

# THE Freethinker

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*The greater the folly and imposition the greater is the crowd.*—HORACE WALPOLE.

## Clerical Protectionists.

CHRISTIAN priests belong to various denominations. They are really not the sole possession of the Catholic Church. Call them what you will—clergymen, parsons, pastors, ministers, even “generals” or “captains”—they are all in the same profession, or, as some would prefer to put it, in the same line of business. All of them are soldiers in the great Black Army. They are all men of God, supernaturalists, mystery-mongers, sky-pilots, heavenly excursion agents, kingdom-come commissioners—in short, traders on the bump of wonder. They are all alike in this: that they are unspeakably useless in this life, and of no value whatever unless there is a future life which may justify their existence.

Now a profession or business of that kind needs very careful nursing. Sensible people are so apt to see through it, and so liable to inform other people of the imposture; and taking precautions against their sagacity and candor has always been one of the first principles of priestly policy. Accordingly, every Christian country has passed and maintained laws in favor of the Churches and against “heresy” and “blasphemy.” Those who opened their eyes and mouths too wide in matters of religion have been killed when possible, and otherwise punished when the killing of sceptics was too cruel for the nerves and imaginations of the majority.

Direct persecution of sceptics is supplemented by other priestly arts of intimidation or suppression. Devices are practised for putting sceptics at a great disadvantage in the propagation of their ideas. The dice of the great game of persuasion are loaded against them, so that the priests throw sixes every time, and the sceptics ones, twos and threes, with a larger number now and then by an unforeseeably lucky accident. All the freedoms are for the priests; but the restraints are for the sceptics. And this is but a part of the general protectionist system by which all faiths and churches surround their time-honored advantages.

One of their protectionist devices is the blessed Sabbath. Men, women, and children are taught to keep it holy—that is, to neglect all secular interests and attend to the teachings and ministrations of God's representatives. The priests actually call it God's Day; in reality, however, it is *their* day. Everything that is his is theirs. If you give to the Lord they take the cash for him and mind it until he sends for it or they are able to hand it over. So the Lord's Day is the priests' day. It is their weekly period of sunshine in which they make their hay. Nobody else, if possible, must do any business or enjoy any pleasure on the day of rest and worship. When the priests take their shutters down they want everybody else's shutters up. All rivalry is to be ruled out, either by social custom or by direct legislation. Priests may work, but other people must not follow their ordinary avocations. Churches and Sunday-schools are to be in full swing, but places of secular education and amusement are to be closed. Public-

houses used to be tolerated, perhaps as another branch of the spirit business; but the parson, being closer driven than of old, now casts an evil eye on the poor publican, and demands that his shops shall be shut too.

A very characteristic letter from one of the Lord's anointed appeared in Tuesday's *Daily News*. The Rev. J. Stephens Roose, President of the Balham and Tooting Free Church Council, eased his stuffed bosom in the following manner:—

“On Friday night last I sat for nearly five hours, together with a number of clergymen and church workers, in the Sessions House, Newington, and watched the London County Council Licensing Committee at work. One was surprised to observe the arbitrary way in which application after application for music and dancing licenses, including Sunday performances, were granted. Clergymen, ministers of religion, and church workers often received scant courtesy, and apparently their evidence counted for little or nothing. One felt how differently such evidence is received in large provincial cities like Manchester and Liverpool, where the corporate civic feeling is strong.”

Note the calm assurance with which the reverend gentleman assumes that the licensing of places of entertainment on Sundays is some special business of his own ilk. We wish he would explain what particular concern it is of the members of the Black Army, any more than it is of the members of the Red Army or the Blue Army. What extraordinary right have “clergymen, ministers of religion, and churchworkers” to be heard on this subject? It may be allowed that they are experts as Sunday entertainers, but why should they dictate to other sections of the community? Does not their anxiety show that they are seeking to guard their old Sabbatarian monopoly?

The Balham and Tooting Free Church watchdog went on to denounce the Sunday League concerts and Sunday entertainments generally. What will the Lord's own do when the Devil's own enjoy free competition on the blessed Sabbath? Can churches stand against theatres and music-halls? They cannot. Mr. Roose calls for a closer application of the Act 21 George III., c. 49, which “has effectually restrained those who were anxious to destroy the religious observance of Sunday.” He sneers at “the love of gain” evinced by those who charge for seats at Sunday concerts. But do not the clerical entertainers charge for seats? What are pew-rents? Does it make any difference whether the seats are paid for weekly or quarterly?

We perceive that the religionists up and down the country are working quietly behind the scenes to promote their own interests, and hinder the interests of their opponents, through municipal agencies. They put obstacles in the way of public buildings, and especially corporation buildings, being hired by Freethinkers. Even if the buildings are let to us, after much friction and delay, we are hampered by conditions against charging for seats. This restriction is more or less crippling to “advanced” bodies, that are nearly always poor. And it is *meant* to be crippling. The municipal authorities and the police know quite well that they are acting in the interest of wealthy religious organisations. The dodge is paltry and hypocritical. It displays the seamiest side of “municipal control.”

G. W. FOOTE.



## Empty Churches.

THE phenomenon of a dwindling church attendance is a much discussed subject in religious circles. But while often discussed, no one has yet succeeded in suggesting a means by which the churches may be filled. More; the phenomenon is of so long standing that it is being accepted as inevitable, and attention is directed towards preventing a still further decline. The decline in church-going is not confined to England. It is practically universal. In the old world and in the new there are the same lamentations in the air. Like Hotspur invoking spirits, Christian ministers call congregations from the outside world, and with precisely Hotspur's experience—they will not come.

In Germany the synods of the Lutheran Church have just been considering what can be done to fill their rapidly emptying places of worship. In this country such meetings give birth to many more or less hypocritical observations about a desire to safeguard the working man's day of rest, etc. The Lutheran Synods proceed, apparently, with greater straightforwardness, and frankly refer to the "rival attractions" of concerts, music-halls, theatres, and cafés. They say it is deplorable to turn away from empty and half-empty churches, to see men and women eagerly struggling to secure a place in theatre or concert-hall; and one may admit that "deplorable" is a right enough word from their point of view. And the synods adopt the ultimate argument of religion-force. They call upon the Government to prohibit Sunday entertainments, Sunday dancing, and to decree that Sunday newspapers shall not be permitted to be read in any public place. Nothing must be allowed to compete with the churches, and then perhaps one day the further and logical step may be taken of the State driving the German people to church much as the military are marched to divine service.

British, German, French, Italian, even Spanish, clergymen may all shake hands in the unanimity born of a common misfortune. It is essentially a clergyman's question. It does not vitally concern laymen—except in a very sinister sense—whether people attend church or not. Whether people go to church or stay away makes no apparent difference to their conduct, their mental health, or their physical well-being. Like the boy who informed his parent that he hadn't said his prayers the previous evening, wasn't going to say them on the coming evening, and then if nothing happened wouldn't say them any more, the majority of people have discovered how useless a function church-going is, and act accordingly. Naturally the "doctors of the soul," as someone admiringly called them, are unhappy. The ordinary medical man secures a reputation by his cures; his fame is built up by those who are able to do without him. The parson deliberately aims at keeping people dependent upon his treatment. Once a person is seized with a spiritual sickness, the aim of the "doctor of the soul" is to serve out a prescription that will convert him into a chronic invalid. The rule of the profession is, "When a man is spiritually ill, keep him so; the worse the disease, the longer the illness, the better for the profession." The discovery that the sooner the practitioner is discharged the quicker the patient recovers health is as great a blow to the present-day clergy as was the medical science of Jewish doctors to the miracle cures of the Middle Ages.

It is said that church attendance declines because the services are not made attractive enough, or because the preacher is not good enough. But religious worship does not really rest upon the desire to listen to an interesting preacher, or to take part in an entertainment. Of course, these things do help to fill churches now; but this is only because the original cause is in process of disappearance. Moreover, the popular preacher does not materially affect the question. His congregation is not formed from non-churchgoers, but at the expense of other

places of worship. Doubtless if church services were made attractive enough—that is, if religious organisations entered into real competition with places of amusement—people could be induced to attend church in greater numbers. If a variety program fills a hall during the week, there is no reason why it should not fill a church on Sunday. Only it must be depressing to the sincere Christian to find his "glorious gospel" playing second to a brass band, two or three vocalists, a tea meeting, or a cinematograph. And it cannot be very inspiring to clergymen to announce that if people will only come to church they will make the service very short.

The slump in church attendance is too universal and too uniform to be counteracted by any possible improvement in the character of the clergy or by any possible improvement in the nature of church services. Neither abroad nor at home do people cease believing because they attend a concert on Sunday or engage in some other form of enjoyment. They do these things because they have already ceased to believe. Originally people looked to the priest for guidance and protection because he stood between them and the supernatural beings the most feared, and was himself invested with a measure of supernatural power. Amongst savages we see the medicine man powerful because of this belief. Higher up in the scale we see the Roman Catholic priest enjoying power over the people because of the same conviction. When Protestantism made every man his own agent for interceding with the supernatural, it inevitably weakened the power of its own ministry, although the habit of obedience to a spiritual leader, cultivated by the elder church, served Protestant ministers for a while. Every decline in the belief in the supernatural has involved a decline in the power of the clergy, and as their power weakened their institutions have suffered to a corresponding extent.

Undeveloped societies and undeveloped people are the only ones who to-day pay any attention to the clergy. I do not mean by this that many clergymen may not have much good and wise counsel to offer, and are therefore listened to with the respect they deserve. But deference is paid them for the same reason that it is paid to other people, not because of their sacerdotal character. Disease no longer drives people to the church or the parson, but to the hospital and the doctor. Bad agricultural conditions do not send them to prayer, but more probably to the legislature. One who is going a voyage no longer consults the oracles, he looks out the fastest, safest line with the lowest rates. In none of the churches is there a preacher who can compete with the best lay teachers on ethical and social subjects. Educated people may go to church to hear a pleasant musical service, to listen to an eloquent preacher, or for various other reasons, but not because they believe the preacher has access to channels of information that are not equally open to all. They know that for reliable information on ethics, art, sociology, science, or literature, it is useless going to church. All they will get there are the pale, emaciated shadow of what may be much better learned elsewhere. For a body of educated men, the clergy, as clergy, have less real influence than any other educated class in the community. On the intellectual life of the nation the clergy act as a drag, and to the social organism they are what rudimentary organs are to the individual—reminiscences of a lower phase of evolution.

Merely shortening sermons and making churches otherwise attractive may make things more agreeable for present churchgoers. It may even keep a few within the fold a little longer than they would otherwise remain. But the real, the vital issue is not materially affected thereby. To stop the leakage the clergy must restore belief. Turning churches and chapels into semi-political meeting-places will not do it. This will only meet with partial success so long as the novelty of the experiment is sufficient to attract a certain type of mind. It is



the restoration of belief that is required, and this is a task beyond the power of any church or of all the churches. Christianity is becoming more and more an impossible creed for an educated man with honest inclinations. If it is accepted at all, it is with a number of mental reservations that rob support of all moral value, and adherence is often of no real help whatever. There is nothing that people detect sooner than insincerity, and the insincerity manifested by those who, in religious matters, are engaged in one long process of "hedging," more than anything else warns people that all is not as it should be. Meanwhile, the clearer-sighted and the more honest step outside altogether, leaving the churches with a population that reflects less credit upon it with the passing of each generation.

This is a phase of religious decay that has repeated itself, with all probability, more than once in the history of man. At any rate, the pages of Lucian make it plain that in his day the pagan religions were passing through a precisely similar experience. "Let us be candid," says a minor god to the chief deity in one of his dialogues. "All that we have really cared about has been a steady altar service. Everything else has been left to chance. And now men are opening their eyes. They perceive that whether they pray or don't pray, go to church or don't go to church, makes no difference to them. And we are receiving our deserts. Our advocates are silenced. If you wish mankind to reverence again you must remove the cause of their disbelief."

As men found out the hollowness of one religion so they are now finding out the hollowness of another. Just as the more thoughtful were finding in Lucian's day that the real interests of men were outside pagan temples, so they are now realising them to be outside Christian churches. Christian preacher is becoming as discredited as pagan Angur. And the disbelief that has led to this is no longer confined to a few. Its seeds are sown broadcast. It permeates our literature, it is implied in most of our teaching, it is embodied in many of our institutions, it is almost in the very air we breathe. Were Lucian alive to-day he would repeat his advice: "You must remove the cause of their disbelief." And he would probably add, beneath his breath, "You may as well try to remove the earth from its orbit."

C. COHEN.

### Atheism.

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

—PSALM LIII. 1.

THE above passage must be held responsible for most of the silly and stupid utterances indulged in by theologians concerning Atheism and Atheists. Because the Hebrew word, *nabhal*, rendered here "fool," signifies a thoroughly and violently bad man, or a man who has "moral and religious insensibility," the inference is drawn that Atheism and moral badness are synonymous terms. This is how the divine talks: "The 'fool' is one whose moral nature has been corrupted, whose heart has been eaten out of him, whose spiritual instincts have been slain by evil living." Then we are told some story of an officer of the Indian Army, who, one evening during the mess-room dinner, heated with wine, took to quizzing the old Army Chaplain. "I can't believe the Bible, you know. There are so many things in it that nobody could believe. Jonah and the whale, for instance." Fixing his eyes upon him, the old man silenced him by naming a certain commandment in the Decalogue, of which the pleasure-loving officer was a notorious violator. But fleshly appetites indulged are not the only things that lead to Atheism. "The sins of the flesh," it is alleged, "corrupt and poison the soul, but they are less fatal than the sins of the spirit—selfishness, hatred, malice, jealousy, cruelty; and, you observe, it is these that the Psalmist is speaking of. These are the fatal poison of the soul, and

that for the obvious reason that they have their seat not in the flesh, but in the spirit. They defile the fountain." It is the man that is guilty of such sins who says "in his heart, There is no God"; and such a man is the only Atheist.

One is not surprised at the fact that such arrant nonsense is constantly to be heard from the pulpit; but one has a right to be amazed at finding the same wretched drivel in religious journals conducted by scholars. Yet there is a whole column of it in the *British Weekly* for November 11. In that column one of the most brilliant scholars of the day, the Rev. Dr. David Smith, says that "the unbelief in question is not *intellectual*, but *moral*," the unbelief of people the fountain of whose life has been poisoned by sins of the spirit, and its steam polluted by sins of the flesh. Now, it may be perfectly true that there are Atheists who are horribly wicked people. No Atheist is fool enough to deny such a statement. That a man labels himself an Atheist is no guarantee that he is a paragon of virtue; but neither is the fact that a man calls himself a Christian a guarantee that he does not habitually wallow in all the vices. Some of the most ardent believers in God have been guilty of unmentionable immoralities. One of the biggest scoundrels of modern times never went to sleep without a Bible under his pillow. Though King David is said to have been "a man after God's own heart," he was yet one of the greatest criminals that ever lived. Does Professor Smith mean to tell us that no firm believers in God are ever guilty of indulging their fleshly passions, or of the worse sins of selfishness, hatred, malice, jealousy, and cruelty? He knows his Church history too well to put forth such a groundless claim. And yet he writes in the article in question as if all wicked people are bound to be Atheists, or as if among genuine Atheists there can be no noble characters. It is only "fools"—withered, good-for-nothing folks—who say, "There is no God." One is astonished beyond measure to witness a man of undoubted culture falling into such a palpable and inexcusable error.

But there is something still worse to be noticed. A certain correspondent, "B. H.," was troubled about Psalm liii. i., and wrote to Dr. Smith for guidance. "And certainly," says Dr. Smith in reply, "it (the verse under discussion) has an unpleasant look." What a confession from an ordained minister of the Word! Here is more of the same sort:—

"Faith is always difficult. The Universe is so vast that it is no wonder if our feeble minds are bewildered and go astray, and it is no argument to call a man a fool. It proves one or other of two things—either that we are ignorant of the difficulties and have never felt their pressure, or that we have been worsted in the argument and lost our tempers. And in either case the folly is on our side. This disposition is cleverly hit off in Oliver Goldsmith's witty criticism of Dr. Johnson's controversial method: 'There is no arguing with Johnson; for when the pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt end of it.' It seems as though this were the method of the Psalmist, but it is not really so."

"It is not really so" because the Psalmist, as already pointed out, had in his mind, not "one who had got bewildered in the maze of argument, and saw so many difficulties, so many arguments against a spiritual view of the world, that he had given up faith in God," but one who was so depraved morally, and who was so impure in heart, that he could not see God. Of the former Dr. Smith says:—

"This sort of man should not lightly be designated an Atheist. It is very possible that he is a believer at heart. Take, e.g., the man of science. Occupied with the study of natural law and impressed by its magnificence, he comes to regard it as all-sufficient, and sees no need and no room for a living and personal God. But is he truly an Atheist? What he terms Nature is really God. He feels its immensity and grandeur, and bows before it; and, in so far, he is a worshiper and a religious man. His mistake is that he stops at Creation, and does not perceive the Creator behind it."

The proverb says that "every man hath a fool in his



sleeve," and certainly the fool in Dr. Smith's sleeve must have been wide awake when he penned those words. It is a gross libel on the scientist to assert that, when he "sees no need and no room for a living and personal God," he is not truly an Atheist, or that "what he terms Nature is really God." To Dr. Smith, what he terms Nature may be really God, but not to the man of science in his mind's eye; and he has no right to say of such a man that he worships in any recognisable sense of the word. That the so-called bump of reverence is highly developed in anyone is no proof that he has any leaning towards religion. The phrenologists declared that Darwin had this bump "developed enough for ten priests," but Darwin called himself an Agnostic and did not worship. It is very significant that, though he started life as a devout Christian, he ended it as an avowed Agnostic, who could see neither design nor purpose in the Universe. In reality, he died an Atheist, though he neither liked nor adopted the term. At any rate, to claim him as anything else is the height of folly.

Professor Smith maintains that there are two kinds of unbelief, intellectual and moral; but is it not with his *mind* that a man believes or disbelieves? It is possible to believe without evidence, but it is not possible to disbelieve without some grounds, and the grounds are of necessity intellectual. Supernatural belief is always superstitious, but supernatural unbelief is a child of reason. It may be extremely difficult for a man who has been thoroughly rooted and grounded in Theism ever to divest himself of it. It is certain that his becoming wicked would not eradicate it from his mind. Some of the most notorious criminals the world has seen were profoundly pious and devout. The truth is that there is nothing in Atheism to foster or encourage wrong-doing, as there is nothing in Theism to make a man good. There is no point on which the testimony of history is more emphatic and unmistakable than on this.

There is no habit more mischievous than this, to which Christian teachers seem to be slaves, of claiming all good people as fellow-believers in God and Christ. They say, "He is a Christian without knowing it, there is no other way of accounting for his elevation of character," or, "At heart he is a believer in God, otherwise his morals would not be so excellent." This is a habit to which Mr. Campbell was once a complete victim; but he has outgrown it, and now candidly admits that morality is independent of religion. Dr. Smith is still a slave to it. He avers that the good man who has given up belief in God is only "bewildered in the maze of argument," and gone astray, and that "it is very possible that he is a believer at heart." Such a statement savors strongly of impertinence. There are hundreds and thousands of serious thinkers among us who are not more sure of anything than of the fact that they do not believe in God, either at heart or anywhere else; and of this they alone are competent judges. All knowledge is Atheistic: it is faith only that is Theistic; and as knowledge grows from more to more the Theistic faith declines.

Atheism forms the indispensable background of the only rational philosophy of life. It is only when the supernatural is gone that the natural can have fair play. Not until God has departed can man come into his own; and it is not until eternity has been blotted out that time shall get its due. Atheism is man's best friend, in that it releases him from the cruel bondage of superstition and unnatural hopes and fears. It enables him to realise and express the best that is in him, and to devote himself to the service of his race. In short, it makes a man of him. A supernatural believer is terribly handicapped in the race of life. He has to carry so many supernatural weights that he is prevented from running freely and swiftly. The Atheist is unencumbered, his only burden being the instinctive and trained sense of obligation to further the best interests of the race of which he is a member.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Narratives in Genesis.—XX.

A NEW VERSION OF AN OLD FICTION.

(Continued from p. 726.)

IN chapter xx. the third writer, the Elohist, makes his first contribution to the narratives in Genesis, and this turns out to be but another version of one of the Yahvist's fictions. According to the writer, Abraham and his wife went to sojourn in Gerar where a certain Abimelech was king, and Abraham fearing that men might kill him in order to take his beloved Sarah, asked that lady to speak of him as her brother—which she agreed to do. The usual result followed: Abimelech hearing the surpassing beauty of Sarah praised, had her brought into his house, with the intention of taking her for a wife. The god Elohim, however, kept watch over Sarah, and warned Abimelech *in a dream* that she was another man's wife, commanding him at the same time to restore her. This warning came on the first night after Sarah had been taken into Abimelech's house, and, fortunately, that king had not come near her. Next day Abimelech sent for Abraham, and rebuked him for his lying and deceit in saying she was his sister; whereupon that patriarch, to justify his conduct, said, "Moreover, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother." This statement was, no doubt, inserted to mitigate in some measure Abraham's falsehood; but there is nothing to show that such was the case. On the contrary, had there been any such relationship, it would certainly have been mentioned in Gen. xi. 29-31, where that between Nahor and his wife Milcah is given, and where Sarah is spoken of as in no way related.

Abimelech, in the story, restored Sarah, and gave to Abraham sheep, oxen, menservants, maidservants, and a thousand pieces of silver. These gifts that wily patriarch did not refuse on the plea that no one should have cause to say that he had made Abraham rich (Gen. xiv. 23). After receiving them "Abraham prayed unto Elohim, and Elohim healed Abimelech and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children." The Elohist writer evidently meant that up to that time all the women folk of Abimelech's household had been barren—which, if true, would be most extraordinary indeed—and that Abraham, in gratitude for the return of his wife and the gifts received from Abimelech, prayed to his god to remove this barrenness—which was done forthwith. So far, the narrative is at least intelligible; but now either the Yahvist writer or the compiler comes in. Having read over the Elohist account, he did not think it strong enough; so he adds one verse, and, by a few strokes of his pen, damns the whole story. He says:—

"For Yahveh had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah Abraham's wife" (xx. 18).

Sarah was in Abimelech's house for one night only, and was restored the next morning. Yet in these few hours all the women of the king's household are represented as having become barren. It would seem that this divinely inspired writer believed that women were in the habit of giving birth to children every hour, and that Sarah coming into the house caused these interesting labors to cease. Had Sarah been in Abimelech's house for several years, instead of only one night, such a statement might be allowed to pass (as a miraculous intervention), though even then there would be a manifest injustice in punishing the females of the king's household for what happened through Abraham's falsehood and deceit. As the account stands, the story of the barrenness proves that at least one of the sacred writers had not the sense of a child.

But, furthermore, the events in this chapter—assuming that they actually occurred—took place after the Hebrew god had promised Abraham a son by his wife Sarah; that is to say, when that patriarch was a hundred years old. Sarah at this time was



therefore ninety years of age, and, in a land and climate where ladies become prematurely old at middle age, she must have been a withered, toothless, decrepit old woman. And it was this ancient scarecrow that Abraham feared would so captivate the hearts of the men of Gerar as to place his life in jeopardy.

As will, no doubt, be remembered, this is the second occasion upon which the "father of the faithful" is represented as acting as described, the first being when in Egypt at the court of Pharaoh (Gen. xii.). In both accounts Abraham asks his wife to call him her brother, in both Sarah is taken into the king's house, the king gives "the brother" sheep, oxen, menservants, and maidservants, and afterwards rebukes the husband for saying Sarah was his sister. In the case of Pharaoh, some unnamed plagues were sent; in that of Abimelech, all the women of the house were rendered barren. It needs not a divine revelation to see that the two accounts are but two versions of one and the same story—a silly Bible fiction.

In the next chapter (xxi.) the Elohist narrates the birth of Isaac, and of Sarah laughing at the wonderful event—as well she might. He then goes on:

"And the child grew.....and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had borne unto Abraham mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

The usual Christian comment on this incident runs something as follows: "Ishmael was now charged with the same offensive conduct as that which had been formerly reprov'd in Hagar; and Sarah insisted on the summary dismissal of both." But the word "mocking" in this passage is in the Septuagint rendered "sporting," and the English Revisers give as an alternative reading "playing." It would therefore appear that there was nothing reprehensible in the lad's conduct. Sarah evidently had an eye upon the disposition of Abraham's property, and was determined at all hazards to get rid of Hagar and her son. Abraham was naturally averse to expelling Ishmael and his mother from his house; but Elohim said unto him: "In all that Sarah saith unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called." After this command "Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba."

In the Septuagint the words in italics read: "and took loaves and a skin of water, and gave them to Agar, and he put the child on her shoulder, and sent her away." The first of these two renderings (the Revised Version) is somewhat mixed; the second is evidently the more correct. But in both "the child" is placed on Hagar's shoulder that it might be easier carried. The Elohist writer appears to have thought that the lad was a baby of three or four years old, whereas Ishmael at this time was a youth of fifteen or sixteen years of age, and possibly as tall as his father Abraham. It is obvious, then, that we are not dealing with historical fact in this chapter, but with silly legendary fiction.

Some people may think that Hagar, having become Abraham's second wife and having borne him a son, was treated hardly, not to say shamefully; but it should be remembered that she was a slave, while Sarah was a free woman—which makes all the difference. At any rate, the Lord, who we know is no respecter of persons, took this view when he advised Abraham to send her away; so no more need be said. In the wilderness, when her skin bottle of water was exhausted, Hagar "cast the child" under one of the shrubs and sat down some little distance off so as not to "look upon the death of the child"; and sitting there, she "lift up her voice and wept. And Elohim heard the voice of the lad," etc.

In the Septuagint the latter reads: "And the child cried aloud and wept. And God heard the

voice of the child," etc. Here, again, the Septuagint version appears to be the more correct. It was "the child" that cried, not Hagar; and the god heard the cry: in answer to which an angel called to Hagar out of heaven, and after promising to make her son the father of a great nation, opened her eyes and caused her to see a well of water. After this relief the mother and son lived for many years in the wilderness, and found ample sustenance there, and the young man became an archer: "and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt."

Here I shall have to defer for two or three weeks the continuation of these ancient Hebrew narratives.

ABRACADABRA.

(To be continued.)

## Acid Drops.

Mr. Bernard Shaw should be careful of the company he keeps. He does not see that the New Theology people are simply exploiting him. They will do his cherished objects more harm than good. His brave fight against the dramatic Censorship, for instance, is going to be entirely frustrated if they can have their way. In the last number of the New Theology weekly the editor hopes that "in the end the local authorities will be given charge of this important business." Now this is precisely what Mr. Shaw wishes to avoid. He wants to see the Censorship abolished altogether. He argues that "reformation" would only make it a worse evil than it is—and we believe he is quite right. To hand the Censorship over to County Council officials, or a County Council committee, would be to substitute scorpions for the whips with which "advanced" dramatists are now afflicted. Why on earth does Mr. Shaw coquet with these sentimental superstitionists? He really ought to know that religion spoils everything it touches. If he hasn't learnt this yet, he will learn it, and perhaps tragically.

In the same article the editor of the New Theology weekly—or, as some would prefer to call it, the Campbellite organ—mentions Swinburne and Meredith under "Literature in 1909." He says that their names "recall to mind some of the noblest verse and fiction of the Victorian era." He takes precious good care, of course, not to allude to their rank heresy from a Christian point of view. They were not New Theologians, or theologians at all. Both were Freethinkers and Humanists. Swinburne called himself an Anti-Theist, which is, if anything, a trifle worse than Atheist.

Mr. Hall Caine still pursues a non-committal policy. In an article on what he means by the *White Prophet*, he declares: "A great deal of the supernatural which attaches itself to great personages seems to me fictitious and even pernicious." Only "a great deal," mark. It would not do to go the whole hog, for this might damage Mr. Caine too much amongst his countrymen. He therefore hedges very carefully—so that "intellectuals" may not be able to accuse him of believing in miracles, nor Christians accuse him of rejecting them entirely. "Whether the miracles of Jesus really happened or are merely legendary," he says, "I do know, and, if I may say it without irreverence, I do not care." Such a declaration is unworthy of any serious intelligence. To lie low between the natural and the supernatural, to be careful not to commit oneself for or against the miraculous, to decline to make up one's mind whether Jesus was man or God, is nothing but cowardice and imbecility. And to say that it does not matter whether Jesus was a human or superhuman being is disgraceful Laodiceanism. Mr. Caine might as well say that he does not care whether there is a God or not, or whether there is a future life or not. Such indifference is either an artificial pose or a confession of mental, moral, and even "spiritual" triviality.

When he is not carefully hedging, Mr. Caine is slapdash. He speaks of Jesus as a half-educated, poor carpenter who "evolved a code of morals, a theory of religion, which for thousands of years to come was destined to be the moving force of the Western world." This is painting, à la Hall Caine, with a whitewash brush. We defy Mr. Caine to state what "code of morals" Jesus evolved, and what "theory of religion." We defy him to indicate the time when this "code" and "religion" were really, as distinct from nominally, the animating principles of Western civilisation. We defy him even to prove the "thousands of years" without



the aid of prophecy. Mr. Caine should stick to his novels. As a religious reformer, and still more as a historian, he is a joke.

Just look at the way in which Mr. Caine reads even the New Testament. He says that the Jewish priests and rulers would never have been able to destroy Jesus "against the love and reverence of the multitude of the common people" without the cynical help of the Roman power. Now there is nothing clearer in the whole four stories of the trial of Jesus than the fact that Pilate did his best to save the enthusiast from his pursuers. Had the prisoner shown the slightest effort at co-operating with the judge he would have escaped. When he was asked "Art thou the King of the Jews" he replied that he was. He was charged with sedition, and he virtually pleaded guilty. As for "the love and reverence of the multitude," it is one of the truest or most truly dramatic features of the story that the same mob which cried "Hosannah!" as Jesus entered Jerusalem, cried "Crucify him! Crucify him!" a few days afterwards, and even preferred the life of Barabbas spared to the life of its own ex-hero. This historic fickleness of the mob is illustrated in Robert Browning's "The Patriot," which he well calls "An Old Story." And we must ask Mr. Caine to pardon us for thinking that he is immensely Robert Browning's inferior in scholarship, intellect, and knowledge of human nature.

The late Rev. Dr. Farrar was a fluent rhetorical sentimentalist. That is why his trashy *Life of Christ* caught on with the dear silly British public, and brought in a lot of money to author and publisher. Mr. Hall Caine is also a fluent rhetorical sentimentalist. We suggest, therefore, that he should write another *Life of Christ*. He is just the man for the job, and it would bring him in thousands—perhaps tens of thousands. We have long been unable to understand why he neglects this magnificent opportunity. It cannot be that he shrinks from making money out of his Savior, for he has done this systematically for many years in his novels. He and Miss Marie Corelli, indeed, have been running a close race with each other in this direction; and we should really like to know which of the two has coined the most shekels out of the Crucified One.

Mr. C. Rann Kennedy, the American author of the play, *The Servant in the House*, has been unbosoming himself to an interviewer. Listen to this:—

"God chooses strange apostles. He generally chooses the saint and the atheist. The saint sees clearly and brightly the inward mysteries of God, and the atheist sees these mysteries unconsciously in his terrible and tragic fight against the forces of the devil. The atheism of fifty years ago has brought a new belief to most of us. Let us thank God that we have got rid of a bad God."

The last two sentences contain an important truth. All "advanced," "liberal," "progressive" Christianity is simply a confession of the extent to which Freethought has decisively permeated the household of faith. Mr. Campbell and his friends have discovered nothing, invented nothing, created nothing. They have merely adopted, as if it were their own, some of the results of Freethought criticism; such results as fairly intelligent people find it impossible not to recognise. No Church, no religion, is ever really reformed from within. It may seem so to the superficial, but a deeper investigation shows the actual cause to be outside pressure. The Protestant Reformation itself was but a partial adoption of the results of the great Humanist movement in Europe. When it settled down it declared war against further progress, and vied with Catholicism in imprisoning and murdering the bolder spirits who aimed at a complete intellectual liberation. Servetus was burnt by the Protestants, as Bruno was burnt by the Catholics; and now, after the lapse of more than three centuries, Luther and Calvin are both left far behind, and Protestants all over Christendom are steadily moving forward to the ideas of the freethinking martyrs of the sixteenth century.

It would seem as though the fact of the Lyceum Theatre being used for religious services on Sunday gives it a respectable character for the rest of the week. We notice that the Lyceum is the only theatre that advertises its performances in religious newspapers. Evidently the manager has a keen eye for business.

"A Mission to Central London" is being conducted by the Revs. Silvester Horne and Dr. Campbell Morgan. Unlike all other missions, this is a thoroughly scientific one. Most elaborate preparations have been made for it, and 11,000 houses have been visited, at 5,000 of which "a brotherly letter and a well-bound large-type copy of St. Matthew's Gospel" have been delivered. Nothing has been left to

chance. Long articles about it have appeared in the religious press, and hundreds of workers are being employed in addition to the missionaries themselves. The question that suggests itself is this, Where does the Holy Ghost come in? What need for all this tremendous fuss if God loves Central London, and Christ is an omnipotent Savior, and the Holy Ghost is abroad in all the world? Is not Mr. Silvester Horne thus advertising the colossal impotence of the Christian religion, as well as his own organising genius?

We are always pleased to note the extent to which Freethought views of Christianity are gaining ground. Acknowledgment is, of course, never made, but that is a small matter. For instance, we have always pointed out that the belief in a pure human Jesus, who served as the centre around which myths subsequently gathered, was as unwarranted by facts as the orthodox teaching on the subject. The moral teachings of the New Testament Jesus are as much the result of a building up as are the miraculous events. And we have also insisted that the two features, the ethical and the supernatural, are absolutely inseparable. We are glad to find this belief endorsed by one of the leaders of the New Theology, the Rev. K. C. Anderson, who, in criticising an opposite view, remarks: "As a matter of fact, the two cannot be separated; miracle and supernatural dogma are an organic part of the New Testament presentation. Go back as far as you like, what you have at last is a supernatural Christ." Quite so; it was the supernatural Christ the earliest Christians followed. It is the supernatural Christ that the vast majority of modern Christians follow. The purely human Christ, the perfect moral teacher—minus the supernatural—is an invention of modern Christians devised to find favor with a class of people who have lost all faith in the supernatural.

In passing, we may note Dr. Anderson's suggestion that the mention of the Cross by Jesus shows the whole story to have originated after the crucifixion. But, in the first place, the crucifixion is as unhistorical as the resurrection, and Dr. Anderson has no more warranty for accepting the one than he has for accepting the other. And, secondly, the Cross is a religious symbol that is much older than Christianity. Thus, while on Christian principles the mention of the Cross by Jesus is premature, since it only became of religious value by his death, the use of the word before that event is only one more piece of evidence that Christianity is a compound of teachings and symbols familiar to the world long before Christianity, as such, was heard of.

Dr. Aked wants the "municipal thieves" of American cities visited by the "vengeance of God." A pretty sentiment, and quite Christian. One is prompted to ask, however, what has "God" been about to give the thieves the innings of which Dr. Aked complains? Preventing the operations of "municipal thieves" would have been a much more beneficent operation all round than wreaking vengeance after the mischief was done. And we suspect that the justice of man will count for much more in the long run than the vengeance of Dr. Aked's deity.

The Lord Mayor of Liverpool has calculated that there are 37,000 sermons preached in that city every year from Anglican pulpits alone. Being evidently under the impression that an improvement in quality is desirable he is appealing for funds to establish a Board of Divinity for the benefit of the "younger clergy." The object may be a praiseworthy one, but from all we know of the City we fancy both the Lord Mayor's energy and the money subscribed might be put to better purposes. Probably the Medical Officer of Health for Liverpool might offer his lordship suggestions on this head.

Germany, like England, is suffering from a dearth of divinity students. A newspaper correspondent writes that in every university the number of divinity students is the lowest ever reached. In Berlin there are 40 per cent. less than was the case ten years ago, and in some places there were 60 per cent. less. The usual reasons are given for this dearth of embryonic parsons—small salaries, the divorce between faith and practice, etc.—none of which go to the heart of the matter. Men like Haecol in Germany, or Spencer, Darwin, and Mill in England, do not reject Christianity merely because churches are tyrannical or professing believers are often hypocrites. They see that Christianity is intellectually threadbare; and what leaders of thought see, and sometimes say, the majority of educated people are realising—often in a semi-conscious manner—but realising it all the same.

Bishop Gore asks, What ought to be the attitude of Christians towards misery and suffering? Well, as Christians,



their attitude is expressed in the old teaching that they are sent here by God for our benefit. The orthodoxy of this teaching is unquestionable; its logic scarcely less so. The world is designed by God, and all that is in it is part of the providential plan. And thousands of preachers have dwelt upon the good done by suffering in developing character—just as defective eyesight plays a useful purpose in providing work for opticians. But Bishop Gore, who is one of God's well-paid mouthpieces in Birmingham, and who ought to know all about it, says that God does not want misery here at all. Bad feeding of babies, bad housing, sweated industries—God wants none of these things. Well, one asks, why are they here? The Christian who says these things are permitted to be here by God for a wise purpose does at least give some sort of a reply to an inevitable question. But the Christian who says they are here against God's will, and will remain here until man removes them, is making himself ridiculous and his deity impotent. Man will remove the more glaring evils of life, we hope; but we fail to see where God comes in for thanks or praise. The Bishop says that when he walks down a hospital ward he feels thankful for the efforts being made in the relief of suffering. The sentiment does Bishop Gore credit; but it also serves to show how much superior is man to the deity he professes to worship.

"Father" Stanton, who has been forty-seven years at St. Alban's, Holborn, appears to be a very genial old gentleman; but why does the *Daily Chronicle* think it worth while interviewing him about Christian doctrines? What does it matter that he "stands more firmly than ever on the ancient ways," and that to him "the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the Sacraments are very real indeed"? And why chronicle the dear old gentleman's foolish opinion that "the resurrection of Christ is a fact in history that is far better authenticated than, say, the death of Julius Cæsar"? One thing, however, was perhaps worth recording, as it relates to a point on which honesty alone is needed for a sound judgment. Father Stanton declared that he accepted Christian doctrines literally. "If they are not true," he said, "why, then, all we could do would be to break down our altars, put aside our orders, and cease to preach to the people." That's straight.

A Presbyterian minister in St. Paul, Minnesota, says that "People don't read Ingersoll's infidel lectures any more. They get the same stuff from so-called Christian pulpits, magazines, Sunday newspapers, and university professors." We are glad to hear the second half of this statement. It shows that Ingersoll's ideas have triumphed. If he is no longer necessary, it is because his criticism of Christianity has been accepted. But the first half of the reverend gentleman's statement is not true. We understand that the Dresden Edition of Ingersoll's collected works, expensive as it is, still enjoys a large sale in the United States.

Arrangements are being made to celebrate the centenary of Gladstone's birth, which takes place on December 29. We may utilise the occasion by dealing with Gladstone's religious views and controversies, particularly those with Huxley and Ingersoll.

A writer in the *Christian World*, noting the work of the late Dr. Dallinger, remarks that by his investigations Dr. Dallinger "entirely disproved" the theory of spontaneous generation. But this is quite inaccurate. Dr. Dallinger did not disprove the theory, only the fact. He showed, what the scientific world was quite willing to admit, namely, that the experiments performed did not exclude the possibility of living germs acting on the preparations used. But the failure of all experiments to produce life now under artificial conditions in the laboratory does not, and cannot, touch the question of whether living matter may not have developed from inorganic materials at a time when the conditions of the earth permitted many elements to exist in a free state that are now only found in combination. The unbroken continuity of all phenomena, from fire-mist to man, remains as ever a necessity of scientific thought. It is either spontaneous generation or a miracle—and science does not admit the miraculous. Dr. Dallinger saw this clearly enough, for in the pamphlet referred to by the writer mentioned, *The Creator and What We May Know of the Method of Creation*, Dr. Dallinger, after repeating Tyndall's famous declaration that if he could look back over the abyss of time he would expect to see living matter emerging from so-called living material, he remarks, "And so should I." And one may add that the theory is really very little questioned in the scientific world. What is questioned is the artificial production of life in the chemical laboratory.

The "serious situation"—financial, ye ken—in the affairs of the United Free Church of Scotland prompts its official organ to ask "What is to be done?" It is no use trusting that "something will turn up to avert the impending calamity." Every member must "contribute at least an additional 2s. a year" to the Central Fund, and "begin at once,"—and "the more able members should forthwith enrol themselves among the one thousand special contributors." "At once" and "forthwith" are distinctly good. But the godly don't promise to show such a coming on disposition. The palmy days of Scotch religion are over.

We should like further news of the following case. John Norman, of Queen-street, Highfield, was subpoenaed to appear at Wigan County Court before Judge Bradbury. When asked to take the oath he stoutly declined, and persisted in his refusal although warned of the consequences. Judge Bradbury therefore fined him £5, to be enforced if necessary by distress; in default of distress one month's imprisonment. Thus far we are indebted to a paragraph in the *Manchester Evening News*. What we desire to know is whether John Norman claimed to affirm instead of swearing. If he did, the judge treated him illegally and could be brought to book. If he absolutely refused to give evidence, he himself acted wrongly, and must pay the fine or do the month.

"The first guests presented to the Lord Mayor" at the Guildhall banquet on November 9 were two Roman Catholic dignitaries, the Archbishop of Westminster and the Bishop of Southwark. The presence of these priests was "a feature of the occasion." We should think it was. Fifty, forty, thirty years ago, such a thing would scarcely have been dreamed of. But the political and social struggle between wealth and poverty, and privilege and justice, is growing keener and keener; the "classes" cling more and more to the Churches for help, and any Church does in their hour of need. It doesn't pay now to make gratuitous distinctions. A Church is a Church, and a priest is a priest—Protestant or Catholic.

A committee was appointed at the last Lambeth Conference to make a new translation of the Athanasian Creed—the Creed which has been said to be like a royal Bengal tiger, because of its "damnation clause." The Creed, in short, lays down the cardinal Christian dogmas and damns everybody to the lowest hell who rejects them. It lays down one principle with which we cordially agree; namely, that the Father is incomprehensible, the Son is incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost is incomprehensible. They are incomprehensible. But it is rather cruel to say so. We are not astonished, therefore, that the committee propose to substitute "Infinite." They also propose to knock out "hell" and substitute "hades." When that is done the strong brandy of the old creed will be turned to ginger-beer. On the whole, it is a clever piece of strategy, and eminently modern. Nothing must be given up, but everything is to be brought up to date. The policy is not very honest, but it is convenient and profitable,—and what does honesty matter?

Mr. Robert Wallace, K.C., at the London Sessions recently, had a witness before him who affirmed instead of swearing, and his lordship remarked that—"To affirm is much more cleanly and much healthier than being sworn on the Testament." He added that this method would probably be soon employed in the courts in preference to that of kissing the Testament, unless a witness insisted on taking the oath in the latter fashion. The sanitary aspect of the matter is attracting more and more attention. For some time "washable" Testaments have been in use to diminish the risk of infection to witnesses. A few steps further and the oath will disappear. Which is a consummation devoutly to be wished—for it has often been observed by moralists that "the more oaths the more lies."

Having failed to make any effect on the Home Secretary, the Liverpool Protestants are talking about trying what they can do with God Almighty. The suggestion is made in a local paper that intercessory meetings should be held simultaneously all over the city, at which the Lord should be besought to bring about the release of Pastor George Wise from prison. The authors of this pious proposal do not also suggest making it a test of the efficacy of prayer. We wish they would, for we profoundly believe that Pastor George Wise will have to do every day of his four months. The only chance for the heavenly powers, as far as we can see, is to afflict him with serious illness, and secure his release in that way; but that might be more cruel than leaving him to serve out his sentence. It occurs to us, likewise, that the Lord would, in this case, be like the



hungry ass, in the metaphysical puzzle, between two bundles of hay, who was attracted so equally by them that he was at a complete standstill, and died of starvation in the midst of plenty. For if the Protestants prayed for Pastor George Wise's release the Catholics would pray against it, and the Lord could not oblige one side without disobligeing the other.

John Bunyan wrote other interesting works, in their way, but he lives by the *Pilgrim's Progress*. When that dies, he dies; but that event is not easily foreseeable at present. What is the use, then, of collecting £1,400 to place a Bunyan memorial window in Westminster Abbey? Bunyan doesn't need any memorial but the one he made for himself. Besides, he was outside, not inside, the Church of England. The idea is, apparently, that Westminster Abbey should be a show place; a thing that was never contemplated by its original builders.

Who is it that admits pious busybodies to prisons and allows them to harangue the unfortunate prisoners? We see that Lord Kinnaird—Ananias Torrey's old friend—had an evening's entertainment in Wormwood Scrubs Prison, on Wednesday, November 10, at the expense of a large section of the inmates. Some 250 boy convicts were assembled in one of the large buildings attached to the prison to listen to his lordship's eloquence on the subject of the "Ideal Man"—whom, we presume, they had before them in the person of Lord Kinnaird. He was good enough to tell them that the temptations of life were too strong for them, and that they "needed the help of a higher power." He forgot to tell them why the "higher power" had not helped them up to date. He also overlooked the fact that his own temptations were not as theirs. If his lordship picked a pocket, for instance, he would have a perfect genius for pocket-picking. The chance of finding a silk handkerchief or a silver cigarette-case, would be no temptation to him. Nor would a well-filled purse, though to many of them it would be El Dorado. We are strongly of opinion that wealthy Pharisees should not be permitted to deliver moral lectures to the poor devils in prisons, which are, after all, not private, but national, property. Amateur preachers like Lord Kinnaird ought to take Hamlet's advice concerning old Polonius: "Let him play the fool nowhere but in his own house."

After the sermonising peer had done with the boy convicts a man called Porter, of the Hackney Y.M.C.A., was let loose upon them. He informed them that "it doesn't pay to go wrong." We hope he will not learn that truth by personal experience. But you never can tell. They *had* learnt it, at least to some extent, in the dock; so that the noble Porter's lesson was like carrying coals to Newcastle. Besides, one or two of the cleverest and most knowing boys might have told him (if they had been allowed questions and opposition) that while it doesn't pay little thieves to go wrong, it often pays big thieves to do it. There are thousands of successful thieves about, and most of them are highly respectable religious men, some of them even patrons of Young Men's Christian Associations. If it is asked why we say this, we reply that when one of the big thieves happens to get found out he is so frequently a prominent member of a Christian Church.

After breaking several panels in front doors in the High Park district of Southport, a man went to All Saints' Vicarage, and knocked down the Rev. Dr. Porter as he came forward. It is not reported that the reverend gentleman turned the other cheek also.

Father Mulcahy, assisted by Father Welsh, was burying two deceased Roman Catholics in Altrincham cemetery, and had just completed his share of the business, when the Chief Templar of the Lodge that one of the deceased belonged to started reading the Good Templar burial service. This performance was promptly stopped by the priests, who naturally wanted no rivalry on such an occasion. But they could not very well assign that as a reason, so they declared that the extra turn was against the wishes of one of the widows. The other widow thereupon threw herself on the ground and cried out to her dead husband: "Joe, Joe, they won't grant your last request." It was a case of too many cooks spoiling the broth.

The Catholic Bishop of Sebastopolis had a letter in last week's *Athenæum* on "The Catholic Church and Cruelty to Animals." In the course of it he complained of the "sicken- ing sentimentality regarding beasts in these days," and wound up with the following declaration:—

"In the whole teaching of our Divine Lord there is not one syllable about the rights of animals. As regards the particular question of vivisection, it is time to say that the

principle of it is covered by such words of His as 'How much better then is a man than a sheep'; and 'Ye are of more value than many sparrows.'"

We welcome this plain statement with great pleasure. It is good to have the naked truth, without disguises or false decorations. Those who invoke Christianity as the best friend of the lower animals are ignorant or hypocritical. Christianity, indeed, is the one great religion in the world which ignores the moral rights of animals altogether.

The Son of God, on becoming man, is said to have emptied himself of his essential omniscience, with the object of acquiring it again in an infinitely meritorious way. How marvellously wise theologians always are when writing or talking on subjects about which they know absolutely nothing. Not one of them knows that there is a God, not to say that he has an impossible son, co-eternal and co-equal with himself.

Dr. Nicoll says further that there are some people who "refuse to believe in any God who does not forgive and win every created soul." We are not of their number. The God we refuse to believe in is the God who created souls so badly that they require salvation. A perfect Deity could not but have produced a perfect creation. That is the explanation of our Atheism.

The vicar of Rowington, Warwick, thinks the average church-going Englishman is a humbug. Our view exactly, agreeably confirmed by testimony from a most unexpected quarter. But the worthy vicar should reflect that if you offer people an absurd creed one of two things must result—either it is rejected, or a pretence of belief is made, and the worst of all humbugs, a religious humbug, results.

A religious contemporary lauds a new book by a Glasgow minister, the Rev. A. Boyd Scott, who is said to be "one of the most rising and popular preachers of the day." From the extracts given, we see he is capable of the old insolence to unbelievers. "Guilt," he says, "cherishes the pretence of Doubt. And there are ways and manners of life colored less sombrely than guilt, which also fly to Doubt to keep them snugly out of the way of the celestial police." Why doesn't the man say straightforwardly that Doubters are rascals? Bigotry and insolence are no better for using circuitous language. They are rather the worse.

What would the Rev. A. Boyd Scott think if we were to suggest that he and other men are Christians because Atheists cannot possibly escape from their consciences, whereas Christians can always find "accommodations with heaven," as Molière said,—or, in other words, throw all the burden of their sins upon Jesus? He would think us grossly insulting. Well now, let him look into the same glass and see his own face.

Rev. J. Rattenbury has just preached a sermon from the text, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision." The reverend gentleman does not "deny there is a certain fierceness about this expression," but he regards it as essentially true. Let all who forget or deny the Lord beware; the day is coming when he will laugh at them and have them in derision. This applies specially to Atheists, with whom it will go hard when the Lord's day comes. Now, God takes no notice of their insolence, expresses neither approval nor disapproval of their unbelief, but then he "shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Yes, he will do it when his day comes! Mr. Rattenbury is quite right, and he is an absolutely safe prophet—much safer than his brother Baxter.

Rev. E. G. Maxted, of Dunmow, Essex, is a Socialist parson, and he has just been burnt in effigy by a lot of local ill-wishers. It is said that several clergymen contributed to the expenses of the bonfire. We don't see, however, that the reverend gentleman has suffered very seriously. The Church he belongs to used to burn people alive. He may think himself lucky that it cannot go through that performance now.

Rev. Frank Swainson, vicar of St. Barnabas, Harvist road, Holloway, calls Spiritualism "a strange mixture of devilry and trickery." Well, suppose it is; are there not other systems that merit the same description? The reverend gentleman might look nearer home.



## Mr. Foote's Engagements.

November 28, Birmingham Town Hall.  
December 5, St. Pancras Baths.

## To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—November 21, West Ham; 28, Aberdare. December 5, Liverpool; 12, Manchester; 19, West Ham.
- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 5, Holloway; 12, St. Pancras Baths; 19, Leicester.
- THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Annual Subscriptions.—Previously acknowledged, £268 17s. Received since.—W. J. Conroy, 2s. 6d.; T. Hamilton, 2s. 6d.; E. Raggett, 1s.; P. Stringer, 1s.
- W. T. F.—Very amusing.
- J. HASE.—Not up to the mark.
- W. E. J.—See paragraph. Thanks.
- W. J. CONROY.—Thanks for good wishes. Mr. Foote keeps tolerably well and fit for work. After all, he has only had to break two engagements in five years; which shows he is not fond of giving in.
- H. A. MOUNTAIN.—See "Acid Drops."
- R. STEVENSON.—We said at the time that the fight between the two Churches in Scotland was over the cash-box.
- C. A. TURNER.—We cannot afford a secretary or a sub-editor, and as so much work, even drudgery, falls upon us, we are unable to take up many suggestions like yours, which is quite sound. You are certainly not "impertinent" in writing to us.
- G. CROOKSON.—There was an old play on the subject of Hamlet in existence (many years before Shakespeare's) as early as 1589, perhaps written by Thomas Kyd. It was referred to in that year by Thomas Nash in a printed letter accompanying Greene's *Menaphon*.
- J. TOMKINS.—Thanks for enclosure, though we cannot deal with it this week.
- A. GERMANY.—Glad you still value the *Freethinker* so highly. Your letter gives us pleasure. The enclosed shall appear.
- A. ROOS.—We cannot answer such questions by post. You would find answers to most of them in our *Bible Romances*, a large volume published at 6d. or 8d. post free. When a Christian asks you how the world was made, ask him how he knows it was made. Glad you like the *Freethinker* so much.
- W. P. BALL.—Thanks for welcome cuttings.
- A. J. FINCKEN.—By "Jesus Christ" kind of play we simply meant that it brought what some people suppose to be the "spirit of Christ" upon the stage. We made no other comment on *The Servant in the House*, which we have not seen. We note that you consider it a very bold play and advise all *Freethinkers* to go and see it.
- F. ROBBINS.—We gave that sky-pilot's case a paragraph a week ago; it is hardly worth another.
- J. H. (Johannesburg).—Pleased to hear *Freethought* is spreading in South Africa, and glad to have your encouraging letter, also to know that you read the *Freethinker* with so much pleasure.
- THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is 2 at Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- PERSONS remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send *halfpenny stamps*.
- THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

## Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote had fine audiences at Liverpool on Sunday. In the evening the hall was packed almost to suffocation, yet the audience listened with unflagging attention for over an hour and a half to the lecture on "Shakespeare's Philosophy of Life and Death." Mr. Ross presided at the afternoon meeting, and Mr. Hammond at the evening meeting. Before the Shakespeare lecture Mr. Duff very effectively sang "I shot an arrow into the air," and was deservedly applauded.

We are happy to hear that the united Liverpool Branch is progressing quite harmoniously, the old troubles being cast into Time's wallet carrying "alms for oblivion."

Two lectures at the St. Pancras Baths, under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd., will take place on the first two Sundays in December. Mr. Foote opens and Mr. Lloyd closes this brief course. Another course of Sunday evening lectures, under the same auspices, will take place at Stratford Town Hall on January 16, 23, and 30; the lecturers being Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, and Foote. We are also pleased to announce that the Secular Society, Ltd., has secured St. James's Hall again for the whole of January, February, and March. Mr. Foote will lead off with a special course of three new lectures, which will be duly announced.

Mr. George Payne, of Manchester, has just contributed a further sum of £50 to the funds of the Secular Society, Ltd. He does not seek publicity, but rather shuns it; and we only mention the matter because his liberality may prompt others to "go and do likewise"—at least, to the extent of their opportunities.

The new North London Branch has engaged the St. Pancras Baths, Prince of Wales-road, Kentish Town, N.W., for Sunday evening, November 28. Mr. E. C. Saphin is the lecturer; his subject "Christianity and Sun-Worship," with lantern illustrations.

Mr. G. Crookson, a veteran *Freethinker*, residing in Yorkshire, went over to Manchester to hear Mr. Foote lecture on November 7, and subsequently wrote him a letter, from which we extract the following passages as likely to interest many of our readers:—

"The room was too crowded for me to thank you personally for the treat I had.....The first surprise I had was when I arrived at the hall and found a queue extending all across the road. I have attended some hundreds of *Freethought* lectures, but that was a record; and although I did not like the idea of not getting a seat I was awfully pleased at your having a crowded audience, and wished it may ever be so. The Ferrer lecture was deeply interesting, beyond my expectations; but the evening lecture was an intellectual treat that I have not had for such a long time, and despair of ever hearing again. I was wondering if half the audience was as interested as I was.....I tried to count up how many years it was since I heard you at Hoyland lecturing on Gladstone and Beaconsfield."

We don't want to count up how many years ago it was. Hang chronology!

Francis Johnson and Sasha Kropotkin, joint secretaries of the Ferrer Protest Meeting held at the Memorial Hall on Thursday, October 21, state in a letter to the press that the sum of £90 17s. 3d. was subscribed towards the expenses, and £13 9s. 8d. collected at the meeting. The expenses amounted to £30 12s. 1d., leaving a balance of £73 14s. 10d., which is being devoted to "the relief of the families of those in Montjuich." Considering the cost of the meeting, it may be thought that the speakers received fees or expenses, but those conversant with such matters will hardly need to be assured that this was not the case.

We have just seen in a French paper the text of the letter sent by Madame Zola to one of Ferrer's daughters. The following is an English translation for our readers:—

"Salsomaggiore, October 15.

MADAME,—

It is an ancient and unappeasable sorrow which comes to you on this day of universal grief. I hold out to you a friend's hand. Be brave in the face of iniquity. Have the courage to continue the Modern School, created by your father, who believed he was working for humanity. You should be proud of the example he has given by his sublime death. My heart is with yours, and I salute you with all sympathy.

ALEXANDRINE EMILE-ZOLA."

A good woman's letter to a sorely smitten sister. Yet they say that Atheism dries up the heart.

## CHRISTIANITY AND VOLTAIRE.

The partisans of the creed in whose name more human blood has been violently shed than in any other cause whatever, can hardly find much ground of serious reproach in a few score epigrams. Voltaire had no calm breadth of wisdom! It may be so. There are moments which need not this calm breadth of wisdom, but a two-edged sword, and when the deliverers of mankind are they who "come to send fire on the earth."—*John Morley*.



## Anatomical Testimony to the Truth of Evolution.

AMONG the multitudinous testimonies to the truth of Evolution, few so readily lend themselves to exposition and practical demonstration as do those presented by the important science of comparative anatomy.

Founded in classic Greece by Aristotle, taxonomy and anatomy remained for more than fifteen centuries practically stationary. The scientific advances made by Aristotle's Greek and Roman successors upon the principles the great Stagirite enunciated were completely obscured by the universal darkness that descended upon Europe with the downfall of Pagan civilisation and the triumph of the Christian Church.

But when Western Europe reawakened from the mental sloth and somnolence of the dark ages of faith, the natural history sciences shared in the revived interest in the facts of life as a whole, and, increment by increment, the way was slowly prepared for that outburst of scientific splendor which gave the nineteenth century pre-eminence above all others as the epoch of completely unified knowledge.

In popular, as in more careful and exact, classification it had long been recognised that Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, Amphibians, and Fishes share many striking characteristics in common which separate them from Molluscs, Crustaceans, Insects, Worms, and animals of the simplest type. Nevertheless the eighteenth century had nearly run its course before Lamarck, in 1797, distinctly and precisely classified the two great divisions of the animal kingdom. The great French zoologist drew a firm line between backboneed or vertebrate and backboneless or invertebrate forms. During the course of the nineteenth century anatomists and embryologists perfected Lamarck's system of classification, and the more important characteristics of vertebrate organisms are thus summed up: Vertebrated animals alone possess an *internal* jointed skeleton worked by outside muscles. The axis of this skeleton is a jointed backbone (vertebral column) which encloses and protects the nervous centres (cerebro-spinal axis). These structural phenomena thus justify the term, backboneed animals. Again, all vertebrates have a number of their *anterior* vertebral joints enlarged and consolidated into a box-like structure to form the skull, which protects an accompanying enlargement of the nervous centre, the brain. Vertebrates usually, but not always, possess a number of *posterior* or lower joints, likewise enlarged and consolidated for the purpose of forming the pelvis which serves as a firm support for the hind limbs. With few exceptions, vertebrates possess two pairs of limbs. The exceptions are of two kinds: the most primitive fishes, amphioxus, and lampreys, which represent the vertebrate condition before limbs were evolved; and degenerate forms like snakes and some lizards, which have lost their limbs through disuse.

This general plan of skeletal structure which obtains throughout the entire range of the backboneed family of animals strongly suggests, and in fact is inexplicable without, the hypothesis of common descent. But what follows not merely suggests, but demonstrates, evolution from a single ancestral stem. An extensive and elaborate comparison in the classificatory and developmental series of backboneed animals clearly demonstrates its detailed structures as obvious modifications of one primitive set of organs. In some instances an organ is enlarged, in others diminished; sometimes separate bones are fused into one; but despite all disguises, the corresponding parts are almost invariably to be detected.

This article would become too technical were we to examine the entire skeleton. The limbs will serve best for the demonstration of our thesis, both because their general structure is more familiar and because in them the fundamental proofs of essential identity

and adaptive modification are each clearly illustrated. Animals mainly react on their environment through the actions of their limbs, and these in turn are greatly modified by the environment.

The fore-limb in man, monkeys, and some other mammals is fairly free from the body, with the elbow half way down the limb: but in herbivorous animals, such as the horse, ox, and deer, the elbow is firmly attached to the side of the body, and the limb is free only from the elbow downwards. All gradations between these structural extremes are met with in other departments of the vertebrate series. The free condition of the extremity was the earlier one, the modified limbs of the herbivorous animals representing an extreme adaptation associated with another to be presently pointed out.

Man, apes, and other mammals, and all reptiles and birds, possess two bones in the fore-arm (radius and ulna). Animals departing more widely from the primitive plan of structure, such as the horse and ruminants, apparently possess one only. Two is the normal and original number; but in these hoofed quadrupeds the *ulna* has steadily dwindled, and is now reduced to a small splint which is consolidated with the *radius*, thus forming a process which extends backwards to produce the point of the elbow. In the evolution of the horse, as revealed by its palaeontological history, every step in this reduction and consolidation has been traced.

Again, the *wrist* of various mammals, and the entire order of birds, comprises a smaller number of bones than that of man. Man possesses the normal number, which is eight. Where reduction has occurred, it has usually taken the form of consolidation.

In such cases the embryo usually shows the bones still separate, thus revealing the ancestral state. The position of the wrist is also noteworthy. The hand in man, monkeys, the bear family, and the entire order of limbed reptiles bends forward at the wrist, so that the tread is on the whole palm. But in all the more specialised mammals the wrist cannot bend in this direction, and consequently this joint cannot be brought to the ground. The tread is therefore on the toes (digitigrade), and the wrist is well above the ground. In the horse, ox, and other ungulates, the wrist is so elevated that it is seldom recognised as a wrist at all, and is commonly called the fore-knee. Comparative anatomists agree that homologous organs should bear the same scientific name; but to use the term "hand" when dealing with the lower animals would obviously lead to confusion. They therefore employ the Latin word *manus* to indicate all those organs of animals which correspond with the hand of man. The *manus* of a horse is about fifteen inches long; while the *manus* of the extinct reptilian pterodactyl, with an expanse of wing of twenty-five feet, was probably seven or eight feet in length.

The number of palm bones is entitled to attention. In fishes and in some extinct swimming reptiles these were, or are, numerous, but in the earliest terrestrial animals were reduced to five. Five is now the normal number in nearly all reptiles, and in all the more generalised mammals. In the dog family these are reduced to four, though the fifth usually lingers as an aborted dew-claw, thus indicating the process of dwindling in the ancestry. The elephant possesses five palm bones and toes; the hippopotamus has four, all of which function. Swine retain four; but two lie behind the others, are much smaller, and never touch the solid ground—are, in fact, functionless, except on marsh or bogland. The palm bones of bovine animals are reduced to two, which consolidate into one (canon bone), and the toes are reduced to two *efficient* and two *useless* organs. In sheep and goats these rudiments have disappeared; and finally, in the horse the toes have dwindled to one, although three palm bones are present, two of them still surviving as rudimentary splints.

The Bird family possesses three palm bones and three fingers; one of these, the thumb, is free, and occasionally bears a claw. The most primitive of



known reptilian birds, the long-extinct Archæopteryx, carried three fingers at liberty which were all provided with claws. And the evolutionary evidence is deepened by the discovery that in the embryos of contemporary birds the fingers are all free, as in the fossil Archæopteryx.

An excellent illustration of different adaptive modifications to secure the function of flight is displayed by the structural changes undergone by the *manus* of flying animals. The flat flying-plane of the bat is produced by enormous elongation of the palm and finger bones, aided by their wide separation and the stretching of a thin membrane between them. In extinct flying reptiles (Pterosaurs) one finger only is considerably enlarged and lengthened, and the flying membrane is expanded between this finger and the hind-limb, the three remaining fingers being free. Curiously enough, the digit which has been modified to form the solid structure of this reptile's flying membrane is merely the elongated and enlarged little finger. In birds, on the contrary, the *manus* is consolidated to the utmost limit to provide a substantial basis for attachments for the quills which form the flying-plane, and which are themselves the extreme modifications of the scales of reptiles.

It is unnecessary to dilate upon the still greater adaptive changes undergone in the swimming organs of whales, ichthyosaurs, or fishes. A visit to the galleries of the Museum of Natural History at South Kensington will enable the student to see at a glance how organs of locomotion, that were all constructed on a similar plan, have been modified to function in multitudinous ways.

A passing glance at the hind-limbs of vertebrated animals reveals many interesting facts. The thigh-bone in man, apes, bears, and other groups of mammals and all reptiles is freely suspended from the body, and the knee is far removed and halfway down the limb. This represents the earliest condition of terrestrial animals. But in all the more highly specialised and swifter animals the knee approaches the body with greater and greater closeness, until in the swiftest of all, such as the ruminants and the horse, it is high up on the side of the body.

The position of the heel is also instructive. In man, monkey, and all extant reptiles, the tread is on the whole foot—plantigrade; in more specialised and active animals, such as the horse or deer, the heel is highly elevated, and the tread is digitigrade.

All primitive mammals were five-toed, but in the more specialised orders, such as the hoofed animals (Ungulates), the digits were steadily reduced in number in the course of evolution. If an animal possesses four toes, it is usually the first (great toe or thumb) that is aborted or missing. Hoofed animals are divisible into two groups, even-toed (artiodactyl) and odd-toed (perissodactyl). The even-toed may possess four, as in the hippopotamus, or two, as in the goat. The odd-toed may have three, as in the rhinoceros, or one, as in the horse. Both these orders were developed in Eocene Tertiary times, from a five-toed plantigrade ancestor.

The evolutionary history of the horse has been more fully worked out than that of any other vertebrate. The beautiful form and structure of this animal is the outcome of slight changes made from generation to generation, and from epoch to epoch, in the earth's history. The earliest form that can with certainty be traced is the Eohippus of Professor Marsh. This was an animal no larger than a fox, with three hind toes, and four serviceable toes in front, with an additional fifth palm bone (splint). In later Eocene times was evolved the Orohippus, which is distinguished from the Eohippus mainly through the disappearance of the rudimentary fifth toe and splint. In the succeeding Miocene period arrived the Meshippus and Miohippus. These were larger animals, about the size of sheep, and possessed three serviceable toes on each foot. Then in the Pliocene developed the Protohippus and Pliohippus. These animals were larger still, reaching the size of the ass. In the former, the two side toes were

shortening up, and the middle toe growing larger. In the latter, the two side toes have dwindled to splints. Lastly, only in the Quaternary appears the true horse (*Equus caballus*). The animal has increased in size, its middle toe in strength, but its side splints have grown smaller, albeit retaining indubitable traces of its descent from a three-toed ancestor.

What has been proved in the limbs is equally applicable to the skeleton in its entirety. To the casual observer, the bodies of animals of separate orders appear to differ fundamentally in plan. Comparative anatomy, on the contrary, demonstrates their essential identity, however obscured by adaptive modifications. The simplest and most scientific, in fact the only rational explanation of vertebrate morphology and physiology is Haeckel's and Spencer's concept of a primitive vertebrate, subject to the increasing differentiation of surrounding circumstances, and consequently becoming more and more modified by the necessities of varying modes of existence.

Nature seldom or never appears to develop new organs, but, if possible, adapts old ones to new functions. It seems as though the methods of Nature were rigidly determined by laws of growth. In far-off Devonian days fishes were the sole representatives of the vertebrate type of structure. The vertebrate was then a swimming animal. As the ages rolled on, conditions favored the introduction of walking animals, and reptiles were developed. With the evolution of the function of locomotion on land, no new organ was produced for the purpose. The swimming organ of the fish was modified into a crawling limb. Time passes away, until in the middle Jurassic birds make their entry upon evolution's stage. With their advent is witnessed the appearance of a further wonderful function—that of flight. It has been acutely remarked that we may readily conjecture how man would have manufactured organs of flight if we recall the results of his imagination as displayed in the angels of Christian art and the griffins of Greek mythology.\* Man would have added organs of flight to already existing parts, thus necessitating an alteration in the entire structural plan. The sum-total of Force and Energy to which we give the name of Nature has followed a more economical method in merely adapting fore-limbs for purposes of flight. She seems to say, If you require wings you must sacrifice fore-feet; you cannot have both without violating the laws of morphology. And then, to crown the biological edifice, man was evolved. His tactual appendages are second only in importance to his brain. Nevertheless, he only gained possession of hands by sacrificing his fore-feet. Thus we discern in the fin of the fish, the fore-paw of a reptile or mammal, the paddle of a whale, the wing of a bird, the arm and hand of man, the same primitive organ variously modified to meet the changed requirements of life.

The numerous details reviewed in the foregoing article are explicable in terms of organic evolution alone. When thus interpreted, these phenomena form an inter-dependent whole which blends harmoniously together. But when surveyed from the standpoint of special creation, these same phenomena are reduced to a mere medley of curiosities and coincidences, destitute of rhyme or reason alike.

T. F. P.

#### HER DESTINATION.

The uninspired idiot was descanting on the race suicide situation. "Those," he declared with conviction, "who do not marry in this world will be married in the next."

"But," interposed the bachelor girl who had once refused him, "in heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage."

"I know it," replied the idiot, seeking a toothpick and withdrawing hastily.

\* Professor Joseph Le Conte.



### Presbyterian Mummery.

THE Presbyterians of Scotland frequently boast that their system of religion is free from the complexities and adornments which are to be found in the Episcopalian system. Presbyterians are accustomed to assert that their system is superior to the Episcopal system because it is less ornate and more simple. They also hold that their system is more democratic than that of the Episcopalians in the matter of management. They confidently point to rule by Presbytery as being less autocratic than rule by individual bishops.

Now this attempt to retain the allegiance of the laity is a very feeble thing. The points in which Presbyterians claim superiority over Episcopalianism are superficial and really in the nature of red herrings drawn across the track. Let us examine the Presbyterian system, and we shall find that in the Presbytery the clerical element largely predominates. The same remark applies to Synods and Assemblies. It is true that in the Kirk Sessions there is only one clergyman, who is always chairman; but, then, Kirk Sessions only administer the affairs of individual congregations, and they are stocked with lay members of the Church who usually say ditto to the minister. "If a 'stormy petrel' occasionally makes his appearance among the laymen, means are quickly found to effectually repress him, and he finds his position so uncomfortably hot that he soon relapses into silence and probably retires from the deliberations of the august body with which he is identified.

On the showing of representatives of both systems themselves, it is clear that the differences between them are superficial and unessential, and the recent efforts that have been made to secure union among Protestants are based on the very plea that there is not really any substance in these differences. Accordingly, we are justified in assuming that in essentials both Presbyterian and Episcopalian are *at cne*.

There can be no doubt that, in every Protestant sect, the great object of the clergy is to maintain clerical ascendancy. Every parson is a pope at heart. The Baptist and Congregational communities for some time endeavored to conduct their services without the aid of regularly ordained clergymen and solely by the ministrations of Church members who had other occupations. But that system would not work. The craving for spiritual advisers became so strong that even among Baptists and Congregationalists the demand for "men of God" who should devote themselves exclusively to the affairs of the sanctuary and pastoral work, had to be acceded to.

That Presbyterian ministers are as insistent upon their claims to recognition as *the leading profession* as the clergy of any other denomination cannot for a moment be doubted. One leading religionist calls theology the Queen of Sciences, and clergymen are therefore her courtiers. We can find plenty of Presbyterian mummery at the ordination of a Presbyterian minister—one of the most "solemn" functions that can be imagined. The dear brother is set apart by the laying on of hands. He is prayed over. Another dear brother preaches one sermon of advice to him and another to his prospective congregation. This latter gentleman invariably informs the assembly that the ministry is the greatest, most honorable, and most responsible vocation to which any man can be called, because he is "called of God." And nobody laughs—at least openly.

But surely lawyers and doctors must on occasion laugh in their sleeves at this kind of flatulent rubbish. Let us ask with unbiased minds what purpose the existence of such a profession as the clergy serves? By their training they have no knowledge of the practical side of life, and I cannot think of a more ludicrous scene than that of a boy of twenty-two or twenty-three getting up and lecturing white-haired men and women, and telling them how they ought to live. The clergy profess to be followers of Christ; but he had an occupation other than that of preacher. He was a carpenter as well. If the clergy had to work for their living and earn their bread like other people, they might have some little claim to speak to people about *life*; but they would, with increased knowledge, have a livelier appreciation of the truth that "silence is golden." Scotland has suffered from her religion: she has always benefited by her philosophy. And gradually the people are removing the galling yoke of religious servitude.

SIMPLE SANDY.

### Correspondence.

"J. B." v. J. P.

"The Power, and the Glory, For ever and ever. Amen."  
TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Never does a paper become more nauseating than when it assumes, on the pedestal of public morals and

religion, an attitude of virtuous indignation. Not least among these is "John Bull"—"John Bull" who champions middle-class common sense, and apparently middle-class virtues and religion.

A short time ago Mrs. Besant was "exposed," and ordered to appear before her judges—Horatio & Co. She naturally took no notice of this palpable journalistic trick to obtain a good headline; and for some time our Streatham Common bulldog snarled and growled at her, until eventually some other lamp-post attracted his attention. And now it is once again John Pigott who is creating good middle-class copy and indignation.

The knowledge I possess of J. P. and his following is that, in spite of their extremely Christian rules of life, they form a peaceful and law-abiding community. Therefore the points I should like you, Mr. G. W. Foote (the editor of what I believe to be the *only* honest journal in this country—I say this with absolute sincerity and after having read the *Freethinker* for seven years), to allow me to point out:—

That "John Bull," by the act of making much coin out of having forced the Bishop's hand to unfrock Pigott, is not only toadying to, and trading on, the Christian Church, but is talking claptrap. For, from Bishop to deacon throughout this country, how many are there who have not persistently and religiously broken one or more of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and therefore equally deserve the honor of not being taken for "a clerk in holy orders"?

To economise space let me skip the catch-penny headlines and get to the main point—the charges brought by "J. B." against J. P.

1. "Promiscuous immoral intercourse." I, as an Atheist, however, maintain that J. P. has chapter and verse and the whole Bible behind him to support his mode of living. The Bible, do I say,—the very book that those who unfrocked him, by order of "John Bull," live upon like parasites on a hog's back.

2. That orgies take place in the Abode of Love "which resemble the 'love-feasts' of the shameless days of the Emperor Nero," and that these are termed "The Worship of the Master." This is a truly Christian perversion of history from the Bishop's standpoint. Really, "J. B.," do you also pilfer from the Christian larder of lies? The Bacchanalia, not even in the days of Petronius and Nero, sank to such sluttish filthiness as the "love feasts" of the first worshipers of Christ. Read your Bible, "J. B.," your Christian Fathers, and your Christian ecclesiastical writers.

3. That J. P. indulges in "Blasphemous Chants." Why shouldn't he in his own house? I, as an Atheist, repudiate blasphemy root and branch; for, once admit blasphemy against J. P., and every Freethinker in England will be threatened. If a man cannot sing what he likes in his own house, and if the law is set in motion to prevent him doing so, then, indeed, are we nearer the Star Chamber and the Inquisition than even the "Bournemouth Corporation Kill-joys" would like us to be.

4. That J. P. swindles his victims by "having first hypnotised them by his ecclesiastical love-making." The Roman Catholic Church, which is a power in this land, swindles thousands of men and women—chiefly women—each year, not by love-making only, but by bullying, threats of hell, and purgatory. Is there also so very much difference between a spouse of J. P. and a spouse of J. C.? Why not turn your attention from the Spaxton doorstep to the doorpost of the Vatican, my dear Toby?

And then to cap all this we read: "If the strict letter of the law does not quite apply, then in a case of this character it must be strained. The police must be instructed to act....." And all this because he won't give up "Glory." Oh, dear! oh, dear! why it's just like roading about the source of England's greatness—to lie for the greater "Glory" of J. C.; to do an injustice for the greater "Circulation" of "J. B."! However, let us be serious and proper, just like the people in Tooting, Peckham Rye, and Long-acre. Perhaps "J. B." is right after all, with the Bishops thrown in, and we, the wicked Atheists, are wrong; therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let him open his Bible, Acts xii. 23, 24: "And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him [John Pigott] because he gave not God [the] Glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grow and multiplied." This is what I, for one, am afraid of; hence this letter!

N. S. F.

[Some expressions in this letter are rather strong, but we have never kept too tight a rein over correspondents, and Mr. Bottomley is probably as able to take as to give. The substance of this correspondent's letter is perfectly legitimate criticism. We have often said that the pursuit of Pigott is a very cheap virtue on the part of English newspapers. They go for him when they want copy; they know his case is really of no importance, and they also know there is no danger in attacking him.—EDITOR.]



### A Vicar's Tribute to Ferrer.

[Rev. P. E. T. Widdington, Vicar of St. Peter's, Coventry, publishes the following in the November number of his "Parish Magazine." It is so unusual a thing to come from the pen of a clergyman that we venture to reproduce it for our own readers, who will doubtless be glad to have it brought to their attention.]

I AM told that much adverse criticism has been aroused by a recent sermon of mine, and by the playing, after service, of the Dead March in memory of Senor Ferrer. The grounds on which I asked the congregation to take part in this ceremony were stated in my sermon. They were grounds which, in the years past when England stood for liberty of thought and championed the cause of oppressed peoples, would have been deemed sufficient by the great majority of my fellow countrymen: the grounds that Ferrer was the victim of a judicial murder instigated by the foes of religious and political freedom. Not for one moment did I imagine that I was committing the congregation to an expression of sympathy with Senor Ferrer's teaching on religion and politics. It is monstrous to assert, as it is being asserted, that the tribute that was paid to the memory of a brave man who died at the hands of tyrants, is tantamount to sympathy with opinions he may have held. The fact that the great leaders of the Free Churches such as the Rev. F. B. Meyer, the Rev. R. J. Campbell, and Dr. Clifford have identified themselves with the demonstrations of protest against Ferrer's execution, confutes such an assertion. And, further, as far as I am able to discover, the opinions attributed to the dead man by an anonymous writer in the *Saturday Review*, and which have been disseminated as facts by the *Yellow Press*, and by certain partisans of the Roman Church, cannot be substantiated as emanating from Ferrer. It is true that he was an Agnostic and that the schools he established were secular schools—that is, schools in which, according to the testimony of one who knew him, no religious teaching was given. But I am loth to believe that enlightened Christians to-day would withhold their admiration of the moral greatness of such a man as Lord Morley because he does not share their religious beliefs, and has written books against the Faith. Nay, there is no doubt in my mind that the refusal of privilege of burial within Westminster Abbey to that last of the great Victorians, George Meredith, on the ground of his religious beliefs, was repugnant to the educated Christian conscience of this country. The extraordinary ebullition of religious and political bigotry, and the support, for party reasons, of the infamous administration of Senor Maura and his clerical abettors, does not represent the traditions of England. It is a question whether the poisoning of the minds of the people by the shameless mendacity of the *Yellow Press* is not a more serious menace to our national life than the ravages of the Drink Traffic. Only last week, a responsible journal had the audacity to publish a message from its correspondent in Spain to the effect that the Spanish people were not concerned in the agitations against the government, and this at the very moment when a large part of the Peninsular was under Martial Law, and the government of Senor Maura was being hurled from power!

I refuse to believe that English people have lost their faith in religious and political freedom, or that the body of the nation is ranged on the side of one the worst and vilest administrations in the history of modern Spain.

One last word. Remember, the fight in Spain and the other countries of Europe is not against Religion; it is Catholicism. The fight is against Clericalism, the point of view which looks on the Church as a vested interest. Clericalism, wherever it is found, and it penetrates into all religious bodies, is the foe of the Christian religion, and the enemy of the people.

I have had my say, and not all the columns of manufactured correspondence will draw me.

### Another Convert.

SECRETARY Reichwald of the American Secular Union, who lives in Chicago, was led by curiosity to attend one of the revival meetings held in the Seventh Regiment Armory by Gypsy Smith. He writes us: "I found Gypsy a medium-sized man, dark complexioned, and full of magnetism. He tells pathetic stories and sings melancholy songs. He gets the sympathy of the tender-hearted people. I saw several both men and women, weep when told these stories. You would think he was crying himself when he is telling them. He appeals to their emotions. They break down and go into hysterics. At 10.30 the meeting formed into a procession and marched into what is known as the Red Light

District. I never knew before where that was; I know it now. All the tough saloons and concerts halls were doing a rushing business. Every house was closed where the revivalist thought of making converts. The places were crowded with customers; they could not hold any more, so they locked the doors. He himself would sing such songs as 'Where Is My Wandering Boy To-night?' in order to get his hearers in a melancholy mood. The revival was gotten up by local ministers to inject new life into their religion, which has been on the wane for some time." Mr. Reichwald tells a joke at his own expense. When he got to the Armory in which the revival was going on he found the place full and the doors closed, and not being able to get in from the front way he walked to the rear, where the police were taking out the fainting and hysterical, and doing some reviving of a different sort. When the door opened to let them out with a man in a faint, Reichwald slipped in. He found Gypsy on an elevated platform near the centre of the hall. As the seats were all taken, Reichwald had to keep his feet. Just then the revivalist appealed to all in the crowd to stand up who wanted Jesus. Turning toward Reichwald, and asking if there were any in that quarter to rise, he espied the secretary standing; whereupon he shouted in a voice audible a block away: "Here is a brother that wants Jesus. God bless you brother, you are saved." Every eye in the place was turned on Reichwald, who, though embarrassed, took the dose fairly well. He is now receiving "congratulations" from all friends on his conversion by Gypsy Smith.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

### NO HURRY ABOUT IT.

An old Kansas citizen, who had been henpecked all his life, was about to die. His wife felt it her duty to offer him such consolation as she might, and said: "John, you are about to go, but I will follow you." "I suppose so, Manda," said the old man weakly, "but so far as I am concerned you don't need to be in any blamed hurry about it."

### "MARGARITA'S SOUL."

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard who at the latest hour received the same wage as those who had worked the entire day Margarita rejected as unfair and absurd. "But, my dear," said her mentor, "it had the approval of our Lord."

"He was probably not one of the ones who had worked all day, then," Margarita replied blandly.

### AN IDEAL JURYMAN.

Judge: "You are a freeholder?"  
Talesman: "Yes, sir, I am."  
"Married or single?"  
"Married three years last June."  
"Have you formed or expressed any opinion?"  
"Not for three years, your Honor."

### EQUIVOCAL.

There was doubt in the faces of the women of the congregation when the minister announced: "The Mothers' Meeting will be held next Wednesday evening at the home of Mrs. Smith. Ladies wishing to qualify as members of the Society should meet the pastor in his study."

### SURE TO BE UNENCUMBERED.

When Phillips Brooks sailed from America on his last trip to Europe, a friend jokingly remarked that while abroad he might discover some new religion to bring home with him.

"But be careful of it, Bishop Brooks," remarked a listening friend. "It may be difficult to get your new religion through the custom house."

"I guess not," replied the Bishop laughingly, "for we may take it for granted that any new religion popular enough to import will have no duties attached to it."

### JUDICIAL NOTE.

Prosecuting Attorney (Frozen Dog): "Your honor, the sheriff's bull pup has gone and chawed up the court Bible."

Judge: "Well, make the witness kiss the bull pup, then! We can't adjourn court for a week just to hunt up a new Bible."

### RADICAL CURE.

Bill: "I never sleep at Sunday chapel any more."

Jack: "Broken yourself of the habit?"

Bill: "No; quit goin'."



## 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.

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Church-street, Upper-street, N.): 7.30, J. Rowney, "The Sermon on the Mount."

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES HUMANITARIAN SOCIETY (Fife Hall, Fife-road): F. A. Davies, "Religion and Life."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Public Hall (Minor), Barking-road, Canning Town): 7.30, C. Cohen, "The Origin and Decay of God."

#### OUTDOOR.

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Highbury Corner): 12 (noon), Sidney Cook, "The Life of Jesus." Packington-street, Essex-road, 12 (noon), Walter Bradford, a Lecture.

### COUNTRY.

#### INDOOR.

EDINBURGH SECULAR SOCIETY (Club Rooms, 12 Hill-square): 6.30, Debate between Mr. Maclaren and J. G. Bowie, "Does the Creation Story agree with Science?"

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): J. M. Robertson, 12 (noon), "Aspects of the Population Question"; 6.30, "Christian Scholarship and Christ."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, J. McCabe, "The Evolution of Morality.—III. The Threshold of Civilisation." Lantern illustrations.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, H. Percy Ward, "Heaven and How to Escape It."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): Ernest Evans, 3, "Uranium and the Age of the Earth"; 6.30, "Animals Ancient and Modern." Tea at 5.

NEWCASTLE RATIONALIST DEBATING SOCIETY (Vegetarian Café, Nelson-street): 7.30, T. T. Lodge, "Intolerance."

NOTTINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Cobden Hall, Peachey-street): 7.30, F. R. Chasty, "Christian Socialism a Fraud, a Delusion, and a Snare."

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (above Tram Hotel, Market-place): 7.30, Important Business Meeting; Lecture arrangements.

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