appeared who did yeomen's service to the evolutionary cause. The opponents of evolution were swept from the field in the dialectical combat which ensued, and when the armed truce between the mutationists and special creationists was declared, practically all the evolutionists had claimed was conceded without a murmur to the conquering host.

When the bright light of patient intelligence was brought by Darwin to bear upon the origin of plants and animals, and observation and experiment substituted for soulless dogma, men were shocked and scandalised at the spectacle. If it were demonstrated that man was not a fallen angel but a risen ape, the entire theological superstructure would henceforth lie in ruins. But the Anglo-Saxon races, true to their traditional love for compromise, slowly, and to some extent unconsciously, evolved the feeling that if the overruling powers of Nature chose to manifest their energies through a steady process of upward growth they were still indispensable to the orderly workings of the universe. Many, therefore, reassured themselves with the reflection that the laws of evolution were really implied in the Biblical account of the six days' creation. The testimony of the rocks certainly seemed fatal to the current belief that the solar and stellar systems came into being some six thousand years ago. The geologists might differ in chronological details, but were unanimous in opinion concerning the vast antiquity of the globe. The six days of creation consequently became six geological epochs of mighty magnitude.

The minor circumstance that Moses, who was previously regarded as the author of the Pentateuch, had instituted the Sabbath, or Day of Rest, to sanctify the day upon which Jehovah reposed after his six days' creative labors, was readily explained as the method Omnipotence was compelled to employ for the purpose of adapting itself to the rude and unlettered understanding of the Hebrew people.

"The cruel ingenuity of the reconciler," as Huxley once put it, was likewise devoted to the congenial task of proving that although the Scriptures appear to state that the earth existed before the sun, this really means that the solar orb was already in the heavens, although the vapors ascending from the cooling planet's surface rendered it invisible. Having thus adapted the Nebular hypothesis and the established data of geological science to their cherished Hebrew mythology, the semi-orthodox proceeded to reconcile the ascertained facts of Palæontology, or science of fossil plants and animals, with the order of creation recorded in Genesis.

Dominated by the desire to retain as much as was humanly possible of the primitive cosmogony of a barbaric Eastern race, the better informed believers exalted inconsequential details to the eminence of first principles, and depressed glaring inconsistencies to the level of microscopic unimportance. At the first blush there appeared some broad general resemblance between the sequences of organic evolution as established by science, and the order of creation as presented in the Hebrew mythology. But albeit the Christian apologists secured the active co-operation of the subtlest dialectician of the day, in the person of the late W. E. Gladstone, a man who, by instinct and training, was a political special pleader of the purest water, Professor Huxley clearly demonstrated that the order of creation recorded in Genesis is not the order of organic evolution demonstrated by science. So complete was the orthodox overthrow that one of our leading diplomatists sarcastically said that "it was not a battle but a massacre."

One minor discrepancy, for instance, is to be seen in the Biblical statement that God created great whales. Now the merest tyro in biology is aware that the whale was originally a terrestrial mammal since modified in the course of evolution to a purely aquatic habitat. A more significant blunder is to be observed in the alleged creation of bird life prior to that of crawling or creeping animals. Few scientific facts are more firmly established than the direct evolution of feathered bipeds from reptilian ancestors. Early studies of fowl embryology led to a recognition of the close kinship subsisting between reptilian and avian life. What was previously surmised became a certainty when the fossil remains of the *Archæopteryx* were discovered in the Solenhafen slate deposits of Bavaria. So anomalous was the structure of this primitive bird, that some comparative anatomists mistook it for a reptile. But Sir Richard Owen easily demonstrated that it was a true bird. The original observers were misled by the structure of the caudal appendage, which betrayed marked reptilian affinities. Instead of consisting of a few short vertebrae united into a single bone, as in all living and recently extinct birds, the tail of the *Archæopteryx* displayed twenty elongated vertebrae, each supporting a pair of quill feathers. Other parts of its bony framework manifested marked reptilian characteristics. The long lizard-like tail of this fossil bird, however, is rendered less anomalous in the light of the fact that the embryo chicken's tail vertebrae are separate and distinct, but become united before the chick is hatched. The fossil *Archæopteryx* is thus seen to exhibit as a permanent possession a morphological characteristic now displayed as a temporary phase in the embryological development of birds in general.

The foregoing evidence establishing the connecting links between reptiles and birds was later strengthened by the discovery of extinct toothed birds by Professor Marsh in the cretaceous deposits of America, and anatomists have also produced much evidence that indicates the greater structural resemblances between lower mammals and reptiles than any that exist between these and more highly evolved mammalian forms.

Many men of letters and a few conservative men of science have expressed surprise at the manner in which the special creation theory succumbed to the evolutionary onslaught. There is little cause for astonishment if the facts are impartially considered. In the first place, the creation legend was inherited

from a rude and ignorant past. Primitive beliefs concerning astronomy, geology, history, geography, and anthropology were slowly dispelled by fuller knowledge; and the principles of modern philosophical biology were certain of acceptance as soon as they were compared with the theologically guarded myths of an ancient uncivilised people. For the creation theory no evidence exists in any conceivable form. Every known process in Nature points in a manner quite unmistakable in the evolutionary direction. All the animal and vegetable organisms we see around us are the certain outcome of growth; every fossil preserved in the rocks bears the same stamp of development; all concepts of manufacture are alien to the processes of vital phenomena, and are therefore thrust outside the courts of science.

But for the Law of Evolution the evidence is abundant and conclusive. Although the geological record is admittedly imperfect, nevertheless the evidence furnished by the remains of organisms imbedded in the rocks is so powerful that Huxley once said that if the doctrine of evolution had not existed the facts supplied by palæontological science would have compelled us to invent it.

The sciences of embryology, comparative anatomy, ethnology, anthropology; the past and present geographical distribution of animals and plants, the phenomena of variation and classification, all indubitably support the evolutionary position. That comprehensive thinker, Herbert Spencer, after reviewing the respective merits of evolution and special creation, has cogently and logically summed up his conclusions concerning the latter in the following words:—

"Thus the hypothesis of special creation turns out to be worthless by its derivation; worthless in its intrinsic incoherence; worthless as absolutely without evidence; worthless as not supplying an intellectual need; worthless as not supplying a moral want. We must therefore consider it as counting for nothing, in opposition to any other hypothesis respecting the origin of organic beings."*

And the judgment expressed in the above quotation fairly represents the almost universal view of students and investigators in all departments of the science of life.

T. F. P.

The Narratives in Genesis.—IX.

THE MYTHICAL ARK.

(Continued from p. 491.)

THOUGH the manifest impossibilities connected with the alleged Flood are more than sufficient to prove the Bible story fictitious, the statements made respecting the Ark supply fresh evidence of the mythical character of that story. This will be clearly seen when we examine this part of the narrative.

1. According to the Bible story, Noah, in an age when ship-building was unknown, was able to build a vessel 525 feet long, 87 feet wide, and 52 feet high, to construct it of three stories, to divide it into compartments for the various animals, and to make it in every part water-tight and strong enough to toss about for a year on the waters without so much as sprinkling a leak. Now, in the primitive age in which Noah is said to have lived—the tenth generation from the first man—mining operations and the work of metals were unknown; hence the construction of a strong and water-tight vessel of such dimensions was a simple impossibility. With no cutting tools worthy of the name, no iron nails, screws, bolts, or clamps, no saws capable of cutting trees into planks, no planes, no tools of any kind suitable for ship-building, no means of joining planks together to a length of 525 feet, the bare idea of men of that generation constructing such a vessel is simply preposterous.

2. Noah could never have got together a pair of every kind of bird, beast, and creeping thing, and

have made them enter the Ark, as narrated in Genesis. He might, no doubt, have taken in some of the domestic animals of his own neighborhood, but to get together a male and female of every kind of living creature was simply impossible; neither can we suppose that Noah was acquainted with one-tenth of the different species then on the earth. Assuming, however, that he could have assembled seven pairs of every kind of bird and clean beast, and one pair of every other kind of beast and creeping thing, and that each pair were separated by partitions with space enough to move and turn round in, the Ark could not have held them all.

3. Assuming, again, that two or more of every species of animal were penned up in the Ark, the enormous quantity of provisions required for their sustenance and that of Noah and his family for an entire year could not be stored within that building. The two elephants would require nearly a cartload of vegetables every day. The two giraffes, rhinoceroses, zebras, horses, asses, dromedaries, camels, the fourteen oxen, yaks, sheep, antelopes, goats, reindeer, and all the other herbivorous animals, would require at least a dozen cartloads of vegetable food daily. The quantity that all these animals would consume in 375 days would be so enormous that a second, probably a third, ark would be required to hold it.

The two lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars, cougars, pumas, hyenas, cheetahs, wolves, jackals, bloodhounds, and all the other great carnivora, would require more than a score of other animals for their daily food. Assuming that this small number would be sufficient for their daily consumption, Noah would have to take into the Ark 7,500 sheep or other animals as food for these carnivora during the 375 days of the Flood, and in addition several thousands of extra loads of grass or vegetables to keep this flock alive until all had been devoured.

Smaller carnivorous animals, such as the glutton, fox, pole-cat, marten, ferret, stoat, and pampas-cat, which live on rabbits, poultry, rats, birds, and reptiles, would also have to be provided for: so that thousands of the last-mentioned animals would have to be taken into the Ark merely to feed the first-named, as well as extra food for the latter. Other carnivorous animals, too, such as the mole, hedgehog, skunk, weasel, ichneumon, and opossum, who feed on such small deer as field-mice, frogs, lizards, small birds, slugs, and snails, must not be forgotten: they would all require their proper daily food.

Again, we must not forget that seven pairs of all the birds of prey were taken into the Ark, and had to be fed. The eagle, vulture, condor, buzzard, kite, gyrfalcon, kestrel, sparrow-hawk, goshawk, harrier, snowy-owl, hawk-owl, and many others, are all carnivorous, and live upon small quadrupeds and birds. Noah would therefore have to take into the Ark an immense number of the smaller birds and quadrupeds to keep all the predacious birds—fourteen of each species—alive for more than a year, besides taking in additional food to keep all the living prey alive until required.

As to the reptiles, those that are not amphibious, such as the lizard, rattlesnake, horned viper, boa-constrictor, and many others, would also have to be taken into the Ark, besides a sufficient number of smaller animals to last them for food for a year and ten days—and extra vegetable food to keep the living prey alive until wanted.

Noah would thus be obliged to take into the Ark hundreds of thousands of all kinds of small animals for no other purpose than to serve as food for the carnivorous birds, beasts, and reptiles, besides taking in sufficient additional herbaceous food to keep the victims alive until devoured. It is, moreover, quite certain that the carnivorous animals could not be kept alive without animal food: their teeth, beaks, and internal structure are formed for no other purpose—a beautiful example of design. They could never be made to eat grass like the ox.

As to the wisdom shown in sacrificing hundreds of thousands of quiet, defenceless animals to keep the

* Prin. Biology, vol. 1., p. 430.

carnivorous birds, beasts, and reptiles alive during the year the Flood lasted, in order that they might afterwards be let out to prey on the herbivorous animals saved, I need say nothing. The question now is, Did Noah take into the Ark all the animal and vegetable food needed to keep all the selected pairs alive for 375 days? The answer, of course, is: He did not. The inspired writer never realised the hundredth part of what would be necessary to keep the seven pairs of birds and clean beasts and the pair of all unclean beasts, reptiles, and creeping things alive during that period.

4. In connection with the food supply is another matter of equal importance, especially in a hot country. All the animals confined in the Ark, including Noah and his family, would require fresh water daily. The quantity that fell as rain would amount to but a few inches. If there was a flood at all, the water to the height of over three miles could only come from the ocean (say, by an upheaval of its bed), and would therefore be salt. Noah was therefore in the unenviable position of having water everywhere around him, but not a drop to drink. Whence did he get the water needed by all the imprisoned animals? How were they all kept alive without it?

5. Noah and his family and all his menagerie, if confined in the Ark for a year, could never have come out of it alive. In the first place, they were in darkness the whole time. There were three floors or stories to the Ark, but only on the top of the highest floor was there what is called a window or cover. There was a door in one of the sides of the vessel by which all the inmates entered; but it was shut close as soon as they were in, and was watertight. The bottom floor was therefore in pitchy darkness; so also was the middle floor. In the top floor, where Noah and his family are supposed to have lived, the cover, if opened, might allow the entrance of a small portion of light in the centre of that floor; but this cover was certainly kept shut during the great downpour that lasted forty days and forty nights. We need go no further: long before the expiration of that time all the inmates would have been dead.

In the next place, Noah and his sons had a two-fold daily work to perform.

(1) All the birds, beasts, and creeping things had to be fed every day. Noah and his sons had to keep in memory the different kinds of food required by all the different animals, and feed them at regular intervals; they had also to keep all the tanks supplied with fresh water. This would leave them very little spare time on their hands. But all the feeding had to be done by groping about in the dark; we may therefore be quite certain that it was not done at all: more especially since we know that no animal food had been taken in.

(2) Noah and his sons had to attend to the sanitary requirements of the Ark during the whole time of the Flood. Here were many thousands of animals, besides Noah and his family, all penned up in close quarters, which they had no means of leaving for more than a year. Besides feeding all the animals, Noah and his sons had to clean out their dens every day, otherwise the Augean stables would be a garden of roses compared to the interior of the Ark long before the forty days' downpour of rain had come to an end. The stench from the quarters of the carnivorous animals alone would, before the end of the first week, be so great, so intensely overpowering, as to render the whole interior of the vessel unbearable. The two teledus, skunks, badgers, and weasels, would of themselves be sufficient to so pollute the confined atmosphere in the Ark, as to render it uninhabitable. Even in the open air the horrible stench from the teledu is so violent as to produce syncope. The nauseating smell emitted by the skunk is the most powerful stench in nature, and produces nausea at more than a hundred yards distance—the stench of the foulest dunghheap being mild in comparison. The fetid odors emitted by the badger, weasel, and many other animals are also overpowering. Confined in this close space, with no fresh air or ventilation of any kind, inhaling an atmosphere becoming more polluted

and nauseating every hour, with every particle of oxygen used up, in a very short time every one of the inmates would have been asphyxiated. No animal that breathed could have continued to inhale such vitiated atmosphere for a single week, and come out alive.

The cleansing of this worse than Augean stable had to be done in all three floors; the sewage from the bottom and middle floors had to be raised into the top storey, and the whole got rid of through the cover or window—which could not be opened during the forty days' rain. This done, all three floors had to be flushed with water, and the latter had to be mopped up and got rid of through the cover. This cleansing, like the feeding, had to be done in total darkness, with no place into which to turn the animals while it was being performed; consequently, it certainly never was done.

In this pestilential prison no living person or thing could remain during the forty days' rain, and come forth alive. There are other difficulties connected with this mythical ark into which it is unnecessary to enter; sufficient has been adduced to prove to anyone save a Christian Evidence man or a Salvationist that the whole story of the Deluge is a ridiculous fiction, born of ignorance and superstition. Bearing the latter fact in mind, what are we to say to the following passage in which the Christian Savior vouches for the historical truth of the Flood story?

Luke xvii. 26, 27.—“And as it came to pass in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.”

There can be no mistaking such language. If, therefore, the story of the Deluge be a baseless legend—as it undoubtedly is—then Jesus Christ (or, more correctly, the evangelist Luke) was a very ignorant and a very credulous man.

ABRACADABRA.

(To be continued.)

The dealings of the Christian world with the non-Christian nations have been almost uniformly iniquitous from the first ages until now. And the reason is obvious. It has been impossible for a Christian statesman to sympathise with a non-Christian creed. The reckless destruction of the ancient civilisations of Peru and Mexico by the Spaniards of the sixteenth century showed this. There were many good and merciful men in the Spanish armies who deplored the avarice and cruelty of their countrymen. But these regarded the Mexican and Peruvian worship as devil-worship; therefore they could feel no indignation at its destruction. It was a repetition of what had been done to Greek and Greek books in the early days of the triumph of Christianity. Of Mohammedanism, the great rival of Catholicism, there is no need to speak.....Protestantism has been no whit superior to Catholicism in these things. Our own action in India, in China, in Japan, has been always tainted with the spirit of contemptuous dislike for a religion and civilisation which was not our own.—J. H. Bridges.

When some man announces the discovery of a new truth, or of some great fact contrary to the opinions of the learned, it is easy to overwhelm him with names. There is but one name on his side—that is to say, his own. All others who are living, and the dead, are on the other side. And if this argument is good, it ought to have ended all progress many thousands of years ago. If this argument is conclusive, the first man would have had freedom of opinion; the second man would have stood an equal chance; but if the third man differed from the other two, he would have been gone.—Ingersoll.

The Boulter Fund.

Special Collection on Clapham Common, £3 7s. 6d.; Richard Johnson, £7; W. H. Morrish, £1; W. R. Seadie, £1; Hyde Park Friend, £1; H. W., £1; W. C. H., 5s.; per E. C. Saphin, 2s. 6d.; Anon, 1s.; S. Carlisbor, 1s.; P. Thornley, 1s.; Mr. Kirkby, 1s.; N. J. Evans, £2; Highburyite, 1s.; F. Smallman, £1.—N. J. EVANS (Treasurer).

Blasphemers and Blasphemed.

We are always hearing complaints from sections of people about their deities being "blasphemed." But in many cases the boot is perhaps on the other foot. Probably we shall find that humanity has the most reason to complain of being "blasphemed" by the spokesmen for divinity.

If religious people were not so much given to abusing the English language—among other things—they might be taught exactly what the word "blasphemy" means. A person cannot blaspheme somebody in whom he does not believe. The very kernel of blasphemy is that it is a violation of the deepest feelings.

Now how do we apply the test as a rule? We find in 999 cases out of 1,000 that vulgar abuse or mere expressions of disbelief and disagreement are classed as blasphemy. The charges often made are so groundless and ridiculous that it seems from one point of view a foolish thing to answer or defend them. But from another point of view it is essential to meet them, because they usually mean a serious infraction of liberty. The mass of the people have much to thank heretics for in preserving their freedom in this Christian land.

I have asked if those who profess to speak for deities do not blaspheme humanity. I have no difficulty in declaring that they do. One of the most glaring examples of this kind of blasphemy is to be found in that hymn which is still sung by people who are supposed to be gifted with reason called the *Te Deum Laudamus*. There is a most objectionable line in that composition which violates the best feelings of those who have a real love and respect for humanity and its potentialities. It runs thus:—

"The womb of a Virgin He did not abhor."

I wonder on what ground it could be suggested by anyone that any being of whatever nature should have "abhorrence" for any human maid? It is all very well for parsons in these days to attempt to show that they believe in the dignity and worth of human beings, but when we read such a line in a hymn that appears in all the Churches' hymn-books we must realise that at the back of their minds the black-coated gentry accept implicitly the doctrine of original human depravity and vileness, and that acceptance is a gross insult to their fellow beings. We are called on by these "sanctified" men of God to abase ourselves and grovel abjectly before a being who, they tell us, is infinitely exalted above us in wisdom, purity, truth, and knowledge, and who, nevertheless, is extremely jealous, and always greedy for adoration, praise, and adulation. The priests do not see any inconsistency in this, but rapturously cringe before their idol whom they have set up and of whom they have such an unreasonably high and fantastic opinion, that they affect to be struck into dumb wonder that he should find humanity even worthy of the slightest notice from him. Human beings must, forsooth, go about with an apology for existing written on their faces. If any man refuses to adopt this attitude of canting piety he is described as wilful, proud, and rebellious, and the God of the orthodox, it is declared, will smite him and damn him for ever.

But I contend that man has more reason to complain of being "blasphemed" by the representatives of God than God has to complain of being "blasphemed" by man. Religion keeps man in cringing and grovelling servility. It is by fear—human fear—that religion exists. Religion does not advance the dignity of individual man, but tends to diminish and destroy it, and therefore to hinder human progress. It is a common trick of clerics to-day to argue the contrary, but what do think in their heart of hearts? They know perfectly well that the pious believer continues to be found because ignorance and fear still exist. It is the rule of terrorism that makes pious believers possible.

Yes, it is humanity that has to complain most of being blasphemed, not divinity.

SIMPLE SANDY.

A Debacle.

By "WUSSLEAN."

On a corner allotment, swept by a bitter wind, stood the survivor of a forest of land agents' boards, and on it flapped loosely a sign which announced in straggling characters, "Great Rally: Testemoneys, To Night." Grouped in a small circle round the post was the great rally. It consisted of half-a-dozen men, whose fierce eyes mocked the feebleness of their features and physique, and several objects which appeared in the torchlight like small, gabled dove-cots on posts, but which closer inspection proved to be coal-scuttle-bonneted Amazons of the "Army." Some of the men wore robin-breasted uniforms, some were in mufti, but

one and all bore the metal S of active service, even to the armor-bearers and camp-followers of the detachment.

The enemy was mostly resting on its base at that stronghold of sin, the Royal Hotel—the pub obliquely opposite. Yet its vedettes were within range, fully eleven of them, tempted from cover by a rumor that an erstwhile "pal" who had "gone over" and become a "comrade" was to give the worldly show away.

One by one the members of the little band related to the wind their tedious, twice-told tales of the terrible time when they feared not God neither regarded man—or, for the women's part, regarded man too much. And the fervor broke out at the usual pauses, deepening in intensity when an extra deep probing brought to light a sin "not elsewhere included." And each succeeding testifier prefaced his depositions by remarking with proud sadness, "Ah, fren's, I've bin a grite sinner. I've bin even worse 'n youse."

Then the raw recruit fell clumsily into line. "Fren's," he said, "it takes more courige sometimes ter surrender than ther stand out. I've stood out often, 'n I've fell often, slain—slain by sin; but this time I've got up again, 'n I've got up on ther other side of ther line." (Slow music: "Over the line its on'y a step.") "'N' I'm goin' ter kick orf me truck 'n' unload me orful parst. "Fren's" (as his Dutch courage rose), "some of youse bin bad coves, but my sins 'as bin as scarlet—scarlet with crimson stripes 'n' delirium trimmins. I was allus bad. I was born bad. Before I was one I useter chuck me nuss-girl under the chin as I lay on 'er knee, 'n' say 'goo' to 'er. 'N' while me mother was comparin' me with neighbors' nippers, I useter shake their dummies 'n' their rattles. Soon after I was weaned I stunned me mother with me feedin'-bottle because she never put no sugar in me milk. As I grew older I on'y grew worse; me thoughtless prime was early ripe to ill. I passed from folly into crime, 'n' me parents pleaded 'no control' when I was five. When I broke away from the schools, on me sixth birthday, 'n' went 'ome, me father and mother cleared out because they couldn't stand me drunken 'abits, 'n' the way I roughed 'em up. When me father 'n' mother forsoke me, the perlice took me up; 'least, they did orf an' on, but I was too 'ot to 'old, I was. I was a ches'nut fair orf the 'ob. When I turned round er corner one d'y, 'n' come right onter two pleecemen, they both dropped dead, 'n' the verdick was 'art failure. I slowed up a bit when I got a job. I wouldn't er took it on'y it give me the 'andlin' o' cash. But embezzlement 'n' petty larceny got too slow fer me. 'Satin finds some mischief still fer idle 'ands ter do,' 'n' I started a bit o' garrotin' in me spare time. Bein' noo at the gime, a good many o' me victims died at first; but I never felt no remorse, although I useter git 'cadaches thinkin' out noo crimes. But now the harrer of conviction 'as sunk deep into me soul. I realise I bin too frisky. I'm goin' to break off me ole bad 'abits, 'n' instead o' the 'and o' the lor, I wanter feel on me shoulder ther steadyin' and 'n' look round ter catch ther lovin' smile er Jesus."

With a sudden suspicion of something missing, the speaker paused, but not even a groaned "Amen" or "Glory Be" cheered him to continue. For a broken, dispirited band had dejectedly dispersed into the darkness, and the only sound was the wind-borne echo of stolid, sullenly retreating footsteps upon the sleeping streets.

But down upon his head fluttered the sign, like the robe of the praying Pharisee descending upon a worthy successor, or the winding-sheet of Ananias enfolding a lovely liar who could shame even a Salvation Army squad into silence.

—Sydney Bulletin.

Obituary.

It is with deep regret that I announce the death of Mr. Richard Hughes. He was well known in local circles as an advanced Freethinker and an enthusiast in all that tended to the welfare of the community. He was a member of the Ferndale Fire Brigade, Ambulance Corps, and the I. L. P. He was killed by a fall of the roof whilst following his daily occupation as a collier in one of Mr. F. L. Davies's collieries. He was a man of varied experiences. Born in the year 1877 at Llandudno. He was in the Postal service at Colwyn Bay for seven years. During that time he was a member of the Royal Welsh Fusilier Volunteers. He was a man of undoubted courage. In company with two others he launched a boat and succeeded in rescuing a party of five who were caught at the height of a storm while boating off Colwyn Bay. In the year 1901 he came to Ferndale, and had made it his home until the time of his death, July 17. During that time he organised many excursions to hear Freethought lectures which were given by prominent Freethinkers in the outlying districts.—T. J. WILLIAMS.

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, James Rowney, Lectures.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road): 11.30, F. A. Davies, "Religion and Life."

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

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford): 7. J. W. Marshall, "The Necessity of Atheism."

WEST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park): 11.30 and 6.30, Lectures.

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Spouters' Corner): 11.30, E. C. Saphin, "The Lord Knows."

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

COUNTRY.**INDOOR.**

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, H. Percy Ward, "How Christianity has Cursed Humanity."

OUTDOOR.

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

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Edge Hill Lamp): Wednesday, August 11, at 8, H. Percy Ward, a Lecture.

WIGAN BRANCH N. S. S. (Market-square): Monday, August 9, at 8, H. Percy Ward, a Lecture.

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