

THE Freethinker

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Children can say over their religion at four or five years old, and their parents that taught them can do no more at four or five and fifty.—JOHN ASGILL.

Christian Consistency.

EMERSON said that under Stoicism every man was a Stoic, but in all Christendom (he asked) where is the Christian? And echo still answers "Where?"

We have called Christianity the Impossible Creed. The late Bishop Magee, of Peterborough, thought it so too. He publicly declared that any society which carried out the maxims of the Sermon on the Mount would go to pieces in a week. Christianity is a creed for Sundays, when there is nothing doing. Other days in the week it is a ridiculous failure. Christians could not succeed in acting upon it, if they tried, without securing a place in a workhouse, an asylum, or a prison.

John Stuart Mill, in his essay *On Liberty*, remarked that Christians professed to believe the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, and *did* believe them in the sense that people do believe what they always hear praised and never see practised. When it comes to acting, instead of professing, they look around them (Mill said) and ask Mr. A. and Mr. B. how far they ought to go in obeying Christ.

If Mill were alive now he might take the illustration of the Peculiar People. They read the New Testament as the real Word of God, and they regard Christ as the real Third Person of the Holy Trinity. What he commands they loyally try to do. They take his words in the last chapter of Mark where he says that those who believe in him "shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." They take the words of Christ's alleged brother in the fifth chapter of James:—

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up."

The Peculiar People take these "shalls" without reservation. They believe the Lord's words to mean exactly what they say. They act upon them. And what is the result? Their fellow Christians prosecute them for using oil and prayer instead of physic, and for calling in the elders instead of a doctor; they are found guilty of manslaughter, and sent to prison with hard labor; yet the jury who convict them, and the judge who sentences them, are all sworn upon the very book which those poor honest Christians have obeyed to their own undoing.

What a curious book the Bible is—at least in this Christian country! You are liable to imprisonment for bringing it into disbelief and contempt—*without* hard labor; and you are liable to imprisonment for believing it—*with* hard labor.

Christian teachers tell us that the whole duty of man is "the imitation of Christ." But it fares ill with any simple person who endeavors to follow the Great Exemplar. Christ had no visible means of subsistence; he had not where to lay his head,—that is, he often slept out of doors. Here are two offences for which he might be imprisoned as a rogue and a

vagabond under the law of England. Christ is well advised to postpone his second advent indefinitely. His loudest-mouthed disciples would be the first to set the police upon him. They would soon have him under lock and key, and keep him there as long as possible. "The passing of the third-floor back" would be from Bloomsbury to Wormwood Scrubs.

The classic prayer of Christendom, called the Lord's Prayer, occurs in that same Sermon on the Mount. Christ taught his followers to pray to their Father in Heaven: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." If you owe money to a clergyman, a churchwarden, a deacon, or an elder, and quote that text when you are asked for payment, he will soon favor you with a blue paper. Look at the huge and costly legal apparatus in this country for recovering debts. Look at the thousands of debtors who are imprisoned for non-payment. Look at the good Christians who clamor for more rigorous treatment of these poor devils. They are treated as criminals already, and we do not see what more can be done unless they are put to death. While they are in prison they have Bibles allowed them, and they read "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." The same pious text is read by their Christian creditors outside. And no one, except a wicked infidel, perceives the slightest inconsistency.

Here is another text from the Sermon on the Mount: "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." That is how Matthew gives it. Luke puts it even stronger: "Give to every man that asketh of thee." This is quite explicit. The command is absolute and universal. Not "give to *him* that asketh thee" but "give to *every one* that asketh of thee." There is no qualification or exception. Such was the teaching of Christ. And what is the practice of the law in Christian England?

At the Guildhall, London, on Tuesday morning, a man called Henry Edgar, sixty-seven years of age, was charged on remand with attempting to obtain £2 by means of a begging letter from the Earl of Gosford. There was another charge against him of obtaining £1 from Lord Llandaff by false pretences. With that, however, we have no particular concern. We have only to deal with the charge of "attempting to obtain." And we must be careful what we say, as the man was put back for the attendance of the Earl as a witness. But this much is clear: attempting to obtain money must be a crime if a man can be charged with it in a court of justice. Now this is directly in the teeth of Christ's teaching. According to that teaching, Henry Edgar did right in asking for £2, and Lord Gosford did wrong in refusing him. Even upon other than Christian grounds it seems strange that it should be a crime for one human being to ask help of another. Special circumstances might make it criminal, but to treat the bare act as a crime seems an abnegation of humanity. In any case, it ought not to be a crime in a Christian country. If it be a virtue to give, it can hardly be a sin to beg; and if a Christian, as a Christian, is bound to give to everyone that asketh of him, how can it be right for him, as a citizen, to give the beggar in charge? Surely this subtle distinction between the Christian and the citizen is the veriest hypocrisy.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Nature of Religion.—VI.

(Concluded from p. 627.)

THE nature of religion being what it is, it having originated in an entirely erroneous view of nature and man, it would seem that nothing more need be said to justify its rejection. Yet something more must be said, because if there is one thing of which religionists are apparently convinced it is that religion, whatever may have been its origin, has been, and still is, an enormous force in the world for good. The curious thing is, that when we inquire, What religion is it that has exerted this beneficent influence? the replies effectually conceal each other. For what each one means by religion being beneficial is his own religion. That of other people's, he is the first to point out, is blindly obstructive to the better interests of mankind. With ourselves, the avowed object of our widespread missionary activity is to save other peoples from the evil effects of their respective religions. Doubtless each of these other peoples would reciprocate if they possessed the brute force and impertinence of European Christians. So that one is forced to conclude either that all religions are equally useless, or that, while religions are, taken singly, injurious, taken collectively they are sources of profound benefit.

What, now, has really been the function of religion in human history? One of the first considerations that strikes one is, that in the history of human progress religion has always played a conservative part. If this had been a wise conservatism, seeking to preserve past customs because of their approved value while, at the same time, ready to admit necessary reforms, the evil of religion might well be a matter of extreme doubt. But its conservatism has been of the most indiscriminating character. Urged, in the first instance, by the belief that innumerable deities were ever on the watch, punishing the slightest infringement of their wishes, opposition to reform receives definite shape and increased strength by the rise of a priesthood. Henceforth economic interest goes hand-in-hand with superstitious fears. Whichever way man turns he finds artificial obstacles erected. Every deviation from the prescribed path is threatened with penalties in both this world and the next. The history of every race and of every science bears eloquent and painful testimony of the extent to which man's endeavors at improvement have been thwarted, and his energies wasted in fighting opposition that ought never to have existed.

This function of unreasoning conservatism is not, it must be remembered, accidental. It belongs to the very nature of religion. Dependent upon the maintenance of primitive ideas, no matter how they are disguised, religion has everywhere set itself in opposition to new ideas and to any change in the existing order. Herbert Spencer has very properly reminded us that primitive religious beliefs are, "under the conditions in which they occur, rational." This is perfectly true, and it is this that provides the seed-plot of future conflict. For religion is an early attempt to account for certain phenomena, with the explanation expressed in terms of life. And along this road there is opportunity for little or no development. For all growth in knowledge is by way of substituting the conception of mechanical causation for that of life and volition. And, further, knowledge can only grow by encroaching on the territory occupied by religion. Thus, while religion is committed by its nature to a vitalistic interpretation of phenomena, science is equally committed to the task of explaining these phenomena in non-vitalistic or in anti-vitalistic terms. Opposition is thus set up at the beginning, and it must continue to the end. What the "Conflict between Science and Religion" really involves is the contest between a lower and a higher stage of culture; it means the attempt to maintain an earlier and a discredited interpretation of nature in the face of later and more accurate theorising. The old cannot be maintained without anathema-

tising the new; the new cannot be asserted without denying the old. The conflict is thus inevitable; the antagonism is irreconcilable.

It lies, therefore, in the very nature of the case that religion, as religion, can give no real help to man in his efforts to understand himself or the world. Whatever good religion may appear to do in the course of history is to be properly accredited to non-religious forces with which, in the course of its history, it has become casually associated. But religion, as such, being concerned with the establishment of amicable and beneficent relations between man and mythical supernatural beings, it can exert no real and direct influence for good on human progress. Far from it doing so, it can be easily shown to exert a quite opposite influence. The energy that man spends, and has always spent, upon gaining the goodwill of his gods is almost an exact measure of the energy withdrawn from the more legitimate and more profitable task of effecting an improvement in human conditions. Religion not only inflicts injury by the direct withdrawal of energy, but also by the waste of energy involved in fighting religious opposition. Let anyone consider, first, how, century after century, workers in every branch of knowledge and reform have had to spend no small portion of their energies in fighting religious opposition; and, secondly, the position the world might have been in to-day had men been free to devote their whole strength to those problems that called for practical solution. Or let one consider, further, what the record of human achievement might read like to-day had the work of enlightenment been taken up at the point where the old Greek and Roman world relinquished the task, instead of there being so many centuries of stagnation and retrogression intervening as a consequence of the domination of the Christian Church. Bacon and Galileo in their prisons, Bruno and Vanini at the stake, are apt illustrations of the manner in which religion has obstructed the free development of the human intellect and of the obstruction it has offered to human well-being.

Again, consider the enormous incubus placed on human progress by the institution of a priesthood devoted to the service of supernatural beings, the larger number of which are dismissed as myths by all civilised people, while the few that remain are undergoing a steady process of attenuation. In the fullest and truest sense of the word priest-hoods represent so many parasites upon human industry. I am not concerned with what individual members of a priesthood may do in their capacity of citizens; it is as priests that I am dealing with them. With the working classes no mean proportion of earnest social reformers has been found amongst tailors and boot-makers; but I do not know that anyone has ever argued that, therefore, we owe reform to the making of boots or trousers. Just as little should we confuse the good that a priest may do incidentally in his capacity of citizen with an estimate of his work as an agent of the supernatural. And the truth remains that of all the inventions and discoveries that have raised man from savagery, not one is owing to the priesthood as such. One may confidently say that if the energies of all the priest-hoods in the world were concentrated on a single community, and all their prayers, formulae, and doctrines devoted to the one end, they would not succeed in advancing the welfare of that community by a single iota.

Far and away the priesthood is the greatest parasitic class the world has known. All over the world, both in savage and civilised times, we see this organised priesthood enthroned, enjoying a subsistence wrung from toil through credulity, and from wealth through self-interest. From the savage medicine-hut up to the modern cathedral we see the earth covered with edifices devoted to the useless service of imaginary deities. We see this priesthood favored with special privileges, their buildings relieved from taxation, and even special taxes levied upon the people for their erection and maintenance. The gods may no longer demand the sacrifice of the firstborn, but they still demand the sacrifice of time,

energy, and money that might well be applied elsewhere. And the people, in their crass stupidity, maintain in every country a large body of non-producers whose whole training and interest compel them to play the part of irreconcilable opponents to liberty and progress.

I have already pointed out how little reason there is for believing either that morality owes its inception to religion or that its development is favorably effected thereby. All I need note here is that, as morality is only consciously aided by a clear perception of the conditions of human wellbeing, it cannot well be assisted by views of life that all rational knowledge shows to be without the slightest foundation in fact. Also we have to bear in mind the positive distortion of conduct by religious beliefs. Normally, evolution makes for the greater sanctity of life—within the limits of the tribe, at least. This must be the case, since were it otherwise the essential condition of associated life would be jeopardised. But here we have to note the fact that the shedding of blood was for ages the normal accompaniment of religious belief and practice. Mr. Tylor very significantly says: "Men do not stop short at the persuasion that death releases the soul to a free and active existence, but they quite logically proceed to assist nature by slaying men in order to liberate their souls for ghostly uses." To the influence of religious belief we have to ascribe the widespread practice of human sacrifice, the killing of slaves and wives at the death of a chief or husband. When to this we add the creation of purely fictitious offences, the confusing of man's moral sense by the system of tabu, and the counting of offences against the gods as far more serious than offences against man, one looks in vain for any good done by religion that will counterbalance this monument of widespread evil.

Finally—not that the list of offences committed by religion is by any means exhausted—one has to take note of the depressing influence of religion on the intellectual development of mankind. From the earliest generations the man who had the strength and the wit to doubt the reality of the gods was, as far as could be, suppressed. Right up to our own day to speak the truth about religion has been one of the gravest offences one could commit. The witch hunt of the savage marked the way for the heresy hunt of the Christian. During all the generations that lay between, the strong and independent thinker has been made to feel the full weight of the enmity of organised religion; the race has been robbed of its finest products by religious bigotry and self-interest. In this way religion has not only obstructed progress, it has actually—even though it be granted unconsciously—worked for race degeneration. Instead of being elevated as an ideal, the fearless thinker has been held up as one to be avoided and condemned.

It is useless arguing that the evils produced by religion were casual, and therefore do not affect religion as such. It is not true; they are deeply imbedded in the very nature of the thing itself. All religion takes its rise in error, and vested error threatened with destruction instinctively resorts to force, fraud, and imposture for defence. The history of religion is the history of the greatest delusion that has afflicted humanity. Happily the delusion is losing its hold on the better minds of the race. Year by year it is being more widely recognised how intellectually unjustifiable and morally useless is the Theistic theory. It explains nothing and it does nothing. And yet in its name millions of pounds are annually squandered, and many thousands of men withdrawn from useful labor and saddled upon the rest of the community for maintenance. But here, again, the economic and intellectual forces of the time are combining for the liberation of the race from its historic incubus. Complete emancipation will not come in a day, but it will come, and its coming involves the restoration to the service of man of the mental and moral energy hitherto squandered in the service of a fictitious deity.

C. COHEN.

The Four Gospels.

"THE Correspondence of the Rev. David Smith, D.D.," in the *British Weekly*, for September 30, is of such a character that we feel bound to call special attention to it. "One of the Old Faith" reports the following statement attributed to a friend: "It is now a well known fact that the Gospels were not written until a hundred years after Christ, so that the accuracy of their statements cannot be relied on, as the writers had only the information which had been handed down through all those years." This the reverend gentleman characterises as "a piece of blatant ignorance," and then adds: "It is absolutely certain that the Synoptic Gospels were written well into the first century. St Luke's is the latest of the three, and it is assigned by some to the reign of Dometian (A.D. 81-96) but there is reason for putting it somewhere between A.D. 75 and 80." Dr. Smith could not blame us if we called that passage "a piece of blatant dogmatism." Instead of doing so, however, we shall quote a sentence from an article by Professor Schmiedel, who is, to say the least, quite as competent to judge as Dr. Smith. The sentence is based on "the weightiest evidences of the employment of Josephus by Luke" both in the Gospel and in the Acts, and is as follows: "In that case the year 100 A.D. will be the superior, and somewhere about 110 A.D. the inferior, limit of the date of its [the Gospel's] composition." Will Dr. Smith exclaim concerning this pronouncement, "A piece of blatant ignorance"? Professor Schmiedel refers to several passages in Matthew's Gospel "on account of which many are disposed to bring down the date of the entire Gospel as late as to 130 A.D." Is this another "piece of blatant ignorance"? With regard to the Gospel of Mark, Professor Schmiedel has the temerity to observe that it may have received its final form later even than those of Matthew and Luke. It should be borne in mind, in this connection, that Dr. Schmiedel is Professor of New Testament Exegesis at Zurich, and cannot be guilty of the "blatant ignorance" Dr. Smith inferentially ascribes to him. And yet he does not fix the date of a single Gospel "well into the first century."

What advantage is to be derived from an early dating of the Gospels it is difficult to perceive. Even according to Dr. Smith, the Evangelists were but "editors of existing material," and it is well-known that editors claim and exercise the right of selecting their material. When, however, the reverend gentleman adds, "I venture to affirm that there is no history in the world which carries equal credentials," he simply poses as a blind dogmatist. By the "existing material" to which he alludes he means "the Oral Tradition which emanated from the Apostles." We submit that Dr. Smith cannot prove that the Oral Tradition emanated from the Apostles. Neither he nor anybody else possesses data on which such an assertion can be verified. Consequently, to declare that "the Gospels therefore are the testimony of the men who companied with the Incarnate Son of God and enjoyed his daily fellowship during the years of his earthly ministry" is to play the theologian against the critic. Professor Schmiedel is much nearer the truth when he says, "The credibility of the Gospel history cannot be established by an earlier dating of the Gospels themselves in any higher degree than that in which it has already been shown to exist."

"Regarding the Fourth Gospel," Dr. Smith proceeds, "it was once the fashion to bring its date down to the middle of the second century, but the force of evidence has pushed it back until the traditional date is generally conceded, and it is recognised that, if the author was not St. John, he was at all events his contemporary." Coming from an orthodox divine, this cannot be labelled "A piece of blatant ignorance," nor can it be accepted as an accurate presentation of the facts. Both the authorship and the date of this Gospel are unknown, and there is no means of ascertaining either. Dr. Smith makes

much of the fact that in the part of the *Clementine Homilies*, which was missing until 1853, there is a quotation from the Fourth Gospel; but, on examining it, we discover that it is not a quotation from any document whatever, but a general reference to a great miracle which Jesus was said to have performed. As these *Homilies* probably date "from the former half of the second century," and contain a quotation from the Fourth Gospel, it follows that the Gospel must be assigned an earlier date—say about the year 100 A.D. So argues Dr. Smith. Unfortunately for his argument, Professor Fisher, of Yale University, says (*History of the Church*, p. 74) that the *Homilies* were not composed until about 170 A.D., and Dr. Samuel Green (*A Handbook of Church History*, p. 137) is of the same opinion; while the erudite author of *Supernatural Religion* (p. 301) declares that the majority of scholars are agreed in placing them anywhere between the middle of the second century and one or two centuries later. The truth is, according to the latter critic, that "there is no certain ground upon which a decision can be based." Indeed, as Dr. Smith himself says, "it is perilous to dogmatise on the delicate questions of Criticism," and we hope he will take the lesson to heart, and refrain, for the future, from denominating any opinion, expressed by critics fully as competent himself, "A piece of blatant ignorance." His treatment of "One of the Old Faith's" statement is contemptuous rather than convincing, and worthier of a biased dogmatist than of a cautious critic. It may satisfy "One of the Old Faith," but it will only disgust his friend.

In Dr. Smith's short paragraph there occurs one entirely true sentence. "The truth is, however," he says, "that it matters little when these Gospels were written, or which is the earliest, since the Evangelists were not original authors." Even if it could be conclusively proved that the Four Gospels were in use before the close of the first century, the truth of their contents would be as open to challenge as ever. Even if they had been partly written during Jesus's lifetime they might have been as unhistorical as *Don Quixote*. Fairy-tales did not take long to grow in those credulous days. They often sprang up round about a man's name while he was yet alive. There was nothing of which Alexander was prouder than the fact that in the temple of Jupiter Ammon he was honored as a son of Zeus, and Augustus availed himself of every suitable opportunity to disseminate the fable "that his mother Atia was once, while asleep in the temple of Apollo, visited by the god in the form of a serpent, and that in the tenth month afterwards he himself was born." It is not reported that Jesus disowned Joseph as his father and proclaimed his virgin birth; but, even if it had been, the story would have been no more credible on that account. Augustus was, in many respects, an exceptionally great emperor; but nobody believes to-day that he was a son of Apollo. Jesus may have been ever so good a man, but that would not verify the legend that he was "conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary." The truth or falsehood of the story that he rose from the dead on the third day is not affected by the answer to the question whether it was of early or of late origin. It is said that Professor Harnack is a recent convert to the traditional views as to the authorship and date of the Gospels and the Acts, but he is not a convert to their entire historicity. Professor Schmiedel and Dr. Arno Neumann are not such extremists in criticism as Bauer and others of the Tubingen school were, and yet they do not hesitate to reject all Gospel passages in which Jesus claims Deity for himself, or others ascribe it to him. In spite of the emphatic declarations in the Epistles that Jesus was God and died that he might become the objective ground of the world's redemption, and in spite of all the miracles recorded in the Gospels, these men see in the Galilean only an exclusively human being whom God highly honored.

The attitude of Freethinkers to the Four Gospels is exceedingly simple. Their verdict upon them is

identical with that which theologians, Old and New, pass upon similar Pagan writings. They apply to them the same canons of criticism as they do to all other literary productions. To them all books alike are of a purely human origin, and they judge them all by the same standard. If theologians read in a Latin work that on several occasions Augustus raised the dead, they would instantly exclaim, "That is wholly legendary, and no sane person can believe it." But when Freethinkers treat the alleged raising of Lazarus in precisely the same manner they are horrified beyond measure, and say, "Jesus was the Incarnate Son of God, and raising the dead was as easy to him as breathing." To such a plea there is only the obvious answer that it is *very* special—and as false. The Buddhists are equally sincere in regarding Gotama as virgin-born, omniscient, and absolutely sinless. There is certainly nothing inherently more incredible in the legend that the Buddha "descended of his own accord into his mother's womb from his throne in heaven" than there is in the Gospel story of the visit of an angel to Mary with this astounding message: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God." Then on what ground do both the Buddhist and the Christian believe each his own scripture and disbelieve that of the other? Having no bias, the Freethinker is logical, and rejects both legends as utterly groundless.

"A piece of blatant ignorance"! What an elegant phrase for one divine to fling at another merely on account of a conscientious difference of opinion. Whether the Gospels were composed early or late, a growing number of critics are coming round to the conviction that they are human productions, and that much of their matter must be pronounced unbelievable. Does even Dr. Smith believe everything recorded in these Christian documents? Does he deny that there are any mythical elements in them at all? If not, how can he condemn Schmiedel and Neumann because they characterise a larger portion of their contents as mythical? Whatever else may be said against these advanced critics, to charge them with "blatant ignorance" is foolish beyond comment. And many of those who deny the historicity of the Gospels altogether, as Mr. J. M. Robertson seems to do in his *Pagan Christs*, are absolutely guiltless of indulging in "blatant ignorance." They are only treating the Gospels just exactly as Christians treat all other literature. J. T. LLOYD.

The Narratives in Genesis—XIV.

POSTDILUVIAN PATRIARCHS.

(Continued from p. 636.)

FOLLOWING the Yahvistic narrative of the "Confusion of tongues" (Gen. xi. 1-9) we have a long paragraph by the Priestly writer (xi. 10-27) commencing: "These are the generations of Shem." In this paragraph the writer enumerates the descendants of the mythical Shem in a direct line down to Abram, the reputed founder of the Hebrew nation; and, by giving the age of each descendant at the time of his successor's birth, he records the supposed number of years between the legendary Deluge and the birth of this founder. These lineal descendants of Shem are stated to have been Arpachshad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, and Abram—the last-named patriarch having been born 292 years after the Flood.

Of the remainder of this chapter (xi.) verses 28-30 are by the Yahvist, and 31-32 by the Priestly writer. In the next chapter (xii.) the last-named writer contributes only verse 4 (last fourteen words) and verse 5; all the rest are from the pen of the Yahvist. In the chapter following (xiii.) only verse 6, part of 11, and part of 12 are by the Priestly writer, whose narrative, notwithstanding, is consecutive. This will

be seen by reading the detached portions of this writer's narrative (Gen. xi. 27, 31, 32; xi. part of 4, 5; xiii. 6, part of 11 and 12) as one continuous paragraph—as under.

"Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot (Short Yahvist narrative.) And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were 205 years: and Terah died in Haran. (Short Yahvist narrative.) And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. (Long Yahvist narrative.) And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. (Short Yahvist narrative.) And they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain." (Yahvist narrative to end of chapter.)

The sentences of the Yahvist narrative immediately preceding and following the last detached portion of the Priestly narrative, when placed together, read:—

"So Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east, and pitched his tent toward Sodom."

The foregoing is given as a sample of how Bible "history" was written. Considerable ingenuity, it will be seen, is displayed by the Hebrew compiler in piecing the two accounts together. He could not, of course, prevent two statements of events or incidents from continually appearing in his compilation; but devout Bible readers never think of noticing such matters, more especially as repetition is one of the characteristics of Hebrew poetry. The Priestly narrative is short and precise, and is stated with lawyer-like circumlocution; the Yahvist supplies fresh incidents and interesting details.

The last-named writer tells us in the first portion of his narrative that Haran died before his father Terah; that Nahor, his brother, took Haran's daughter Milcah to wife; and that Sarai, Abram's wife, was barren—matters with which the more dignified Priestly writer did not concern himself.

In the second portion of his narrative the Yahvist tells us that the god Yahveh had called Abram, commanding him to leave his country and kindred and go into the land of Canaan; promising at the same time to make of him a great nation, and that in him should "all the families of the earth be blessed." The Priestly writer knew nothing of this divine call; he represents Terah as leaving Ur of the Chaldees of his own accord, without any such call, taking all his relatives and servants with him. The reputed descendants of Abram had, of course, become a nation in the Yahvist writer's time—which accounts for the story of Yahveh's promises to Abram.

In the fourth portion of his narrative, following after a story concerning strife between the herdmen of Abram and Lot, this romancing writer represents "the Lord" as giving fresh promises to the founder of the Jewish nation after that patriarch had entered Canaan. The Lord on this occasion is reported as saying to Abram:—

"For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered."

It was, no doubt, very good of "the Lord" to promise to give to Abram the land then in possession of the Canaanites and Hittites, and also to give it to his posterity "for ever"; but, unfortunately for that patriarch and his descendants, neither promise was fulfilled. During the whole of his life Abram never possessed more than one field, and that he acquired by purchase from "Ephron the Hittite" (Gen. xxiii.). Moreover, as the result of their war with the Romans (A.D. 70) the Jews had wrested from them the land

which their god had promised them should be an eternal possession, and to this day have had no country they can call their own. In this case, the Yahvist writer omitted to follow the maxim "Never prophesy unless you know." When he predicted that "the seed of Abram" should become a nation and possess the land of Canaan, he was on firm ground, for both events had been realised: but when he hazarded a prophecy respecting events which were to occur many centuries after his time, his inspiration failed him. He had no foreknowledge of the great empire which should arise to mar his patriotic prediction. And this is the case as regards all the Bible "prophecies": unless written after the events predicted, they are falsified by the course of history.

There now remains to be noticed but the third Yahvist narrative, which, like the other three, appears to have been unknown to the Priestly writer. There was a famine, the writer says, in the land of Canaan, and as there was always corn in Egypt, Abram went down to that country "to sojourn there." On the way the worthy patriarch said to Sarai his wife: "Behold now I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon; and it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife; and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, that thou art my sister, that it may be well with me." To the latter request the loving wife agreed. When the two were come into Egypt "the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was fair," and some of the princes who had seen her "commended her before Pharaoh," with the result that "the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house." Sarai's pious "brother" let her go, well knowing the purpose for which she was intended. Pharaoh, it would seem, was well satisfied with the last addition to his harem; for he "entreated Abram well for her sake," and made presents to the supposed brother of "sheep and oxen, and he-asses, and menservants, and she-asses, and camels." Thus was Abram comforted.

How long these interesting relations lasted is not stated; but Abram would probably have lost his beloved Sarai altogether, had not Yahveh come to the rescue. That god, it is said, "plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife." What was the nature of these plagues is not stated, nor are we told how Pharaoh knew that they were sent on account of his new wife: but these are mere details. It goes without saying that neither Abram nor Sarai gave that king the slightest hint that the latter was a married woman. However, when Pharaoh discovered the relationship, he "called Abram and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? Why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister, so that I took her to be my wife?" (Revised Version).

In the Septuagint the words italicised read: "and I took her for a wife to myself." There can thus be no doubt as to the meaning. Yet, in the Authorised Version, this sentence is rendered: "so I might have taken her to me to wife"—which is not quite the same thing. However, all is well that ends well: the king restored to Abram his wife, and the two left Egypt together—richer in slaves and cattle than when they entered it.

But to properly appreciate this highly moral Bible story, we must look for a moment at the complaisant wife's age. Abram, on first coming into the land of Canaan, was 75 years old; consequently, Sarai at this time was 65 years of age (Gen. xvii. 17). On the going down into Egypt, Abram's wife would be between 65 and 70 years of age, and, in a climate where women reach maturity at an early age and are prematurely old at forty, her personal appearance could have been nothing but that of an old scarecrow—a regular "Aunt Sally." Yet it was this doddering old Biddy, we are told, that set all the young men who beheld her raving about her beauty: and it was this decrepit old Granny that charmed the heart of a king, and made him forget all the young and comely inmates of his harem.

The story is really too ridiculous for serious consideration.

With regard to the statement that Abram came into Canaan from Ur of the Chaldees, it may be remarked that there really was a place in Babylonia called "Ur," and that the name "Abram" was a common one in that country. Further than this, nothing is known of the Abram legends.

ABRACADABRA.

(To be continued.)

Acid Drops.

Ex-Rev. Dr. Lunn (or is he still "Rev.?"?) started his political campaign at Boston with a lot of pious nonsense about "atheist" millionaires, whom he seems to think very numerous—though it has never been our luck to come across one of them. Dr. Lunn told his first meeting of Boston electors that he once attended a dinner of the Clover Club of Philadelphia, whose motto was:—

"Whilst we live we live in clover;
When we die we die all over."

This "cursed motto," Dr. Lunn said, was "the atheism of individualism." We do not understand this expression, and we do not suppose that Dr. Lunn does; but he evidently wanted to say something nasty about "atheism." As for the "cursed motto," we beg to remind Dr. Lunn that it would suit most rich people in Christian countries like England and America. They don't really believe in a future life; they merely keep up the pretence of it to bamboozle the rest of the population; and they do live in clover as far as possible. So, we believe, does Dr. Lunn. He can reply to this, if he pleases, by telling us the amount of his annual income, and the total of his investments.

The Churches in the United States try as hard as they do here to get the control of public education. We have been favored with a copy of the *Los Angeles Times*, California, containing the report of a sermon by the Rev. Charles Edward Locke, pastor of the First Methodist Episcopal Church. This gentleman groans over the exclusion of the Bible from the State schools, and argues for its introduction. He contends that the most important part of education is training in character, and that an "influence that is indispensable to make true character and pure culture a product of the public schools is that the Bible should be revered and read." The reverend gentleman does not attempt to prove this. He thinks it sufficient to recite a list of more or less eminent Christians who have said the same thing. No doubt he feels that such a line of advocacy is the best for the audience he is addressing. But he would have to adopt a very different attitude in general open debate. Even as it is, he does not venture to propose indiscriminate reading of the Bible. He proposes the reading of "suitable passages"—which is virtually an admission that other passages are unsuitable. They are so unsuitable, indeed, that the teacher who read them out to boys or girls in school would be dismissed and probably imprisoned.

Mr. Locke talks just like our Dr. Clifford about a knowledge of the Bible being essential to the study of English literature—as though the Holy Ghost wrote it in Hebrew and Greek for that very purpose. He maintains that without knowledge of the Bible it is "impossible to understand clearly the glories of Shakespeare, Milton, and Tennyson." The only answer to this is to call it nonsense. We may add that Mr. Locke's own composition is about the poorest we ever encountered. He hasn't even read the Bible to any "literary" purpose.

We see by the *Los Angeles* paper that Mr. Locke and his brother ministers are meeting and agitating and "raising hell" over this question. They want the Bible in the schools badly, and they won't be happy till they get it. Of course, they have the usual ecclesiastical eye to business. Besides, every profession likes to see an indefinite time of prosperity ahead of it. To feel that the business will last their lifetime is not enough. Behind the sure present lurks the future insecurity. In the same way, a ninety-nine years' lease is good enough for all practical purposes, but most people prefer a freehold.

From a notice in the *Christian Commonwealth* we see that the editor of the *Occult Review* thinks that Mr. R. J. Campbell has failed to serve any useful purpose in giving new and more agreeable meanings to old doctrines. Natur-

ally, the C. C. objects to this view, but we agree with the editor of the *Occult Review*. Probably the worst enemies to real progress are those who, instead of rejecting beliefs when they are shown to be baseless, proceed to give them a gloss that will make them palatable. With such people the question is never, What do these beliefs or teachings really mean? but always, What can we make them mean? And, of course, it is fairly easy to make an ancient myth mean anything if one sets seriously to work. The evil of it is, that certain beliefs being made less obviously repulsive, their abolition is prevented, and all the essential evils remain untouched. The social consequences of such beliefs is lost. Those who might become vigorous antagonists to obsolete beliefs are converted into either passive spectators or friends. In the war with superstition there is no such thing as standing on one side. He who does not attack is helping, if in no other way than that of saving it from the assault of a possible enemy.

Rev. N. W. Johnson is in favor of mixing the sexes in church and Sunday-school. He says that he has known cases where "the sound of a lady's voice has thrilled a man through and through more than 10,000 choirs." Much depends upon the age and attractiveness of the singer, but we are nevertheless inclined to agree with Mr. Johnson.

Dr. Cook has just received a striking testimony as to the truth of his discovery of the North Pole. A whole church congregation, headed by its minister, has passed a resolution expressing its conviction that Dr. Cook's story is true. The church in question is situated in Brooklyn, and the explorer is a member thereof. Probably this will settle the question; although unkind critics may suggest that the minister and his followers are not blind to the advertising value of the resolution. We shall expect to see Dr. Cook's exploit used as proof of the truth of the doctrines taught in that particular church, and we have no doubt this proof will be as convincing as any other that may be used.

The North Pole will never be discovered. So says Rabbi Glazer to a *Montreal Daily Witness* reporter. He bases his dictum on the Talmud. That settles it. Cook and Peary, outside!

Rabbi Glazer assures us that there is nothing at the Pole but an immense void—whatever that is. He informs us that within 250 miles of the Pole the noise of the planets and of the earth's axis would be overwhelming. No human being could survive it. Rabbi Glazer's skull should be of great interest in a phrenological museum.

We are a great people and deeply interested in the Eastern peoples under our rule, and those with whom we have commercial and other relations. So our leading politicians assure us. Yet on the teaching of Oriental languages our Government spends but £1,300 a year, while Germany, with far less responsibilities towards Eastern races, can afford to spend an annual sum of £10,000. A committee that has just gone thoroughly into the matter reports that to carry out this work properly a sum of £12,000 annually should be spent. Whereupon our legislative lords announce that they are prepared to find a quarter of the sum required, but no more. Had it been a question of finding a few additional millions for Dreadnought's we have no doubt the money would have been forthcoming. It is when money is required for intellectual purposes or for scientific research that the purse-strings of this most pious nation are drawn tight. A wider outlook might convince them that even from a financial point of view money spent in forwarding intellectual efficiency is far from being an unprofitable expenditure.

Rev. J. E. Rattenbury says that he views with all respect the religion of the Christian Scientists, but their philosophy is "a farrago of nonsense." We agree with him; but we beg to point out that in their case the philosophy is an outcome of the religion, and from nonsense, nonsense results. Mr. Rattenbury agrees with one piece of nonsense and treats the other with scorn. This is the worst of the religious specialist. He has no toleration or sympathy for any non-sense but his own. He also objects to Christian Scientists refusing to read books against their belief because such reading creates doubt and, therefore, disease. But this is only the policy of Mr. Rattenbury and his kind. They, too, object to people reading books against Christianity because such reading creates doubt and unrest. And no one but Mr. Rattenbury can detect any real difference in the two cases.

Professor I. H. Weston, of Portland, Oregon, U.S.A., is reported by the newspapers to have fixed the date of the

crucifixion of Jesus Christ at 12 noon on April 18, A.D. 29. There seems to us a mistake here. The real date must surely be April 1. We read that Professor Weston's calculation is "based upon the position of the sun and the moon." Especially the moon, we should say.

Should the Bible be published in modern English? is the question asked in a religious weekly. Well, for our part, we wish it were. Those who wished to read it in the old version might still do so; but for the mass of the people a deal of its mystery and its glamor would be gone. As it is, people read the Biblical stories in a style of language that is no longer in use, and it has the same effect upon them that the hearing of Latin has upon an ignorant Catholic peasantry. Much of the objection raised to popular Freethought propaganda is really due to the fact that the Freethought speaker does retell religious belief in the vernacular. People are then able to realise the full value of the Biblical stories, and because they are seen in their true light the unthinking and the interested raise the cry of vulgarity. As the case stands, the reading or repeating of intrinsically ridiculous stories in a solemn manner, in a special place and in an archaic language, really prevents the mass of the people realising what they actually mean. If Jack and the Beanstalk were read in the same manner and amid similar surroundings, much the same effect would be produced as is now evoked by the Bible. It is a perception of the truth of this that has caused every attempt to translate the Bible into the vernacular to be greeted with the charge of vulgarising the Scriptures. By all means let us have the Bible in the language spoken by the people—that is, if we wish them to understand it.

The Rev. J. Ossian Davies, dealing with "Harvest Joy" in the *British Congregationalist* for September 23, offers the silliest and most preposterous explanation imaginable of this year's scanty crops. "Has not God the right," he ponderously asks, "to act in his own way with his own property? The fields are his, not ours." Fancy a man talking in that insane fashion at this time of day! Then he adds, "If by permitting a few cornfields and hayfields to spoil the Lord is disciplining his moral creatures, and opening their eyes to see that the royal sceptre is in his own right hand, then what right have we to complain?" We thought that ancient and stupid superstition was dead and buried. We were evidently mistaken. We are absolutely sure of one thing, namely, that its revival now will only serve to hasten the death and burial of belief in any and every kind of Diety.

"J. B.," of the *Christian World*, says that "labor, backed at all points by Nature's sanctions, has, through Christianity, become a religion." Is that the reason why labor, like religion, while being ideally praised, is yet looked down upon and despised? Is that the reason why it is always excluded from fashionable drawing-rooms? The truth is that Christianity has always derided the claims of labor, and is only taking them up now to save its own skin.

The attitude of orthodox Christianity to labor is correctly represented in an address by Father Power on the "Blasphemies of Socialists." One of the worst of those blasphemies is "their extravagant glorification of Labor." No, labor is not ennobled by Christ.

We do not discuss politics in this paper, but the right of peaceful and orderly public meeting is not politics. It concerns all political parties alike—as well as parties that are not political and never intend to be. There cannot be any possible reason for disturbing one *bonâ fide* public meeting which is not equally valid for every other public meeting. We have, therefore, from the very beginning, denounced the "Suffragette" rowdyism at public meetings which they choose to consider fair game for their anarchical enterprise. It is no good talking about their "reasons." Sensible people are too busy to listen to "reasons" against the obvious. The right of public meeting is axiomatic in English politics. If Mrs. Pankhurst likes to assassinate Mr. Asquith, or Mr. Asquith likes to anticipate Mrs. Pankhurst, is a side issue about which we (as Freethinkers) are indifferent. But rowdyism at public meetings is quite another matter. Persisted in, and extended, it destroys the fundamental condition of rational progress; which, we beg to observe, is vastly more important than female suffrage or male suffrage either. And if the ladies do not know this, and will not learn it, they simply show a want of imagination and originality; or, to put it still more plainly, that they are absolutely wedded to the ancient policy of "carrying on" to get what they want. We venture to suggest to them that they are mistaken as to the efficacy of this method when carried over from private to public life.

A self-willed, unscrupulous, hysterical woman may terrorise a man who has to live with her, but she cannot play that game on men who are under no such obligation.

Mr. Frederick Jones Bliss, in the *October Century*, contributes some personal recollections of George Meredith, whom he first met in 1893. Meredith at that time had a "man" who, on hearing of an interview with the poet by the Liberal leader, said, "How proud Mr. Gladstone must have been to meet the master." Most people, perhaps, will regard this as a good joke; but the "man" was essentially right. Meredith was intrinsically a greater man than Gladstone.

A street poet rejoicing in the "nom de plume," as he called it, of "Ernest Altruist," was fined five shillings at the South-Western Police Court, London, for being drunk and disorderly. He supposed he was singing, but the policeman's evidence was that he was making a "horrible noise." Before he left the dock the street poet started reciting one of "his own compositions," which we recognise as the work of an American poet long since dead. "Dollars and dimes" was rather popular forty years ago. It seems to us that "Ernest Altruist" has mistaken his vocation. He should join a Christian Evidence Society. In time he might become a Waldron or a Torrey.

Some judges have a curious, but not perhaps unnatural, belief in the refining influences of imprisonment. Addressing a prisoner whom he was about to sentence, the Recorder at Folkestone Quarter Sessions said, "You have had every chance. Three times you have been sentenced to penal servitude and you have been twice put under police supervision." We are not concerned with the merits of this particular case, we only desire to notice the Recorder's notion of what constitutes "every chance" of improvement. Three terms of penal servitude are presumed to have such a moralising and elevating effect, that the judge is astonished at the recipient of such benefactions coming before him for further treatment. The non-legal might conclude from this, not that the subject of the treatment was unappreciative of the attention given him, but that there was something amiss with the treatment meted out. At any rate, we commend this view of the case to Mr. Lewis Coward, K.C. It may be—to use a rather loose expression—a person's own fault the *first* time he is imprisoned. But it is the fault of the whole society that he should be dealt with time after time like an out-patient at a hospital.

John Odds, a shepherd employed on Lord Darnley's estate near Strood, Kent, committed suicide because he had told a falsehood. He left a letter calling upon God to forgive him and take care of his wife. The coroner remarked that if every liar committed suicide he (the coroner) would be kept very busy. Of course he would. This is a Christian country.

Bishop Diggle has been holding forth at Carlisle against indecent books and plays. Has he forgotten the dramatic stories of Tamar and Judith and Lot and his daughters? But the report may have omitted to state that he included "sacred" indecency in his denunciation.

The Methodists have been having a big Centenary gathering at Blackburn. Of course, they were bound to have a fling at the Church of England—for the household of faith is still in a wonderful harmony. Rev. J. Watkyn, who delivered an "eloquent address," referred to a certain assembly presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and declared that the questions it discussed "should have been dismissed with ten minutes' conversation." Some of us could say the same of questions discussed at Methodist assemblies.

Christian Endeavorers have also been foregathering at Blackburn. One of the speakers, the Rev. J. Tolefree Parr, naively declared that he "had come to the conclusion that the only hope of England was the Christian Church." It would have been wonderful if he had come to any other conclusion. Isn't he in the business?

These religious bodies had their palavers and Blackburn stands where it did, with its thousands of houses officially declared to be really unfit for human habitation and its thousands of people on the verge of starvation through unemployment. Such is Christian civilisation.

We are glad to see the Trade Union leaders being forced into protesting against Salvation Army "sweating." They

have taken a long time to "find salvation" on this question, but better late than never. The Glasgow Trades Council has actually held a demonstration at Glasgow Green, with Mr. John Burgess, President of the Trades Council, presiding, and Mr. James Macpherson, chairman of the United Workers' Anti-Sweating Committee, the chief speaker. We take the following report from a local newspaper:—

"The Chairman emphasised the fact that the demonstration was not an anti-religious demonstration, but a demonstration against the sweating that was going on in connection with the Salvation Army. He and other members appointed by the Trades Council had made investigations in Glasgow among firms engaged in the waste paper industry, and had ascertained from three firms that as a consequence of the Salvation Army engaging in this industry, and being in the peculiar position of getting their material free, they were able to undersell these firms in the market. He and his fellow-members had also gone to the Salvation Army premises to make inquiries, and had seen the officer in charge, but they had never got to know the wages and conditions of work of the men engaged by the Army in the industry. Mr. Macpherson said they as an anti-sweating committee had nothing whatever to do with the religious side of the Salvation Army movement, but they were fiercely and determinedly opposed to sweating by any body, especially when it was done under the cloak of religion and philanthropy. Mr. Macpherson dealt at length with the conditions under which men are employed at the Salvation Army 'Elevator' in Hanbury-street, London, which, he said, was an up-to-date carpenter's shop. He compared various rates paid at Hanbury-street with Trades Union prices, and went on to say that there were men employed in the paper sorting works in London who did not get anything except lodging and food."

We note that the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress has passed a resolution recommending that General Booth should only produce things at the Hanbury-street Elevator for the use of the Salvation Army. That would stop the underselling, but would leave the sweating where it is; and the sweating is the worst part of the grievance. The Parliamentary Committee has shown a regrettable want of courage in this matter. It seems to be half paralysed by the sacred word "religion."

The newest improved battleship of the "Dreadnought" type, the *Neptune*, was launched at Portsmouth on the last day in September. The Duchess of Albany performed the christening with a bottle of Colonial wine. This was "after a brief religious ceremony." Religion and war always went well together. Every battleship that floats has been "dedicated," as it were, by a man of God. This sort of thing is a part of his trade. And as German battleships are similarly "dedicated" by other men of God it will be a pretty problem for the Almighty when the war breaks out which the Jingoese are always trying to hasten.

Rev. F. B. Meyer is "strongly impressed by the tendency towards Christian unity"—in China. We thought he would have to go a long way to find that sort of thing. Perhaps the tendency towards unity in China is due to a common danger. Mr. Meyer says that "the missionaries talk quite openly of the time when they will be banished from China." China is waking up.

A political correspondent of the *Daily News* "thanks God sincerely for raising up such men as Lloyd George." Other people are thanking God no less sincerely for raising up men like Arthur J. Balfour. Poor old God! What a time he has between them!

The godly "unco' guid" at Edinburgh are up in arms against Mr. George Alexander, the famous actor, for "christening," as they say, three baby lions at the Marine Gardens. It increases his offence that he used champagne instead of water. Shade of John Knox, what a waste!

South Wales has tasted the sweetness of "Providence." Terrible floods have been experienced, and several lives lost. Many "believers" thought it was a second Deluge, and looked round for the Ark.

"Providence" still troubles Messina. There have been several earthquakes there since the terrible one two or three years ago. The latest one tumbled down an old factory. One workman was dug out a shapeless corpse, and others were seriously injured. "He doeth all things well."

Halley's comet is coming along again. It frightened the Christian world into fits in the fifteenth century. Church bells were rung like mad to scare it away. And it went! Church bells won't be rung now. But it will go all the same.

Pope, in the most charming of his poems, spoke of a gold cross on the bosom of a beautiful woman "which Jews might kiss and infidels adore." Evidently the Jews don't mind patronising crosses in less attractive positions. They have done a good business in crosses and ikons in the Alexandrovsky Market, St. Petersburg; but the police, at the instance of the Procurator of the Holy Synod, are putting an end to this "unholy" traffic,—which is henceforth to be carried on by Christians. Jews are not to sell crosses and ikons any more. If they do, they will be prosecuted; what is worse, their property will be confiscated. The good Christians know how to make persecution profitable.

Rev. Dr. Clifford is a rare joke as a Passive Resister. He made his periodical appearance lately before the Paddington magistrates, who made "the usual order." The grand old joker asked the bench to send him to prison instead of dis-training on Mrs. Clifford's goods. Knowing how they became Mrs. Clifford's goods, the bench smiled at the old gentleman's solemn jocularity.

"Men Only" is a disreputable way of catching an audience by Christian exhorters. What right has a preacher to talk in public what women may not listen to? Rev. J. E. Watts-Ditchfield, of St. James's-the-Less goes one better (or worse) still. He has "Men Only" at the top and "It is especially for Men Only" at the bottom. And his subject, printed in bold letters three times across the bill, is "The Man Up a Tree." That is where the reverend gentleman ought to be.

The late Mr. Charles Morgan, of Laurel Lodge, Winchmore-hill, London, N., left estate valued at £154,852, and provided in his will against either of his three daughters marrying "a minister of any religious denomination." Had he "had some"?

A religious maniac ran amok at Bulwell. His name was Samuel Parr; he had studied the Bible attentively and could rattle off texts by the yard. At last the spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he acted accordingly. Being chased by the police and the crowd, he displayed prophetic agility, and parted with all his clothes in slipping through their clutches. Finally, when they got him into the police-station, in the costume of David before the ark, he fixed his inspired gaze upon the inspector and solemnly told him: "The Lord hath sent me to set this place on fire." As this holy performance was objected to, the pious madman started a fresh innings, and it took the constables all their time to get him off to the Bagthorpe Workhouse imbecile ward. Let us hope the spirit of the Lord has done with him now.

Sidney Bunyan, the young man who cut his sweetheart's throat "by agreement," has been reprieved. He appears to be a pious person. His letter to his mother from the condemned cell is full of religious expressions. His favorite hymn was "Safe in the Arms of Jesus." He put his "whole trust in the One Above" and begged his brother and sister to do the same. We hope the One Above appreciates the compliment.

Human beings call animals "dumb," and regard them as belonging to a "lower order." What right have they to do either? Animals have as much right to term human beings dumb and stupid because they fail to understand or speak their expressive language, while they (the "lower animals") are so quick to comprehend and respond to the sounds and signals made by their much-vaunted "superiors." In what way is a human being more wonderfully organised or constituted than an ant or a bee, considering that these tiny creatures possess all the organs and the necessary intelligence to successfully pursue their avocations and carry on the business of living, only in so much smaller a compass? Why should we presumptuously conclude that any living organism is "dumb" merely because we are unable to hear or understand their methods of communication? As well might we term French and German people "dumb" when we cannot comprehend or engage in conversation with them. The complicated and methodical manœuvres of animals and insects used in carrying out their plan of existence are surely quite as wonderful and interesting as the systems pursued by mankind with similar intentions, and more generally satisfied and interfered with by the race which is credited with such greatly superior forces of intellect and ingenuity.—
Libertas.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, October 10, Secular Hall, Humberston Gate, Leicester: at 6.30, "The Religion of Shakespeare."

October 17, 24, and 31, St. James's Hall, London.

November 7, Manchester; 14, Liverpool; 28, Birmingham.

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—October 17, Glasgow; 24, Victoria Park; 31, Birmingham. December 5, Liverpool.
- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—October 10, St. James's Hall; 17, Liverpool; 24, Glasgow. December 19, Leicester.
- THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £243 12s. Received since.—H. E., £1 1s.; Leicester Friends, per E. Pinder, £1 7s. 6d.; B. A. Millichamp, 2s. 6d.; J. D., £5; Mrs. Turnbull, 10s.; J. A. T., 5s.; Henry Spence, £1 1s.
- BOULTER FUND.—We have received:—E. Calvert, 1s.; G. McCluskey, 2s. 6d.
- E. PINDER.—Change of address noted. Shall be very glad to see you and the other Leicester friends on October 10. We hope you will succeed in working up that "crowd" for our lecture.
- T. DENNING.—Never lose temper in argument; it leads to giving your case away. We do not "deny" a future life—any more than we deny a previous life. We know nothing about either. And we may add that the one seems as reasonable as the other.
- M. GORNLEY.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.
- ELIZABETH LECHMERE.—The explanation is that nature endows every species with the instinct of self-preservation—including priests.
- B. A. MILLICHAMP.—Pleased to hear that your children, withdrawn from religious instruction, are allowed to attend school at 9.45, which is, as you say, much better than being stuck in a room by themselves for three-quarters of an hour. You rightly ask—"If this can be done at Wednesfield, why not elsewhere?" We echo the "why?"
- W. J. LEWIS, referring to Mr. Cohen's recent articles, asks—"If there is no spirit in man, why does man die?" We give it up.
- A. W.—Always glad to receive useful cuttings. Hope you enjoyed your visit to Glasgow on Sunday.
- JAMES NEATE.—See paragraph.
- EAST LONDON.—We received a notice of the Ferrer meeting at South Place Institute late on the previous Tuesday—*too* late for insertion. The co-operation of the N. S. S. was not invited.
- G. ROLEFFS.—Thanks for cuttings.
- R. H. ROSETTI.—All we have room for.
- M. E. PEGG.—Glad to hear Mr. Lloyd had such highly appreciative audiences at Manchester.
- W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always welcome.
- WILLIAM OWEN.—Glad to know that what your official duties permitted you to hear of our Sunday night's lecture gave you "a sweeter and deeper interest in the Master's work." Thanks for all the trouble you took over the Ferrer resolution.
- T. DOBSON.—We fear it would be a waste of time, and we are very busy. But thanks for suggestion.
- W. P. ADAMSON.—More people read the *Freethinker* than you imagine. We congratulate you on the correspondence you started in the local paper.
- B. G. BROWN.—We are constantly saying that Tuesday is too late for paragraphs. We shall have to stop straining points for the "too late."
- WALTER LLOYD.—(1) Your example shows that our circulation might be doubled if our friends would bestir themselves in the matter. (2) All persons have a right to affirm under the Oaths Act (Bradlaugh's) on the ground either that they have no religious belief or that the taking of an oath is contrary to their religious belief.
- A lot of correspondence, etc., stands over till next week, owing to Mr. Foote's long journey to Glasgow and back.
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Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote opens the lecture season at the Leicester Secular Hall to-day (Oct. 10). His subject will be "The Religion of Shakespeare." On the following Sunday he returns to St. James's Hall, London, to deliver the first of three more lectures there, the subjects of which will be advertised in our next issue.

Mr. Foote's morning audience at Glasgow on Sunday was a fine one, and in the evening the hall was packed in all parts, every inch of standing room being occupied. Many "saints" came in from South-East Scotland generally, a few from Edinburgh, and at least one from Dundee. Both audiences were very appreciative and enthusiastic. It was pleasant to see Mr. G. Scott again at the meetings. He took the chair in the morning—and Mr. Turnbull in the evening. Mr. Baxter reported a good sale of literature, and nearly £2 was collected for the District Propaganda Fund, which bears the cost of lectures in surrounding places under the auspices of the Glasgow Branch.

The crowded evening meeting passed the following resolution unanimously:—

"That this meeting, in the name of international fraternity, calls upon the Spanish Government to secure to Professor Ferrer the opportunity of defending himself against all charges before a properly constituted civil tribunal, and thus to prevent a possible tragedy which will revolt the conscience of the civilised world."

We were glad to see this resolution appearing in a conspicuous place in Monday morning's *Glasgow Herald*.

Mr. F. J. Gould pays the Glasgow Branch his first visit to-day (Oct. 10). We hope the local "saints" will see that he has good meetings and an encouraging welcome.

Mr. Cohen delivered an excellent and much appreciated lecture at St. James's Hall on Sunday evening, Mr. F. A. Davies being in the chair. A lady auditor asked a question, but there was no discussion. Presumably the meeting was satisfied with Mr. Cohen's able presentation of "The Origin and Decay of God."

Mr. John T. Lloyd occupies the St. James's Hall platform this evening. His subject is an interesting one, and he is quite competent to treat it; we therefore hope to hear of his having a good audience. Freethinkers have very few opportunities of hearing Mr. Lloyd in London; they should avail themselves of this one. Those who have not heard him before may take it from us that they will find him a man of information, ability, and eloquence; the very three things requisite to a first-class lecturer.

The secretary of the Bethnal Green Branch asks us to announce that Miss Kough is going to lecture from the Branch platform in Victoria Park this afternoon (Oct. 10) on "Some Bible Heroines." He says that this is the first time for many years that the Branch platform has been honored by a lady lecturer, and begs the favor of an announcement in our columns. We grant it cheerfully, and add the hope that the local "saints" will give Miss Kough a big audience and a hearty welcome. She has been lecturing for London Branches with great "acceptance" during the summer.

The West Ham Branch starts Sunday evening lectures to-day (Oct. 10) at the Public (Minor) Hall, Barking-road, Canning Town, with Mr. Saphin as lecturer. Local "saints" please note.

A public debate on "Belief in God" takes place at the Shepherds' Hall, Bristol, on October 12 and 13, between Mr. B. G. Brown, of the N. S. S. Branch, and Mr. A. Holdsworth. Chair at 7.30 each evening.

Louisa Harding, of Los Angeles, California, whose letter we print in another part of this week's *Freethinker*, is a well-known American Liberal (the name for Freethinker over there) and an able writer. We are very glad to know that the work of the *Freethinker*, which she has only known for a few months, has already given her much pleasure.

We believe the *Freethinker* might get a fair number of subscribers in America (it has a good few already) if the Liberals (Freethinkers) over there only knew of it, and we are taking steps to have it brought to their attention.

Bible Stories Retold.

THE STORY OF MICAH (JUDGES XVII.-XVIII.).

ONCE upon a time there dwelt in a certain Eastern land a number of semi-civilised clans, or tribes. As they all acknowledged a common ancestor, an Arab Sheikh named Abraham, there existed among them a kind of family or social unity. The two things that are writ large in the history of these clans are, religion and war, or, more properly, superstition and barbaric cruelty. But it was a case of like god, like people; as the tribal deity they acknowledged has been fitly described as a bloodthirsty monster. But he was the god their forefathers had worshiped when in their nomadic state they roamed the desert, and it is possible their attachment to him was more a matter of hereditary necessity than of religious affection. At all events, it is something to their credit that they were forever forsaking him for the gods of their conquered foes. The following story is illustrative of the stage they had reached in their social evolution.

The man Micah, with whom it deals, belonged to a tribe called Ephraimites, who lived in the highlands of the district that this particular clan inhabited. The first virtuous action of Micah which the story records is the abstraction from his mother's safe of eleven hundred pieces of silver. Tradition has it that he began his career as a financier by appropriating small sums obtained for the sale of gooseberries out of his mother's garden. But his operations had all along been conducted with such stealth that his mother never once suspected her own son of surreptitiously breaking the household bank. And in the absence of any evidence as to the perpetrator of such a cowardly theft, suspicion rested upon the little maid-of-all-work; but on overhauling her box there was no trace of the missing wealth to be found. The only thing in the nature of a discovery which the examination afforded was a number of *Hornet's Penny Stories*, with which the maid was wont in secret to feed her romantic longings. Micah's mother had all her lifetime been careful to the point of meanness, and these eleven hundred pieces of silver had been got together by dint of hard scraping (see Henry and Scott's Commentary). Their loss was therefore a serious blow, and, in accordance with the customs and beliefs of the times, she uttered a fearful curse against the thief who had robbed her of her wealth. This, of course, was before the days of Scotland Yard and Sherlock Holmes, and the recovery of the money was almost a forlorn hope; or so it would appear to the modern reader,—the more so, because although this story is related in the Book of *Judges*, at that period of Israel's history there were no Judges in the land; every man doing that which was right in his own eyes. This absence of judicial ministration at a period which is distinguished as "the time of the judges" is as disconcerting as the peculiar chronology of the story. For although this is related in the last chapters of the Book of *Judges*, "we are all agreed," says a commentator, "that the incidents properly belong to the beginning of the book, or to a period somewhat earlier." The legal machinery of the period, however, was none the less effective because it does not accord with our notions of jurisdiction. It was of a very primitive kind, and might be summed up in the word "curse." It was quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. And no sooner did Micah hear of his mother's curse against the thief than he experienced a cold, clammy shiver down the spine of his back. He went to bed that night early, but it was not to sleep; it was to wrestle with the powers of superstitious fear. His mother and her curse conquered at last, and he resolved to make a clean breast of it, and thereafter quit thieving for ever. So meeting his mother on the stairs as she came down to breakfast in the morning, in all the agony of guilty confession he cried, "Mother, I took It."

The old lady was so overjoyed to find that the silver was intact and still in the family, that in the impulse of the moment she determined to make her son a present of the lot. This is the one and only instance in the history of their race where a member of it ever succumbed to such a reckless impulse, and is one of those psychological freaks which cannot be accounted for on the grounds either of heredity or environment. In the first flush of her joy she exclaimed, "I dedicate the whole of this silver unto the Lord for my son, for a graven image and a molten image." The "chapel-building" craze was not then in vogue—it was the days of the graven image—so she requisitioned the services of the founder instead of the builder. Her ardor, however, when it came to parting with the cash, seems to have cooled somewhat, as, instead of sending the whole of the eleven hundred pieces of silver to the smith's, she only sent *two hundred*. This act seems to resemble the sin of "lying to the Holy Ghost"; but as the feet of the young men who carried out Ananias and Sapphira were not waiting at the door to carry out Micah's mother also, it is evident that the mysterious Ghost was not in those days the powerful phantom that he afterwards became in the imagination of the humble Galilean fishermen. In due time the two images arrived from the smith's, and were installed upon suitable pedestals in the best parlor. The narrative says "It" was in the house of Micah; and the grammatical feat of converting two images into an "It" is only equalled in dexterity by the theological sleight-of-hand which transforms three persons into one godhead. However, the occasion was justly celebrated by a banquet, and the quantities of Passover cake and "Skipper" sardines that were consumed by the guests reflected great credit on their powers of gastric assimilation.

Besides these two images, Micah further gratified his religious aspirations by making an ephod—which, being translated, means a fancy waistcoat—and some teraphim. These teraphim were little household deities, suitable for adorning the mantel-shelf, and were sometimes consulted as oracles. That is to say, they resembled the dummies of the ventriloquist and answered questions according to the voice of the operator. The fitness of things, therefore, required that an oracle-worker—some official operator—be appointed; and heedless of episcopal sanction, Micah himself consecrated one of his own sons to act as his priest. And for awhile all went well in this ecclesiastical establishment, until Micah's religious ambition changed the current of events.

It may be taken for granted that the son whom Micah selected to act as his priest was the same brainless member of the family which it has become customary in these modern days to set apart for the Church. He, however, lacked the qualification of being of the tribe of Levi, from which alone it was strictly lawful to appoint a priest. And when the opportunity offered of securing a genuine Levitical priest, family considerations with Micah were set aside in the interests of Aaronical claims.

It happened on a fine summer's day in the month of June that a travel-stained young man knocked at the door and begged for a drop of water to cool his parched tongue. Visitors to that lonely district were very rare, so Micah asked him in to rest awhile. And after washing the stranger's feet and wiping them with the hairs of his beard, they fell into conversation. It transpired that the young man belonged to the tribe of Levi, and that he had tramped all the way from Bethlehem-Judah in search of a place.

The business instinct of Micah coming to the fore, he thought he saw in this young Levite a judicious speculation. So he said, "Dwell with me and be my priest": to which the young Levite only too gladly consented. He was to receive ten pieces of silver by the year, but Micah comforted himself for this outlay by the reflection that "now the gods will be good to me seeing that I have a Levite to be my priest." The ministrations of his son had not been fruitful of divine blessings, but to prevent any friction in the household at this new arrangement, he

paid his son's passage out to New Zealand, where, so history records, he was more successful as a sheep-farmer than he had been in the old country as a priest. But graven images and teraphim and a Levitical priest combined were not sufficient to procure Micah immunity from trouble, much less bring positive blessings to his abode. And one of those little incidents that were characteristic of the times resulted in his losing both gods and priest.

One of the tribes which had retained the nomadic habits of their ancestors longer than the rest finally decided to settle down and endeavor to become civilised. Their trouble was to find an inheritance; and, as was the custom in those days, they sent out spies to discover the weak points of a country inhabited by some peaceable people in the north land. And in their journey these fine spies came to the hill-country of Ephraim, and to the house of Micah. And while they were partaking of Micah's hospitality they made a little discovery—they recognised the voice of the young priest. They also remembered the "little affair" that had caused him to forget to say Farewell to his friends on leaving Bethlehem-Judah. But they wisely held their peace until a more convenient season. They had not long to wait. Micah, towards evening, had gone out to superintend the milking of the cows, and they found the young Levite sitting upon the back-garden wall playing a sentimental air upon the national harp. "Well, Jonathan, my boy," said the chief spy, "and how doth the air of this God-forsaken hill-country of Ephraim agree with thy constitution?" It was no use for Jonathan to parley, so with a twinkle in his eye (priests are but human at bottom) he said, "Hist!" and he told them of his arrangement with Micah, and also that he hoped soon to marry into the family. With the remark that "There's many a slip," etc., the chief spy told him to inquire of the oracle whether their journey would be a prosperous one. And being assured by the priest that all would be well, they departed on their way, and came to a place called Laish.

The country, they found, was a very desirable one, as the people of the land wanted for nothing. And, as the spies told their brethren on their return, the unsophisticated inhabitants hadn't even a Mawser rifle or an Armstrong gun wherewith to strike a blow. At this the fighting-men were well pleased, as ever since the day that their God had brought them up out of the land of Egypt (an exploit of which he ever afterwards boasted, in season and out season) their history had been one long campaign, and they had become somewhat tired of the butchering business. With the prospect of an easy walk in, six hundred of their men of valor, under the guidance of the spies, set out to dispossess the peaceful inhabitants of Laish.

On their way north they came again to the hill-country of Ephraim, and to the hospitable house of Micah. And the five spies said to the fighting-men, "Do you know that there is here an ephod and teraphim, a graven image and a molten image? Consider, therefore, what ye have to do." To people upon whom the very mention of a graven image acted as a magic spell, it was like saying to a hungry dog, "Here is a meaty bone; now, therefore, consider what you have to do." The result of the consideration was, of course, already a foregone conclusion; and, without even taking the priest into their confidence, while the fighting-men waited by the gate, the spies came into Micah's house and purloined the graven image and the ephod, and the teraphim and the molten image. And when the young Levite saw them emerging from the house with his ecclesiastical paraphernalia, he was wroth with priestly anger. But they said unto him, "Hold thy peace and go with us. Is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or to be a priest unto a whole tribe of Israel?" And being a sensible sort of ecclesiastic in material things, he at once saw the wisdom of the spy's remark. The prospect of this sudden rise from a country curacy to an influential Bishopric caused him (so says the narrative) great

gladness of heart. But—he suddenly remembered that he had other interests in Micah's household, and he thought of all the happy evenings he had spent with little Miriam down at—the old Bull and Bush. Miriam was Micah's half-sister on the mother's side. His mother was like the woman of Samaria, in that she had had five husbands; only, unlike that good lady, she had made the five suffice her—and Miriam was the only daughter by the third husband. Taking the chief spy, therefore, aside, Jonathan whispered, "How about—?" But the withering glance of that individual checked further utterance. It so happened that his experiences in affairs of the heart in connection with the female form divine had not been of the pleasantest; and so, with an ironical smile, he said: "There are plenty — Jezebels in the land for which we're bound." And with that the young priest was comforted, and departed from the house of his benefactor and friend to minister to the spiritual needs of the gentlemanly ruffians of the tribe of Dan. And that evening, as Miriam sat on the milking-stool in the field, she heard the sound of the Scottish bagpipes coming from over the distant hills; and, putting her ear to ground, she thought she could distinguish the air of "The Girl I Left Behind Me." And the milk that arrived by train next morning at Kirjath-Jearim contained a plentiful addition of salted human tears.

Micah, however, was not going to take this ungrateful affront lying down. So, gathering together a few of his scattered neighbors, they set off in hot pursuit to demand an explanation. When the Danites saw them coming they turned and waited their approach. With quiet unconcern the chief spy greeted them, and said, "Why what aileth thee, Micah, that thou comest with such a motley crowd?" This nonchalant air was a little more than Micah's temper could stand; and, getting as excited as a Frenchman, in a high-pitched tone of voice he screamed, "Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and my priest, and what have I more? And how, then, say ye unto me, 'What aileth thee?'" But the Danites failed to see the matter from Micah's point of view, and, while their reply is somewhat deficient in sympathy, it will be seen to be remarkable for its *persuasiveness*, and to possess a true Biblical flavor. With a meaning look at the excited Ephraimite, and in slow, deliberate tones, the chief spy said to Micah, "Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows fall upon thee, and thou lose thy life, and the lives of thy household." The sight of six hundred fighting-men lent a good deal of emphasis to this statement, and Micah came to the conclusion that discretion was the better part of valor. He returned to the hill-country of Ephraim vowing vengeance on priests in general, and the young Levite in particular; but his heart was sore grieved at the loss of his two beautiful silver images.

Micah lived to a ripe old age, but his faith in "gods" declined with advancing years; and his tombstone, which remains unto this day, bears the inscription, "A Reverent Agnostic."

JOSEPH BRYCE.

The "Edinburgh Review" on Richard Jefferies.

IN an article on "Richard Jefferies' Death-Bed," published in the *Freethinker* of February 21, it was pointed out that the story of the "conversion" of Jefferies, which I had shown to be groundless, was effectively, and it might be hoped finally, disposed of in the biography by Mr. Edward Thomas. As far as I am aware, there has been no revival of the legend in the religious press; but in the July number of the *Edinburgh Review* an attempt was made by an anonymous writer to reclaim the strayed nature-lover to the Christian fold. The method is less direct, but not less impudent, than those previously employed.

Unable to deny what used to be strenuously denied, that Jefferies, when his thought matured, was a pronounced Freethinker, the critic sets himself to argue—rather late in the day, so far as Jefferies is concerned—that a man's mere opinions are much less important than his *temperament*, and devotes no fewer than twelve very learned and very dull pages to the contention that Jefferies was by nature a western, not an oriental mystic, and that his mysticism was of the Christian school. But even if this were admitted, what would it prove? No one has ever denied that Jefferies was brought up in the arms of the Church. The sole point of importance is that he discarded Christianity for Freethought; and if it were a fact that the creed which he discarded was one to which he was by temperament prone, the obvious inference would be that he must have seen the stronger reason for discarding it! The crowning absurdity is that the reviewer claims to know better than Jefferies himself what Jefferies' convictions were. This is how he puts it:—

"Here stands Jefferies: a mystic, but a western mystic; a mystic of the order of the Incarnation. How angry Mr. Salt would be, and Mr. Thomas too, we fear, could they hear us call him so; nay, how angry he would very likely have been himself! But it is not always so easy to know ourselves."

That Jefferies, if some brazen-faced journalist had attempted to teach him to "know himself," might have shown personal resentment, is certainly not improbable; but those who, like myself, have often observed the boundless effrontery and dishonesty with which this Christianising process is carried on by religious writers after the death of their victims, will feel neither anger nor surprise, but rather amusement and contempt, at what is simply the latest specimen of a very ancient fraud. "It is not always so easy to know ourselves." True: and I venture to wish that this Edinburgh reviewer could for once know himself—as the writer of a very disingenuous article.

HENRY S. SALT.

A Wood Green Freethinker at Church.

THE lofty walls of unrelieved red brick looked rather sombre as we stepped from the mellow November sunlight into the "dim religious light" of St. Mark's. That religious light should always be dim, no one seems to question!

We had just time to notice the "belles" in the pews, when the bell on the roof ceased its clanging, and was substituted by the organ.

Then we all came with that same old "penitent and obedient heart," and told the same old story; we were the same miserable offenders that we were last Sunday, and last month, and last year, and every year since we first went up to the house of the Lord. Do these people mean all this, or is it the same old *lie*?

Then the priest, looking fat and easy, declared quite seriously that "Almighty God" had commanded him to pronounce the absolution and remission of the people's sins. Absolution, it seems, only lasts seven days, for he absolved the same people last Sunday.

By singing and chanting and praying we were continuously reminded that our Gawd was a jealous Gawd, and that it would be best to keep on friendly terms with him, somehow.

Our fat and easy friend asked the Lord to bless us, and, of course, we in return called upon the moon and the mountains, and the noble army of bugs and caterpillars, to "bless the Lawd."

Then, just to remind the aforesaid "Lord," we all stood up and told him a lot of things that we believed. We had told him all about *that* last Sunday; so belief seems, like absolution, to last just a week.

We forgot all about the weekly arrangement by tantalisingly reminding his "Lord"-ship that his "oath" was to "keep us in holiness and righteousness *all the days of our life*."

Probably righteousness is like an eight-day clock—will go for a lifetime, but has to be wound up once a week.

The second lesson left us in no further doubt about the jealous spirit of our Gawd, and incidentally informed us that he lovingly inflicts his vengeance upon the great-great-grandchildren of the man or woman who offends him.

Remembering this, we all knelt down and promised him

we would never have any other gods but him—on the principle, I suppose, that one was enough (of the sort!).

When the priest reminded us "Thou shalt not commit —," the young ladies in front earnestly cried out, "Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law." I was pleased to note this, for I read that this above-named "Lawd" used to evince a particular desire for maiden captives.

Curiously enough, our fat and good-looking priest then named two or three of the neighboring maidens who wanted to get married, and, no one objecting, business proceeded in that department.

Then he mentioned some of our neighbors who were at home sick. We prayed for them; and no doubt, like the aspiring maidens, they have the Church's permission for speedy restoration. How should we ever get on without a priest?

Then we prayed for the King, but were not told for which malady.

A sermon followed, which only interested me when the preacher said that if Christianity was real, Christians should be bright and happy; and to his credit be it said, his jolly face and good-natured smile were a practical illustration of his teaching. But then, perhaps he is not a Christian—only a priest?

When we left refreshments were being prepared for the faithful, and, by the proportion of empty seats, the proverbial "faithful few" would be a correct measure of those remaining to the Lawd's mid-day Supper.

Some men and women may, in some way or other, be better for such an hour-and-a-half as we had spent together. I don't think I am.

SCOTIA.

Funny, at Least.

A PAGE of a late number of the *Daily News* seems to contain quite a heap of morals.

In column two is a short note on a Baptist Union Conference which is to take place in London in October, in which it is said: "Several innovations have been introduced into the program this year." Hm! yes, innovations. Fancy, even into a Baptist Union program!

And then:—"I am not divulging any secret when I say that the presidential address by Principal Marshall will be one of the highest importance. At the May sessions he took for his subject Old Testament criticism. At the forthcoming meetings he will deal with New Testament criticism, a subject on which he is an authority."

Who says Innovations? The May sessions apologetics were of small moment except from the concessions to "Innovations." What are we to get in October? More concessions, more innovations.

Column four opens with "£21 Cheque Refused. Strange Incident at a Farewell Meeting. Pastor's Protests," and gives a report which is a striking, if somewhat sordid, commentary on a variety of religious claims:—

"During the proceedings the Rev. R. Fotheringham, the pastor, said he wished to present the cheque to the Rev. R. C. Thurley, who for thirteen years had been pastor at Rathbury Hall (E. Greenwich)."

Mr. Thurley, however, declined the present, and referred to a certain matter which had taken place, and that, in the circumstances, he could not accept the cheque, especially as it came from a church which could raise on one Sunday £3,500.....It was all very well to say "sweet nothings....." Speaking about his stipend, he referred to the fact that he had been told that unless he accepted a certain decision he had better take a month's notice.....It was disgraceful and degrading.....He left without any animosity in his heart..... He looked to his friends in Blackheath to uphold truth, justice, and honor, but to ask him to accept at the end of thirteen years a cheque for £21 was a little grotesque.....He handed it back with the remark, Give it to some charity."

There seems meat for a moral somewhere.

The next item in the same column is a case of sacrilege, where a man got into the vestry of a Welsh church, and was later on found almost naked and somewhat dazed. All he got seems to have been enough bad sacramental wine to make him very ill. His church work did not seem to have benefited him much more than the Rev. R. C. Thurley.

Column six has a short report of the Coventry curate's case, in which "Our Own Correspondent" reports the official announcement this evening that, at the request of the Bishop of Worcester, Canon Masterman, vicar of St. Michael's, has agreed to allow the Rev. Everard Digby to remain in charge of his mission "for the present."

The Bishop made a surprise visit to Coventry on Sunday, and gave an address to the mission congregation on the position caused by Mr. Digby's resignation.

He deprecated the agitation that had arisen, but agreed to make a proposal to Canon Masterman that Mr. Digby should continue his work there, and to this the Canon has consented. And the Canon's discharge is suspended at, or by, the muzzle.

There seems more meat for a moral.

Column seven, and last, opens with "Wesleyan's Vote. Torquay Minister's Claim Not Allowed. Important Decision." This is one more element of confusion and chaos introduced into our franchise muddle. At Torquay yesterday the ingenious revising barrister gave his reasons for disallowing the Parliamentary vote of the Rev. James Rogers.

If there be any useful sort of Dantesque Inferno reserved for lawyers generally, it is to be hoped that there is a special corner for the benefit of Revising Barristers. Without a possibility of doubt they are the past masters of verbal jugglery and of confounding wisdom.

By his arguments the Torquay artist has managed to introduce a new form of religious intolerance, and Freethinkers may, if they will, rub their hands together, for the new decision will have far-reaching effects if finally maintained. It will, in the hands of some of the extremists and bigots of the Established Church, be used as a fresh means of annoying and worrying Nonconformists; it will be to such men a new food to feed their already astounding egotism and pride. It will be a sweet morsel to some to read that the Legislature applied the word (office) to one form of religion, and did not intend to apply it to any other form. Only a bigot, an obscurantist, or a juggling lawyer could have arrived at such an important decision on such trivial basis.

A short while ago James Adderley had a short note in the *Daily News* referring to the Bill qualifying ministers of religion to serve on all Municipal Councils. The editor had put as headline, in large letters, "Clergy as Citizens." It would seem that if he had to use that line to-day he would be quite justified to put "?" to it.

It would almost seem that the Rev. R. C. Thurley, the Rev. Everard Digby, and the Rev. James Rogers, might well join in reciting Macaulay's lines:—

"Heap heavier still the fetters,
Bar closer still the grate;
Patient as sheep we yield us up
To our most cruel fate."

Not men or women—Sidney Smith settled that for them in his *Men, Women, and Priests*—not useful, considered workers, shot off with a month's notice and a cheque for £21 after thirteen years service, or discharged by a petulant puff of a Canon, and deprived of a vote even for a Member of Parliament. Can degradation lower go?

There seems room for quite a crop of morals in this page of the *News*.

T. S.

Johnson's Intolerance.

The problem that really interested him, that he felt to be vital, was the religious problem. He was not inclined to despise the force of the reasons advanced against Christianity. He was naturally sceptical. "No man," says Boswell, "was more incredulous as to particular facts which were at all extraordinary; and therefore no man was more scrupulously inquisitive, in order to discover truth." He had himself inclined to the sceptical side in his youth; and he was even in his old age, still anxious for more evidence of the supernatural. Of Lord Lyttelton's vision he said, "I am so anxious to have every evidence of the spiritual world, that I am willing to believe it." On Dr. Adams rejoining: "You have evidence enough; good evidence, which needs not such support," Johnson answered: "I like to have more." But he was subject to fits of depression, and he was obsessed by the fear of death. He had not that happy courage, that confidence in himself, in others, in human nature generally, which alone made possible to the pioneers, the quest of unknown lands of thought. The controversy, indeed, has undergone some changes since his time. The argument that Johnson drew from the number of great men who have been convinced of the truth of Christianity—and, of course, he meant the absolute not the relative truth—after a serious consideration of the question, has now been seriously impaired, if not inverted, by the number who have not been convinced. And the conflict between the Mosaic chronology and the geological record can no longer be settled by a reference to the authority of "what is unquestionably the most ancient writing." Many unquestionable things have since been questioned. Yet, in spite of the bold front with which Johnson met the new ideas, he always had his doubts. The unhappiness of human life, if it were an argument for a future state of existence, was also an argument against the goodness of the First Cause. Hence from his very fear that

they might be right after all, came his exasperation against infidels, and his dislike of religious toleration. "You are to a certain extent hurt," he said, "by knowing that even one man does not believe."—S. H. Swinny, "*Positivist Review*."

Correspondence.

A NOTE FROM AMERICA.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In the *Freethinker* of August 22, I have just noticed a letter from Mr. H. B. Samuels. I am sure he is thoroughly mistaken in his assumption that the Mormon Church dominates all the States in this country where women are active citizens. I enclose a letter for which I hope you will have room, provided no one answers Mr. Samuels more effectively.

I have only been acquainted with the work of the Freethinkers for a few months, but it has already given me much pleasure. You have some clerical fabricators over there; apparently, however, they cannot surpass our own "Rev. Dr." Locke, of Los Angeles, as you will note by the enclosed clipping.

LOUISA HARDING.

Los Angeles, California.

P.S.—We are replying to Mr. Locke in one of the local papers, but have little idea that he will enlighten us as to the authority for his "quotations" from Goethe, etc.

[The letter referred to will appear probably next week.—EDITOR.]

A POOR SCHOOL.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—A Freethinker has sent a parcel of useful though part-worn clothing, etc., suitable for children to the Head-teacher of Christow-street Council School, Leicester, where the scholars are many of them ill-clad and ill-fed, and it has occurred to me that other friends might be willing to follow the example. I am Chairman of the Managers' Committee, and would guarantee that gifts were well distributed.

14 Highcross-street, Leicester.

F. J. GOULD.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON SEPT. 30.

The President, Mr. G. W. Foote, in the chair. There were also present:—Messrs. J. Barry, W. H. Baker, S. Bloomfield, C. Cohen, H. Cowell, N. Evans, W. Leat, A. B. Moss, Dr. R. T. Nichols, F. Schaller, S. Samuels, H. Silverstein, T. J. Thurlow, R. H. Rosetti, V. Roger, F. Wood, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed.

Monthly cash statement presented, and adopted.

Application for permission to form a new Branch at Ogmoo Vale was granted.

New members were received for the Wood Green, Bishop Auckland, and Liverpool Branches, and seventeen for the Parent Society.

The Appeal on behalf of Mr. James Rowney was discussed, and the Executive resolved to contribute the sum of £5.

The Secretary was instructed to communicate with Branches in arrear with subscriptions, also to fix the Annual Dinner at Holborn Restaurant for Tuesday, January 11, and a Social Meeting during November.

Other minor business having been transacted, the meeting adjourned.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary*.

The Bible is responsible for the cruel slaughter of millions of alleged witches. It is also responsible for the prolonged treatment of lunatics as possessed. The methods of science are now adopted in civilised countries. Hysterical women are no longer tortured as witches. Lunatics are no longer chained and beaten as persons inhabited by devils. Kindness and common sense have taken the place of cruelty and superstition. And this change was brought about, not through the Bible, but in spite of it.—G. W. Foote, "*The Book of God*."

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.

INDOOR.

ST. JAMES'S HALL (Great Portland-street, W.): 7.30, J. T. Lloyd, "Buddha and Christ, a Striking Contrast."

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Church-street, Upper-street, N.): F. A. Davies, "Religion and Life."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Public (Minor) Hall, Barking-road, Canning Town): 7.30, E. C. Saphin, "Christianity and Sun-Worship."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 3.15, Miss K. B. Kough, "Some Bible Heroines."

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, W. J. Ramsey, a Lecture.

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S.: Highbury Corner, 12, J. J. Darby, "Charles Bradlaugh: An Appreciation." Newington Green, 12, Sidney Cook, "Christianity and Progress."

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road) 11.30, W. J. Ramsey, "Charles Bradlaugh."

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Spouters' Corner): 11.30, a Lecture. Seven Sisters' Corner, 7, E. Pack, "Mythical Jesus."

WOOLWICH BRANCH N. S. S. (Beresford-square): 11.30, E. C. Saphin, "Proofs that Christianity is Sun-Worship"; 7.30, A. Allison, "God and the Harvest Festival."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

ABERDARE BRANCH N. S. S. (Pugsley's Restaurant): 11, Conference; H. Percy Ward, 2.15, "Why I Left the Wesleyan Pulpit"; 6.15, "Goodness Without God."

FAILSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, Grand Musical Service—Failsworth Orchestral Society.

GLASGOW (Secular Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 (noon) and 6.30, F. J. Gould, Lectures.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, Councillor James Sexton, "The Parable of the Asses."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, Dr. L. Haden Guest, "Problems of Slum Life."

OUTDOOR.

NOTTINGHAM (Great Market-place): 7.30, R. Hansen, "The Debasing Effects of Christianity."

BUSINESS CARDS.

Short advertisements are inserted under this heading at the rate of 2s. per half inch and 3s. 6d. per inch. No advertisement under this heading can be less than 2s. or extend beyond one inch. Special terms for several continuous insertions.

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Secretary—MISS E. M. VANCE.

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

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

The liability of members is limited to £1, in case the Society should ever be wound up and the assets were insufficient to cover liabilities—a most unlikely contingency.

Members pay an entrance fee of ten shillings, and a subsequent yearly subscription of five shillings.

The Society has a considerable number of members, but a much larger number is desirable, and it is hoped that some will be gained amongst those who read this announcement. All who join it participate in the control of its business and the trusteeship of its resources. It is expressly provided in the Articles of Association that no member, as such, shall derive any sort of profit from the Society, either by way of dividend, bonus, or interest, or in any way whatever.

The Society's affairs are managed by an elected Board of Directors, consisting of not less than five and not more than twelve members, one-third of whom retire (by ballot) each year,

but are capable of re-election. An Annual General Meeting of members must be held in London, to receive the Report, elect new Directors, and transact any other business that may arise.

Being a duly registered body, the Secular Society, Limited, can receive donations and bequests with absolute security. Those who are in a position to do so are invited to make donations, or to insert a bequest in the Society's favor in their wills. On this point there need not be the slightest apprehension. It is quite impossible to set aside such bequests. The executors have no option but to pay them over in the ordinary course of administration. No objection of any kind has been raised in connection with any of the wills by which the Society has already been benefited.

The Society's solicitors are Messrs. Harper and Battcock, 23 Rood-lane, Fenchurch-street, London, E.C.

A Form of Bequest.—The following is a sufficient form of bequest for insertion in the wills of testators:—“I give and bequeath to the Secular Society, Limited, the sum of £— free from Legacy Duty, and I direct that a receipt signed by two members of the Board of the said Society and the Secretary thereof shall be a good discharge to my Executors for the said Legacy.”

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