

THE Freethinker

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PRICE TWOPENCE

*Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant!
Theirs the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.*

—ROBERT BROWNING.

Mr. Campbell on the Future of Religion.

A REPRESENTATIVE of a French newspaper lately interviewed Mr. R. J. Campbell on the position of religion in England, and an account of the interview is given by Mr. Campbell in the Christmas number of *T. P.'s Weekly*. According to Mr. Campbell's report the French newspaper man was much puzzled about certain features of the religious life in this country. In his own country, as elsewhere on the continent, he explained, the average man either accepted Catholicism or he repudiated religion altogether. Protestantism counted for very little, and really made little or no headway. There was a flagrant opposition between the Church and the modern mind, especially that portion tinged with Socialistic ideals. In England the interviewer found "a strong religious element," and a growing religious movement in sympathy with social aspirations. And he asked Mr. Campbell the pertinent questions, "How do you square your Christianity with your Rationalism? Can you maintain your claim? Have you a right to say that the Christianity which repudiates dogma is nearer to the original Christianity than that with which we have been so long familiar under ecclesiastical forms?"

First of all I think it may fairly be questioned whether there is in Britain a stronger religious element than there is on the continent. Personally, I should be inclined to put it the other way about. What we have in this country is first a diluted supernaturalism in the form of Protestantism, which because it exhibits itself in a variety of forms offers a refuge to hazy and timid thinkers, and so serves to multiply the species. Abroad, the general rule is that a man is either a Christian or he isn't. His position in either instance is plain enough for classification and to demand whatever respect is its due. But in Great Britain, between genuine Christianity and avowed Freethought, the gradations are so numerous that a person's mind frequently offers such a collection of incongruous ideas and his speech such a hopeless jumble of unintelligible sentences that he defies classification. If one possesses a type of mind inclined to intellectual philandering, English life offers every opportunity for its cultivation. He starts from anywhere and ends nowhere. He becomes an eyesore to the really orthodox and an obstruction to the clear sighted reformer.

What we have here is not so much a strong religious element as an intense fear of the respectabilities. The interviewer was probably quite aware of this, though he may have been too polite to say so. The Englishman could get along very well without God, if the deity ceased to be a member of "respectable" society. But while public opinion demands a profession of religion as a badge of respectability, the average Britain will continue to profess himself religious, no matter what interpretation he gives to that much abused word. In France, statesmen who

are Atheists say so. In England, politicians who are Atheists call themselves—when compelled to give themselves a name—by some evasive title. Usually they prefer to say nothing, or to avoid saying anything that would attract the attention of religious people, and to take every occasion of flattering religious prejudice. It is not here a question of a stronger religious element, but of a lesser degree of mental independence. And other people, finding that those looked upon as leaders adopt this attitude, follow their example. Thus we have the leaders playing the hypocrite for the benefit of their followers, and their followers following suit because of the example set by the leaders.

An acute French observer, M. Emile Boutmy, has noted in his study, *The English People*, that Mill and Spencer, "who in France would have been professed Atheists, have been particularly careful to avoid disturbing the traditional beliefs of the public to whom they address their writings." What is true of Mill and Spencer is true of scores of other prominent men and women in England. Only here and there has one the courage to say his say, careless of public opinion. Although called an unsocial being in certain respects, the unreadiness of the average Englishman to enter into social intercourse is not due to his lack of sociability so much as to the importance he attaches to his neighbor's opinion. He is not so much afraid of giving offence as he is of expressing an opinion that will be looked down upon as improper or disreputable. This is why in England it is so easy to impede the spread of a teaching by calling it immoral or by some other unpleasant epithet. In ideas the Englishman does not like to stand alone. He likes to do his thinking in crowds; it need not be in a crowd large enough to form a majority, but it must be large enough to give it a standing.

Whoso would secure salvation must before all things be respectable. This is the unwritten law of English life, and the result is that proneness to cant which Emerson noted as one of the prominent characteristics of the English people. But it serves the purpose of the Churches well enough. It locks the mouths of many, and it numbs the minds of a still larger number. On the continent, as the interviewer remarked, there is opposition between the modern mind, especially Socialism, and organised Christianity. In this country we have socialist leaders figuring in Christian pulpits and carefully standing aloof from Freethought work. This is not because all of them are Christians—or in the real sense of the word any of them. In its highest aspect it is because they believe their movement would be injured by the association of socialism with Freethought. So it might suffer for a time, but all that is good in it would certainly gain in the long run by developing clarity and manliness of mind among its supporters. And this will hardly be accomplished so long as by both teaching and example people are taught to suppress one portion of themselves in the fancied belief that they are thereby developing the remaining portion. It is this tremendous pressure exerted by all upon each, and by each upon all, that secures an outward conformity with religious belief, a pitiful desire to avoid affronting other people's prejudices, and which may easily be mistaken by those not intimate with English people as the manifestations of "a strong religious element."

Mr. Campbell, of course, agrees with his interviewer that we have in England this strong element of religion, and opines that the contrast between this country and the continent is more apparent than real. And he adds that "it would be accurate to say that aggressive Secularism has never made much headway with the British people." Now, whether this statement is really accurate or not depends entirely upon exactly what is meant. In the words of the great Cuttle, the value of the saying depends on the application thereof. If by "aggressive Secularism" is meant the ill-treatment of clergymen or the looting of churches, that is a form of attack on religion that has never been countenanced by Secularism in this country. Or, if Mr. Campbell is measuring the effect of "Aggressive Secularism" by the test of huge organisations, this again shows a misconception of what Secularism really is. For, first, it is not the aim of Secularism to build up a new sect, but to destroy Sectarianism in whatever form it may exist. And, second, the absence of large Secularist organisations, even as instruments of warfare, is just one of the manifestations of that fear of the respectabilities that I have just mentioned. Mr. Campbell might be surprised were he to discover how widespread has been the support given to Secularism during the last generation or two by people who have not openly identified themselves with the Secularist movement.

But if Secularism is to be tested by the extent to which its ideas and principles have made headway among the people, then Mr. Campbell's statement is quite the reverse of the truth. He himself says there has been a

"healthy reaction against the other-worldism of the Christian teaching of the past, which regarded this world—and not without reason at the time—as a wretched place, a place to be endured rather than enjoyed; the re-discovery of the wonder and beauty of earthly life, and the development of its possibilities, have changed all that. A new eagerness, a new zest of living, has sprung up and taken possession of the common mind; our hopes and interests have become more directly secularised."

Well, it is just this destruction, or at least the weakening, of the historic other-worldism of Christian teaching, the re-discovery of the beauty of life and its possibilities that is largely the fruit of Secularist propaganda. The growth of interest in social problems, the dropping of many of the more repulsive and intellectually objectionable features of orthodox Christianity, are all, as a matter of fact, examples of the extent which Secularism has made "headway with the British public." Dissatisfaction with orthodox religious teaching and increased interest in matters of earthly welfare owes nothing to the New Theology. The New Theology is but exploiting tendencies that existed before it was heard of. Very largely it is the degree in which Secularism has succeeded in getting its main teachings accepted by the British public that has made Mr. Campbell and his New Theology possible.

I do not mean by this that Mr. Campbell is preaching a Secular Gospel, nor even that his preaching is calculated to promote the growth of an enlightened Secularism. I have a strong conviction that it is precisely those that endeavor to gild the pill of supernaturalism that are, perhaps unconsciously, Freethought's deadliest enemies. Just as Protestantism in the sixteenth century meant renewed life for Christianity, and actually lengthened the life of the Papacy, so those who are putting a rationalistic gloss on superstition are doing the same service for Christianity. All I mean by what has been said is that Secularism has permeated the Churches, and Mr. Campbell's power and standing is very largely due to the people who have been so affected, seeing—I believe quite mistakenly—in him one who will help them to realise in actual life these dimly understood Secularistic aspirations.

And this leads me to one of Mr. Campbell's—very natural—mistakes. He has told us how eagerly the New Theology has been accepted by large numbers

of people who belonged to the more orthodox Churches. This may be true enough, but it by no means follows that their acceptance of the New Theology was due to their "spiritual hunger." I believe it was due far more to the widespread dissatisfaction, even disgust, with the more orthodox teaching. The measure of their support of the new is little more than an indication of their disgust with the old. The people who are supporting the New Theology knew all along how false the orthodox teaching was. But they continued, ministers and laity alike, to give it support until someone was able to give them a "respectable" lead. This happened in the case of Mr. Campbell, and we can well understand how grateful they must be to him for enabling them to lead an intellectual life a little more honest than would otherwise have been the case. Without him they would have continued playing the hypocrite awhile longer. It all illustrates what I have already said concerning the Englishman's fear of the respectability, his proneness to think in crowds, and his readiness to be on the right side in a matter of opinion, provided the right side has enough to commend it in the shape of numbers and standing.

(To be continued.)

C. COHEN.

The Unknowable Reality.

DR. SALEEBY says that "it is part of the evolutionary philosophy to demonstrate that Reality, or being, the thing that really is, can never be known by us; or, in other words, to assert that the quest of philosophy, in its highest sense, is foredoomed to failure." As everybody knows this is but an echo of Herbert Spencer's teaching. Part I. of *First Principles*, extending to 110 pages, is devoted to a discussion of The Unknowable. This Unknowable is called the Ultimate Reality. In a Postscript, written in 1899, Spencer admits the logical absurdity of such a position. "It cannot be denied," he says (p. 108), "that to affirm of the Ultimate Reality that it is unknowable is, in a remote way, to assert some knowledge of it, and therefore involves a contradiction." Then he adds: "Intellect being framed simply by and for converse with phenomena, involves us in nonsense when we try to use it for anything beyond phenomena..... We are unable in any consistent way to assert a Reality standing in some relation to the Apparent. Such a relation is not truly imaginable." Nevertheless, the great synthetic philosopher clings to his Unknowable with the utmost tenacity. "We find it impossible," he concludes, "to think of the world as constituted of appearances, and to exclude all thought of a reality of which they are appearances." Of this Ultimate Reality it is impossible for us to have a conception, but "there yet ever remains a consciousness—a consciousness of which no logical account can be given." Here we find Spencer, in his old age, frankly admitting that he was unable to conceive of Reality standing in any relation whatever to Phenomena, and that all that remained with him was "the undefinable substance of a conception—a consciousness that cannot be put into any shape."

Dr. Saleeby, like his master, seems to think that the properties or attributes of a thing are really distinct from the thing itself, which existed prior to their appearance and would still exist if divested of them. Properties or attributes, according to him, are but the garments in which Reality arrays itself, or the veil behind which it hides itself, or the form in which it manifests itself. Furthermore, this table on which this article is being written, is only a *phenomenon*, a something that appears, which something is invisible and inscrutable. Dr. Saleeby waxes exceedingly merry over those who believe that a table really exists. He labels them unqualified realists, and laughs them to scorn. He represents them as saying: "As for Reality; what could more palpably be a solid chunk of Reality than—a table? Behold it—a hard, flat, wooden object, supported upon four

legs. Room for refinement or argument there is none; no sane man can possibly dispute the unequivocal evidence of his senses." Dr. Saleeby is equally contemptuous in his references to metaphysicians, or ontologists, the students of Reality. This is a sample of his reasoning:—

"Ontology may be left to the academic philosophers or metaphysicians. Students of science are well aware how it has injured their cause in the past; they believe its prosecution to be impossible and more than futile, and they are wise to leave it alone. It is of some interest, however, to observe that the materialists, of whom Professor Haeckel, of Jena, is the chief living representative, believe themselves to be literally ontologists, since they regard matter and energy as the ultimate realities, and fancy that they *know* them. Materialism, however, is a childish absurdity which has been refuted by the most eminent men of science as well as by all the leading thinkers of all schools in all ages. It has not revealed Reality, and is therefore not to be regarded as a true ontology" (*Evolution the Master Key*, pp. 30, 31).

Let us note a few of the statements contained in that extravagant passage. Materialism is summarily dismissed as "a childish absurdity." In another part of the same book (p. 36) he says that "crude realism, though it is, always has been, and doubtless will long continue to be, the most widely accepted of all beliefs whatever, has, nevertheless, been found out, and is more certainly untenable, the universal plebiscite notwithstanding, than the crassest superstition of the most ignorant age." The Psalmist said in his haste, "All men are liars"; and in his haste Dr. Saleeby looks down from the heights of his superior intelligence, and exclaims, "Materialism is a childish absurdity"; which is equivalent to dubbing all Materialists utter fools. Well, what justification does he offer for such violent epithets? He asserts that Materialism has been "refuted" by all the best thinkers in all ages; but the assertion is worthless, because Dr. Saleeby fills the category of "leading thinkers" with only those who oppose Materialism. We are convinced that Materialism has never been refuted; and most certainly Dr. Saleeby has not succeeded in refuting it. He simply swears at it in impotent rage, without rhyme or reason. He denounces it because "it has not revealed Reality"; but this is the point in dispute. If Dr. Saleeby has not the ghost of an idea what Reality is, how on earth can he tell that Materialism has not revealed it? On what ground can he declare that matter and energy are not the ultimate realities? If the Ultimate Reality is unknowable, as Spencer again and again avers, the fact of its existence must also be unknowable. With Spencer, the fact of its existence is a mere inference from the term *phenomena, appearances*. If the objects which we can see and feel are but manifestations, phenomena, appearances, he argues, there must be a reality which they manifest or express, of which reality, apart from these, we know nothing. But, in the last analysis, the phenomena of Nature are nothing but the properties or attributes of matter as it affects our senses. As Spencer himself maintains, thinking means relating, and "no thought can express more than relations." "From which truth," he adds, nearly forty years after writing his *First Principles*, "it is inferable that human faculty must become fundamentally unlike what it is, and knowledge must become something other than what we call knowledge, before anything can be known about the Unconditioned."

The truth is that neither Spencer nor his zealous disciple, Dr. Saleeby, have done anything to discredit Materialism. According to themselves, the Unknowable Reality is only a myth. Indeed, Spencer had no use whatever for it. His philosophy is delightfully independent of it. It almost seems as if he had invented it on purpose to offer it as a propitiatory sacrifice to angry theologians. One can almost imagine him chuckling to himself as he presented the sop to them, saying, "I know I have robbed you wholesale, and your indignation is doubtless an all-consuming fire; but don't lose heart; behold, I make you a present of the Unknowable Reality, upon which

you can build whatever theological systems you please. It is of no use whatever to me, and I bequeath it to you; make the most and best you can of it." And the theologians have accepted the offer with gratitude, and they have been living on it ever since. Trinitarians and Unitarians, Theists and Pantheists, Calvinists and Arminians, High Church and Low Church, all have appropriated and adapted and decorated Spencer's gift to suit their respective requirements, and are forever quoting him and saying, "By the Unknowable, Spencer really meant God, unknown and unknowable to the intellect, but well known, and graciously near, to the heart."

The crumb which Spencer threw from his philosophical table, and which the theologians have seized with such avidity, is poor stuff to stand between a man and theological starvation. There is no nourishment whatever in it. It is indeed a stone, not bread at all. The Unknowable Reality is rather a will-o'-the-wisp which nobody has ever caught, an illusion which vanishes the moment you try to touch it. The Unknowable Reality has never given the least sign that it exists at all. The theological imagination has manipulated and shaped it into a personal Deity of infinite goodness and love, who is said to be the Maker, Father, and Lover of all mankind, eternally sacrificing himself on their behalf; and yet the Rev. R. J. Campbell, a passionate believer in him, is honest enough to make this sad confession in his last-published sermon:—

"I am a lover of history, and have been so ever since I was able to read; but I will confess that it has often been to me a sad study, and I have risen from it with the feeling that the ways of God were past finding out. There has never been any age in which cruelty and injustice were not rampant; the pathetic dream of a far-distant past on this earth, in which there was nothing but love and joy, and sorrow and strife were unknown, is but a delusion. Lord Morley may well speak of the never-ceasing cry of human agony ascending through all the ages to deaf gods; has there ever been an hour without it?"

The picture painted by the City Temple pastor is terribly sombre, but it is not one whit too sombre. God is eternally deaf and dumb and impotent, never once interposing for the world's betterment. He is the Unknowable Reality clothed with the attributes of a phantom personality. We believe neither in God nor in the Unknowable Reality. The Universe with which we have to do is partly known and, we believe, wholly knowable. What science is endeavoring to do is to interrogate her until she yields up all her secrets. We are getting to understand her better every year now; and in proportion as we crave and toil to know her we shall learn to conform our life to her laws. For us she is increasingly a known reality, and we are aware of no other. It is upon matter alone—visible and invisible, ponderable and imponderable—that we have to wait for the supply of all our wants.

J. T. LLOYD.

Science, Loftiness, and Supernaturalism.

I HAD been reading Camille Flammarion's *Astronomy for Amateurs* all the evening, and towards midnight I stepped out into my garden, gleaming white beneath a sky in which was written the mighty, heart-stirring story of the stars: the story of how atoms in space became suns, how suns made planets, how planets became worlds of land and water and living things. Above me glittered millions and millions of stars. There were stars shining faint, and stars shining clear; stars scattered all over the sky; stars clustered in groups; stars that are suns of fire, whirling through vast oceans of space at thousands of miles a minute; and hanging like a clinging streak of mist across it all was the great, star-dusty silence called the Milky Way.

But it was not the Milky Way that arrested my attention upon this magnificent December night. Standing out among the million million suns was a

sun that Camille Flammarion tells us is a thousand times larger than our sun: a sun that is known among astronomers as Arcturus, the star of dazzling light which is plunging through space at the rate of three hundred and eighty miles a second. Strange things that I had been reading in my neat little volume of Nelsons' Shilling Library about Arcturus were in my thoughts. In the ages to come it will burn up our system as surely as it has burned other and mightier systems in the ages that are gone. For countless centuries it has risen and set each day and year at its appointed time, like a shining sentry upon its eternal march; and just as it will swallow up our insignificant little planet, with its joys and heartaches and laughter and tears, so in its turn will Arcturus be swallowed up by fiery suns we know nothing of.

It gleamed above me in the peaceful night-blue sky as I lingered in the silent darkness of my hill-top garden, and slowly I realised the meaning of it all. Arcturus seemed to stand for the continuity of life, for rule, order, and a plan ordered by inconceivably greater forces than the puny God that is worshipped in the convent of the Good Shepherd a stone's throw away across the fields. For even the mighty Arcturus is in bond to a still mightier central force that controls and imperceptibly draws to itself all the suns and systems; and you, I, and the pale-faced priest and ghastly nun kneeling in the dreary little chapel are but passing incidents in a series of races and empires, extending through immeasurable ages. And these races and empires, with their creeds and feuds and hatreds, have each in their turn been shrivelled in the magnificent fires of Arcturus. I thought of the vastness of the universe, with its awful abysses of dark space through which comets shoot at a speed a thousand times as fast as an express train; and I thought of the spiteful pigmy whose name is Jehovah, who became so angry with a handful of men that he threatened them with plagues of lice and frogs! Then I smiled.

But as I smiled I wondered also. To-day there are thousands of mental guides (so called) who deplore the development of Science. We are still infested by priests and clergy who would rejoice with a great and unholy joy if it were possible to burn every copy of such books as Camille Flammarion's *Astronomy for Amateurs* and Sir Robert Ball's *Story of the Heavens*—aye, and burn their authors as well. They tell us glibly, for lies always fall glibly from the liar's lips, that supernatural religion and Christian creeds respond better to the higher wants of man; that to learn of Arcturus, and Sirius, and the Pleiades, is to lose all stimulus to good action, all inspiration towards a noble living. Even among those who admit the utter falsity of the Christian faith, as of all other supernaturalistic faiths, there are many who consider that it ought to be preserved and encouraged, because of the "lofty views" it is supposed to open to us. Which is as if a man desirous of going to Ireland should insist on walking there, because journeys on foot are more poetical than journeys by steam. It is vain to show him the impossibility of crossing the Irish sea on foot; he admits that grovelling fact, but his lofty soul has visions of some overland route by which he hopes to pass. And as a result he dies without reaching Ireland at all.

Let us hear no more of the claim that loftiness is the exclusive attainment of believers in supernaturalism. Ignorant indeed, not lofty, is the outlook of the man who nowadays is unacquainted with the grandeur and sweep of scientific thought in astronomy and geology, or who has never been thrilled by the revelations of the telescope and microscope. The nobler ideals of Life, Destiny, and the Universe are inspired by Science, not by supernaturalism. The heights of man's nature are touched by Science in a manner that is beyond the Christian's ken. There have lived no nobler personalities throughout all the Christian centuries than George Eliot, John Stuart Mill, and Charles Bradlaugh—Freethinkers all, and not one of them was guided by

the morality inspired by gods and ghosts. We all remember W. E. Gladstone's fine tribute to Mill: "What his conduct disclosed to me," he said, "was his singular moral elevation. He did us all good. In whatever party, whatever form of opinion, I sorrowfully confess that such men are rare." Charles Bradlaugh was described by a Christian Member of Parliament as the "best Christian in the House of Commons," and in two recently published books, *Recollections of Half a Century*, by R. C. Lehmann (Smith Elder), and *Letters of George Eliot to Elma Stuart* (Simpkin Marshall), personal friends of the greatest of all Englishwomen unite in asserting that no one could remain in her presence, or even enter the same room, without feeling a better man or woman. And even if we were compelled to acknowledge that lofty views were excluded from Science, the earnest mind would surely sacrifice such loftiness for Truth? Our struggle, our passion, our hope is for Truth, not for loftiness, if loftiness means pretence and insincerity. If we cannot reach certain heights, let us acknowledge them to be inaccessible, and not deceive ourselves and others by metaphysical moonshine.

But as I stood in my midnight garden, communing with Arcturus and the mighty stars, I realised that not only does Science not banish lofty views, but the only lofty views that are worth the having are inspired by Science, and Science alone. It is Science that teaches us the meaning of Life. Through all the years in which we flounder in the dismal bog of supernaturalism, we never realise the essential thing: that Life ought to mean to us a ceaseless endeavor to repay a tiny part of the incalculable debt we owe to the great Mother who gave us Life, and to whose bosom we must surely return—Humanity.

If a man cannot believe death any longer to be the touch of a ghostly hand, but the fulfilment of an infallible, unchanging law of nature, his humility and awe are deepened, and he becomes tenderer and kinder to the creatures who can love so much, and yet live so in the shadow of the impassable wall of death. And when he has learned to consider every impure thought, each ignoble act, not as a breach of the decrees of an unseen judge, but as an ungrateful infection which will surely weaken and corrupt the lives of his children and the future of his brothers, his remorse is greater and deeper; for sounding fall in his ears is the cry of Humanity, craving ceaseless help from her children.

And if he responds to this call, he is offered no reward of future bliss, but constant communion in life with the spirit of the Good, the True, the Beautiful—the perfect trinity, and a place after death in the choir invisible—

"Whose music is the gladness of world,"

the choir of those whose work is cherished in the hearts of those who follow them, and whose influence, however small, will live to the end of time.

THOMAS MOULT.

THE WAR GAME IN THE CHOIR.

The high soprano started out
With naught her rush to stem
And with a battle-cry advanced
Upon Jerusalem.

The alto met her on the road,
Engaged her in a "scrap."
The tenor on the double-quick
Came up to fill the gap.

Around the theatre of war
The steady basso boomed;
Then all of them fell to at once,
Jerusalem was doomed.

The city was about to fall,
Her glory proud to doff.
When higher powers intervened,
And called the fighters off.

—New York Sun.

Presidential and Personal Notes.

I AM not occupying the front page of the *Freethinker* this week. It is very well filled by Mr. Cohen's article. I do not like to put in that place what is perhaps of great interest to members of the Free-thought party, but is likely to be of far less, if any, interest to casual readers, or those who may be seeing the paper for the first time. One wishes to attract such persons, instead of repelling them; how else is the paper to increase its circulation?

My articles are generally written with a "we," but in this instance it must be written with an "I," because I shall often have to mention myself. The reader will understand, therefore, that the "I" is not egotism but necessity.

I was lecturing at Birmingham on Sunday, November 28. There were grand audiences in the Town Hall, and two lectures to such crowds in such a vast building were of course a great effort. Unfortunately the noise in the vicinity of my hotel prevented me from getting much sleep on the Saturday night. It might have been better on the Sunday night, which was naturally quieter, and I went to bed soon after ten; but just as I thought I might drop off presently they began a concert right under me, and as it lasted till nearly twelve my night was completely spoiled again. For I am an abominably bad sleeper, and am able to appreciate more than most people the splendid lines which Shakespeare put into the mouth of Henry IV.; which, by the way, satisfy me that he knew by experience what it was to woo sleep desperately and woo it in vain.

Monday morning did not find me in the best condition, but I travelled up to London and went to my office in order to work for some hours on the paper. I am so used to insomnia that I take very little notice of it, and go on as if nothing had happened, which I am sure is the wisest policy.

Amongst my letters was a telegram from my wife apprising me of the death of Mr. F. Bonte. The news had been communicated to me by letter at my residence; my wife had opened it quite by accident, and if she had not done so I should have known nothing about Mr. Bonte's death until I arrived at home late in the evening. This fortunate accident enabled me to telegraph to friends at Liverpool, and to Mr. Bonte's residence at West Kirby, with respect to the funeral arrangements. It also enabled me to get the paper ready for the press on Monday instead of Tuesday. It was about one o'clock in the morning when I got to bed, and I was up again at five. I left home at six, and by travelling in four trains, one omnibus, and one motor-car, I managed to reach West Kirby a few minutes before three.

At Lime-street Station, Liverpool, I met Messrs. J. Hammond, H. Percy Ward, G. Roleffs, and J. Martin, of the local N. S. S. Branch, who went over with me to the funeral. Had the news of Mr. Bonte's death been known on Sunday, as it might have been, there would have been a much larger attendance at the funeral.

The time and place of the funeral had been arranged without consultation with me, and it was too late to alter the arrangements. Mr. Bonte's remains were buried at West Kirby churchyard, there being no cemetery within reasonable distance. It was consecrated ground, but the clergyman kindly consented to a Secular service at the graveside, for which he is sincerely thanked. The service consisted of a brief address by myself; briefer than it would otherwise have been, for we could not use the church, and I would not keep the funeral party standing too long in that bitter cold wind and rain.

Mr. Bonte was a philosopher: he believed in cremation on sanitary grounds, but he would have had no personal anxiety about the disposition of his body when (to use Carlyle's expression) he had done with it; although he would have hated the idea of a religious ceremony over his coffin.

I believe I was Mr. Bonte's closest friend. I had known him for several years, and I think I may say

that we were much attached to each other. His admiration for my work seemed to grow with time. He was quite a passionate friend of the *Freethinker*. The compliments—not fulsome, but discriminating, even if too friendly—which he so often paid me, are best left in the treasure-house of memory. I shall miss that purely disinterested appreciation. It was pleasant to know that a generous eye was always ready to mark one's successes; and when I knew I had taken special pains with a piece of work, it was encouraging to have the corroboration of his praise, which never missed its opportunity. Moreover, I liked him—why should I hesitate to say I loved him?—for himself. He was so intelligent, so gentle, so considerate, so benevolent. Only twice or thrice in my life have I seen a face that bore so conspicuously the stamp of fine intellect and gracious character. His nature was open and sweet, and transparent as the daylight. He looked, as he was, incapable of falsehood or dishonor. I am proud that such a man was my friend for years, and most of all my friend at the very last; for I must have been very much in his thoughts during the final days, and even the final hours of his life.

He knew that his death might occur at any minute from heart trouble—and it was mercifully sudden when it came. He spoke to me on the subject quite serenely. When I visited him after my last Liverpool lectures, he insisted on seeing me off, although I begged him not to. On the road to the station he pointed out the spot where he had fallen some months before, and added that the next time would probably be the last. As we shook hands at the station, I said something cheerful about his looks; but he shook his head, though he kept his smile, and said "It can't be long now." He had also been preparing a new edition of his valuable pamphlet, which he had completed, and which I shall see through the press myself, as a last act of friendship and respect.

Mr. Bonte had been a Freethinker for a good many years. He came of a Catholic family, he had been a Catholic priest, and the Catholic chaplain of old Kirkdale prison. Because he gave so generously, people thought him a wealthy man, but he was not so. He had a pension, on account of his chaplaincy, of less than £200 a year. What he gave away, and what he saved, came from that source.

Matters of importance kept me in the north until Wednesday, and I reached home a little before midnight. I was shockingly tired, but otherwise well enough. Many of my friends had had colds, but I escaped in spite of the weather. As I write, however, on Tuesday, I feel something suspiciously like a cold creeping through me, and I must hasten home and take steps to expel it. Happily I have no lecturing to do on Sunday. I kept December free for different work. My correspondence is dreadfully in arrear, and there is a lot of other writing to be done. Several publications are in active preparation for the new year. Mr. Bonte's pamphlet is already mentioned. There is also a new edition of my *Bible and Beer*. Both these will be included in a series of remarkably cheap penny propagandist pamphlets that I am projecting with a view to getting further and further at the masses of the people. Then there is the new popular edition of my *Bible Heroes*, which is well on the way. I am arranging also for other publications which will be announced in due course.

The space left in this column may be filled up with a few words about the *Freethinker*. I am glad to say that its circulation improves steadily though slowly. It may in time be a profit instead of a burden. There would be no loss on the paper merely by itself, even now; but the loss arises through the special conditions of its existence. Those who care for the paper will help to reduce that loss to vanishing point. They can do that by making the *Freethinker* known as widely as possible.

G. W. FOOTE.

Acid Drops.

A correspondent sends us a paper called *The Pepper-Box*, published by Odhams Limited. Who the editor is does not appear. The paper itself is obviously intended to capture the nimble penny. One page is devoted to a £100 Competition and "numerous consolation stakes." Another page is devoted to Racing and Sporting Telegrams, with the name and address of an "agent" to whom you may safely entrust your gambling business. Another page is devoted to a National Share Exchange advertisement. It does not astonish us, therefore, to find that the editor is distinctly and gushingly pious. He thinks that "the atheist is morally blind" and the agnostic "wilfully so." "If unbelief becomes general," this gentleman says, "there will be no restraining savage natures, there will be no hope or comfort for gentle ones. The human race would degenerate into brutes, civilisation would gradually disappear, and the world would become a bear garden." And what would the *Pepper-Box* do then? We should say it would enjoy an immense circulation. Not that we wish to fill our contemporary with sanguine expectations, for "unbelief" will never bring about the state of society which he prophesies.

England's two chief mystery men, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, have laid their heads together (some will say there's not much in that) and produced a special contribution towards the success of the approaching general election. It takes the form of a prayer:—

"Most gracious God, we humbly beseech Thee, as for this Kingdom in general, so especially at this time for all electors of members of Parliament, that, remembering their vote to be a trust from Thee, they may faithfully and wisely make choice of fit persons to serve in the great council of the nation, to the advancement of Thy glory, the good of Thy Church, the safety, honor, and welfare of our Sovereign and his dominions: that all things may be so ordered and settled that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety may be established among us for all generations. These and all other necessities, for them, for us, and for Thy whole Church, we humbly beg in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ, our most blessed Lord and Savior. Amen."

Now we beg to ask this question: Are there six men in England who really believe that this pious rigmarole will have any effect whatever on the coming contest? Do the Archbishops themselves believe it? We venture to say that they don't. We imagine that they must have smiled down their noses as they drew up this holy document. A distinguished old Roman once said that he didn't understand how two augurs could meet each other without laughing. We humbly say ditto.

Christianity is nearly two thousand years old—and it is called the religion of love. England boasts of being the most Christian country in the world—and, besides punishing "infidels" at home, it spends heaps of money in trying to convert the "heathen" abroad. We ought, therefore, to expect England to be overflowing with love. But do we? Look at this. Two men stole twopenny worth of milk, and were sentenced to eighteen months' hard labor each at the City of London Sessions. Now this malignant sentence does not surprise us, for we are aware that there is more religion and rascality to the square yard in the City of London than in any other part of the kingdom. Fortunately there is now a Court of Criminal Appeal, and the men's sentences have been reduced to three months. Even that sentence would be regarded as excessive by any nation of Freethinkers.

"I am a lover of history," the Rev. R. J. Campbell says, in his last printed sermon, "and have been so since ever I was able to read, but I will confess that it has often been to me a sad study, and I have risen from it with the feeling that the ways of God were past finding out." Mr. Campbell gets rid of that "feeling" by dropping reason and clinging to faith. Atheists get rid of it by the opposite process. They drop God—and the mystery disappears.

Canon Henson describes one of Mr. Campbell's prayers as "mostly a soliloquy rather than a prayer." We agree, and suggest that "wholly" be substituted for "mostly." But what is true of one of Mr. Campbell's prayers is equally true of all prayers. Public prayers differ from private in that they are heard but not answered, and are items in theatrical performances.

Canon Henson also declares that the New Theology has no right to the adjective "Christian," and implies that the adjective "blasphemous" would be more appropriate. At any rate, the New Theologians are directly charged with

uttering blasphemy. How beautiful a grace is Christian charity! Only the other day a preacher characterised the teaching of "a beloved brother" as positively "diabolical."

Mr. Stephen Collins, member for the Kennington Division of Lambeth, complained to a Brotherhood meeting of having tramped for four years, and during very late hours, through the Division lobbies of the House of Commons; but, after all, the Children's Charter and the Old Age Pensions Act were worth all the trouble. The moral he deduced from this estimate was that "God's in his heaven, and all's right with the world. It is only man that is wrong." Mr. Collins is evidently not a profound logician. Had he been a decent reasoner, he would have seen that, if some men fought for the children, other men must have been fighting against them,—otherwise the children would have needed no protection; and that, if God made both sets of men, it is difficult to understand his reputation for perfect benevolence. We suggest that Mr. Collins should leave theology alone. It is to be hoped that there are other subjects in which he shines more brightly.

"All's right with the world." Reptiles killed some twenty thousand people last year in India. Wild beasts killed as many more. One tiger devoured nineteen human beings before it received its quietus. What a dreadful sacrifice of the higher life to the lower! God may be in his heaven, for all we know, and all we care; but to say that "all's right with the world" in the face of these facts is mere intellectual frivolity,—and something still worse from a moral point of view.

Some people are always telling us there are not enough parsons. Rev. A. J. Viner, secretary of the Lancashire Congregational Union, thinks there are too many. He would have fewer ministers, pay them better, and make them all do a reasonable amount of work. The suggestion has an air of common sense about it.

Mulai Hafid, Sultan of Morocco, is the subject of a book by Mr. Laurence Harris, published by Smith, Elder, & Co. The Sultan appears to delight in cruelty. Mr. Harris tells the following story of what happened when the Sultan was showing off his menagerie:—

"Wait," said he, "and I will show you something good for thine eyes to feast upon." And he forthwith gave a whispered order to Hajib, and soon a live sheep was brought. I naturally thought that they were going to kill the sheep, cut it up, and feed the animals. But, to my astonishment, the sheep was not killed, and struggling and bleating, it was thrust alive into the cage of a fine tiger. The sight was most nauseating, and I had to turn my head away. As I did so I caught sight of the Mulai Hafid. Such a cruel look of enjoyment I had never before seen on a human face; with glistening eyes and open mouth he thoroughly enjoyed the horrid spectacle as the poor sheep was rent to pieces by the hungry tiger."

This is very dreadful, of course; but how is it worse than bull-fighting? And bull-fighting is the national sport of Christian Spain. So there is no need to throw stones at the wicked Mohammedans, is there?

Mr. Harris tells how a political prisoner was degraded and punished in the presence of Mulai Hafid and his rejoicing court:—

"The hum of the crowd suddenly ceased. A big gate at the side clanged open, and from the black opening emerged a crowd of Makhezni, dragging a forlorn figure. He was brought in front of the Sultan and degraded. His beard was plucked out and his head shaved, no water being used. Then he was thrown violently to the ground and the palms of his hands slashed open with a sharp dagger. Salt was rubbed in, and a round stone placed in each hand. The fingers were closed, and a leather gauntlet drawn tightly over each clenched and mutilated fist.

'Now,' remarked Mulai Hafid, with a smile, 'he will write no more letters.'

With a rope round his neck the poor being was led away to prison, to linger on in indescribable anguish till death once more claimed another victim of the salt torture."

Very dreadful again! But worse things than that have been done in the fortress of Montjuich, where Ferrer was shot on October 14; things not less cruel, and even more abominable.

While that horrid punishment was inflicted in the sight of Mulai Hafid and his court, Mr. Harris says that "The royal Ulemas were in attendance to strengthen the royal presence by their holy and powerful presence." Just like them! But on the other side of the Straits of Gibraltar, in Christian Spain, the men of God give their holy blessing to the torturers and murderers of Montjuich; indeed, the torturers and murderers are virtually in the service of Holy Mother

Church, since they carry out her policy in the pursuit of her interests.

The "saints" around the city of Fez are thus described by Mr. Harris:—

"One was entirely naked and ate sand, calling on devotees to testify his holiness by punching his stomach, which was as hard as stone. Another was hideous with blood flowing from numerous wounds over his body, made with broken bottles. As we approached they greeted us with vituperation and curses, calling on all true believers to kill the Christians. The most saintly of all was an old white-haired saint, whose home was a dirtheap by the roadside. His thin, naked body was bare, except for a rope of wooden beads three inches thick hanging round his neck. Abdallah explained that this was the most saintly man in Fez. Never did he quit the dirtheap, and from time immemorial knew not the luxuries of a bath. We were greeted by this most holy man with a string of well-chosen sentences. 'May the true God blast your lives, O Christians,' 'May the bones of the unbelievers rot in the graves,' etc., etc.; at the same time an emaciated arm was thrown out and a long, bony hand deftly caught a small coin I threw down. 'May thy grandmother's bones rot in hell,' quoted the sweet old chap as he clutched the coin, and such-like charming phrases followed us till we were out of hearing."

Just like the Christian saints of the early and "Dark" Ages, as described by Gibbon, Lea, and Lecky.

Rev. S. Rollards writes of white men who sneer at missionaries in China because "the yellow men are not worth saving." But this is not the reason why people "sneer" at missions to the Chinese. Their objection is, first, because the Chinese do not want the missionaries; second, they have always been a source of trouble in China; third, the Chinaman is as well off without Christianity as with it; and, fourth, it is a piece of impertinence to fit out missionaries to Christianise people who, so far as the important elements of life are concerned, can probably teach us as much as we can teach them.

A Methodist missionary in China sends an appeal home for lantern slides, with which he hopes to capture souls for Jesus. He adds that any old slides will do. Reproductions of the great masters do not appeal to the Chinese, but "colored daubs with some resemblance to the objects they intend to represent are more suitable." We wonder why this is so. It may be that in China, as elsewhere, the class of natives who are brought under the influence of the missions are of the poorest type, or it may be that the incongruities of dress, etc., in many of the great works of art dealing with Biblical subjects excite the criticism of the Chinese. In such cases we have no doubt that the hazier the detail of the "colored daub," the greater the safety. And probably the less understandable the pictures, the better suitable to the arguments of the missionary exhibitor. The letter, however, is curiously illustrative of the missionary mind.

The *Christian World* falls foul of the *Christian Times* for saying—

"What the New Dissent would really like is not Liberationism and the purely secular State—that ideal belongs to the Individualist Liberalism of fifty years ago—but co-establishment, or rather the re-establishment of religion in the form of a creedless Undenominational Church."

But is this really a correct statement of the case? With rare exceptions, present-day Dissenters do not want the State to leave religion; they only wish a smaller share of State patronage to be given to Episcopalianism, and a larger share to themselves. They are most energetic in calling for State aid to further their religious interests and in preventing assaults on their religion. The action of Dissenters in fighting for a State-taught religion in the public schools is alone enough to prove the substantial truth of the *Church Times'* remarks.

At the Hampstead Garden suburb, Churchmen and Dissenters have not yet got their separate places of worship built. Pending their erection, both bodies use the Institute for their services, and occasionally worship together. The *Christian World* thinks this circumstance worthy of special notice. So it may be; but what a commentary upon the brotherly feeling developed by Christian belief! After all these centuries it is recorded as a remarkable circumstance that different bodies of Christians can worship together in the same building!

Catholics and Protestants both have "defective children" at Paisley. At a meeting of the School Board the question of "separate accommodation" was raised by Dr. Rogau. He held that short-witted little Catholics ought to be separated from short-witted little Protestants, and was ready to

spend £900 to provide separate accommodation for sixty defective Catholic children. The Chairman, however, the Rev. Dr. Metcalfe, thought it was better for short-witted little Catholics and short-witted little Protestants to mix. This may be correct. Anyhow, Dr. Metcalfe was supported by seven votes to four, and the "defective" kiddies will still shake hands (or punch heads) irrespective of religious denomination.

Rev. Dr. Lewis Edwards says that the right motto for theological students is "Believe, that ye may understand." If by right is meant *safe*, we agree with the advice. To believe first and understand afterwards, or rather to believe afterwards that you understand, is the only safe method for any budding preacher to adopt. To make understanding a preliminary of belief is a hopeless procedure. The New Testament teaching is that you must be saved by believing, not by understanding. Theologically, understanding is more or less of an act of presumption against God.

The Rev. J. S. Voorhees, of Massachusetts, has resigned his ministry and accepted a post in a Boston Investment Company. He says frankly, "I am doing it for the sake of the money there is in it." Evidently Mr. Voorhees is unfitted by nature to be a parson. Otherwise he would have treated the world to some talk of the spiritual influence he might wield in the new sphere. It is a splendid opportunity simply thrown away. He might have pictured himself going down into the depths of the commercial world of Boston, lifting it from degradation by the good influence carried from his church. The members of the church could have held a farewell meeting, and Mr. Voorhees might have passed into history as the first of a new order of Christian martyrs. Instead of this he says, simply and unpoetically, "I am doing it for the sake of the money there is in it." Meanwhile there are thousands of ministers who are keeping to their churches—because no such opportunity offers.

"J. B.," of the *Christian World*, says: "As you read Epictetus, Seneca, or Marcus Aurelius, you might think you were listening to a Methodist preacher." Ye gods! Many hard things have been said of these ancient moralists, but no one has ever before gone so far as to compare them with a Methodist preacher. And "J. B." evidently thinks he is complimenting them! The world is full of surprises, and, were it not for these bits of unconscious humor, would be a dull place.

A local writer to "Laicus," of the *Methodist Times*, complaining that in his district outdoor speakers frequently attack Christianity, asks, How far is it desirable, or possible, to reply to their mischievous criticisms? To which question the reply is given that it is unwise for any preacher who is not "thoroughly up" in Rationalistic and Agnostic-Socialist arguments against Christianity to deal with them. We agree with this advice, only "Laicus" does not face the further difficulty that when people are "thoroughly up" in Freethought arguments, and appreciate them, they are usually cute enough to realise how ineffective their replies are—and they remain silent. "Laicus" says he "believes" that the arguments are usually of the flimsiest character, and can easily be refuted by the well informed man. Well, we have heard this said before, and we have never been fortunate enough to meet the well-informed man who could so easily refute the Freethinker. Our own impression is that the case for Freethought is so simple and so convincing that a controversialist must be a poor one indeed who cannot silence an ordinary Christian opponent. And we have a suspicion that professional Christians realise this so strongly that no discussion with Freethinkers has become the order of the day. "Laicus" recommends his correspondent to take a course of the Rev. Frank Ballard. Good heavens!

Mr. Hilaire Belloc, M.P., says that "we are in the worst state of society, in modern England, that any Christian people were ever in, and probably worse than any Pagan society." Whether this statement is wholly true or not, there is enough truth in it to make uncomfortable reading. And as Mr. Belloc is a staunch Christian we put it to him that his picture of the state of affairs is one that reflects little credit on Christianity. Yet we do not doubt that on another platform, and replying to a different opponent, Mr. Belloc would fall back on the customary senseless twaddle about the profound benefits Christianity has conferred upon civilisation. Fortunately, the truth will out, in spite of the most elaborate precautions. And when it does make itself felt the consequences are very uncomfortable to these hawkers of the Christianity and civilisation myth.

Mr. Belloc also says that Roman Catholicism is opposed to Collectivism "because there resides in the Catholic atmos-

phere and Catholic tradition an intense sense of personal dignity and personal freedom." The latter portion of the statement makes one open one's eyes. We hope Mr. Belloc's statements on other matters have a more solid basis in fact than this one has. Personal freedom and dignity are the last things we should associate with the Catholic atmosphere.

Rev. John Reid, M.A., writing in the *Messenger* on the work of Birmingham Presbyterianism, says: "I believe it would be the best thing for all our congregation if every other organisation were wiped out of existence, and our people with all earnestness concentrated their energies upon the Sunday-school—it would yield immediate splendid results." Very likely. But is not this a confession that the one profitable line of Christian activity nowadays is taking advantage of the innocent ignorance of children? Nothing can be done with the adults.

Rev. J. D. Jones, Chairman of the Congregational Union, made some eminently candid admissions the other day. He said that "Christianity has no chance apart from the Church." He also said that "Christian men are impossible apart from the Church." He was quite right, and it follows that both Christianity and the Church are exclusively of the earth, and that all the talk about the power of the Holy Ghost and the Eternal Christ is mere nonsense.

Whitefield's Tabernacle has become a place of exhibitions. All sorts of "distinguished" men are fished in to sustain the Sunday afternoon Men's Meeting entertainment. One of the most recent is Mr. Robert Wallace, K.C., and chairman of the County of London Sessions. This speaker made several curious statements in the course of his Sunday afternoon address. The following is worth special notice:—

"For many years I myself stood outside all the churches. For many years I was what is known to-day as an Agnostic, not hostile to the Christian faith, but simply doubting; and no one who has not passed through that experience can know how doubt chills the heart, dissipates the power, and enervates the soul. And I want to-day to bear this testimony before you all. At that time Jesus found me, and I found Jesus, at the foot of the Cross; and from that time, in the discharge of my public duties, I have striven so to live that I might in some way, unworthily if you will—and I know it is so and feel it—show forth the glory of Him who called me out of darkness into light."

It is wonderful what a lot of these good Christians were "once Agnostics." One would think that nobody was ever brought up a Christian, but that all the "believers" in England had been converted from "infidelity." Mr. Wallace was not hostile to religion; he was only a doubter; that is, he was unable to make up his mind, and in consequence he was miserable. Well, we know plenty who have made up their minds, and rejected Christianity altogether, and they are *not* miserable. We congratulate Mr. Wallace, of course, on finding Jesus, if that was necessary to make him discharge his public duties properly; but we venture to assure him that the medicine which did him so much good is not requisite to the moral health of all his fellow citizens. We are confident that he overrates the value of his own specific.

Newspapers blow hot and cold on the subject of religion. At one time they assert that nearly every man of science is a Christian. At another time they assert, as the *Daily Chronicle* does, that Sir Oliver Lodge's new book, *The Survival of Man*, is "the bold and unafraid announcement of a very eminent man of science that evidence exists for a belief in the immortality of the soul." But they can't have it both ways. It cannot be true that nearly every man of science is a Christian, and at the same time that it needs courage on the part of a man of science to profess himself a Christian. Nor is that all. We may call the *Chronicle's* attention to the fact that Christianity, at least in the Bible, does not teach the immortality of the soul. This position was maintained by Gladstone in his book on Bishop Butler.

Sir Oliver Lodge has really not discovered anything fresh about the soul and a future life. Macaulay once said that a philosopher knew no more than a Cherokee Indian on that subject—and Sir Oliver Lodge has not affected the truth of Macaulay's statement. Only dead men know anything about it—if they know anything at all.

The Bishop of Manchester has been preaching in the Royal Exchange on "Ruin." This is rough on the more unfortunate stockbrokers. Many of them would be glad to have the Bishop's dead certain four thousand a year. His lordship is in clover—and shouldn't be forgetting it. Some he preaches at are outside the field, in the ditch.

An article in a Birmingham paper calls for legislation against "pernicious literature," and also for the better use of the Bible as a corrective of indecency. The writer has evidently not read the Bible. We beg to assure him (or her) that it is the most indecent book that is freely printed and circulated in England to-day. The writer may easily test the question by printing some of its most spicy passages in a separate form. He'll get twelve months for certain.

The Catholic Church must not be blamed for hunting down Ferrer to his bloody death. Nobody is entitled to blame her for anything. She has the right to do whatever she likes. So says Dr. Hedley, the Catholic Bishop of Newport. "Founded and established by Jesus Christ," he has just declared, "she has never accepted from man either a definition of her office or any limitation of her prerogative. She had the inherent right to define her own work, to choose her own means and instruments, and to set down the limits of her own authority." This is a very cheerful theory—for the Catholic Church. Outsiders, however, are not likely to put up with it in practice; and as they are now in the majority they will have their own way. Dr. Hedley may talk big, but he cannot act up to it. So let him talk. It amuses him, and it doesn't hurt us.

White Christians at Cochran, Georgia, have burnt a black Christian. The negro was not only a Christian but a preacher. He fired upon a pale-face who frightened his mules, and is now for ever with the Lord. How they love one another!

We fear the Rev. Claud Campbell, of Brooklands, Leamington, has taken the wrong turning. He died on September 15 and left £39,458 10s. 9d. The odd ninepence doesn't matter, nor perhaps the odd shillings, though we doubt if Jesus Christ ever had as much in his possession at one time. But nearly forty thousand pounds is a big hump to keep him from going through the needle's eye. We presume he is now with Dives; that is, if he is anywhere,—which perhaps is problematical.

Rev. George Alker, of Coventry, left £13,154 0s. 9d. He won't suffer from cold this winter.

The late Mr. A. D. Southgate, of Croydon, formerly a liveryman of the Salters' Company, made a proviso in his will that "should any child join the Roman Catholic Church, or become associated with the Peculiar People, Faith Healers, or Christian Scientists, or any similar religious or quasi-religious body (I well knowing the harm, trouble, and misery caused in homes thereby) such child shall forfeit his or her share and receive in lieu thereof £52 per annum, so as not to be entirely without means of subsistence." There is something very mean and tyrannical in this policy of ruling children's opinions from the tomb, and punishing them for exercising their own minds in forbidden ways. We presume that the testator in this case was a true-blue Protestant. People of that sort are always talking about religious liberty, but have often the slightest acquaintance with it.

Mr. John Lobb, the comic-opera Spiritualist, says that "Our loved ones LIVE, and the ANIMALS—the pets of our domestic hearth—pass on to meet us on the other side." Let us hope they keep themselves on the other side. The dog-tax would be heavy for those who have to meet several canine pets in the "beyond." And we wonder whether the passing on applies to *all* animals. Fancy meeting the other side all the lively parasites we have ever encountered in strange beds! Oh, what must it be to be there!

The *Barnsley Chronicle* records the death (and achievements) of Mr. William Wood, editor of the *Barnsley Independent*, who seems to have been a fair-sized gas-lamp up a side street. We read that he once "tackled Bradlaugh," which apparently means that he spoke during discussion-time after one of Bradlaugh's lectures. Later on this is called his "encounter with Bradlaugh," and it is stated that he "did not come off second best." Of course he didn't. Christians never do come off second best in discussion with "infidels." Thousands of them defeated Bradlaugh in debate. They say so themselves, and they ought to know. Besides, they wouldn't be inaccurate in such a case, for their modesty is proverbial. Hundreds of American preachers defeated Ingersoll. They challenged him to debate with them, and as he took no notice of them, they claimed a victory. There was no contest, but a walk over was good enough for the pious competitor, who bought his own pennyworth of laurel and wore it with the usual dignity.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

(Suspended till the New Year.)

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 12, Manchester; 19, Public Hall, Canning Town.
- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 12, St. Pancras Baths; 19, Leicester.
- W. FEDDEN.—There never were such raisers of the wind as the clergy, though Jesus told his disciples to carry neither scrip nor purse; which meant, we suppose, trusting to God and begging; and they have been at the begging, at any rate, ever since.
- J. H. R.—Force comes with practice. A writer of sixty is usually more vigorous (as a writer) than a writer of twenty. We assume earnestness and sincerity to start with.
- R. STEVENSON.—Always glad to receive cuttings.
- W. P. BALL.—Thanks for welcome cuttings.
- ALFRED WILKINS.—We have no personal acquaintance with the Rev. Comad Noel.
- F. WOOD.—Obliged for cuttings.
- G. H. WISE.—Mr. Foote is writing you.
- K.—Mr. F. J. Gould, Leicester, is a sufficient address.
- ENQUIRER.—Mr. Manson's book on the Salvation Army is still published by Routledge at sixpence. Mr. Cohen's leaflet, which we published for free distribution, did its work and is now out of print.
- H. B. DODDS.—See paragraph. Glad the ladies of the Newcastle Branch rallied so gallantly to its financial help.
- FREDERICK DIXON.—We reproduced the Christian Science item with acknowledgment from the *Daily Chronicle*, and your correction should be sent to that paper. Besides, we see very little substantial difference between the item and your correction. We can hardly go into the subtle mysteries of difference between various bodies of Christian Scientists.
- A. G. ROYSTON.—Pleased you "derive much comfort and pleasure from reading the *Freethinker*" and do your "little best" to promote its circulation. There is a Branch of the N. S. S. at Aberdare, and a good many Freethinkers are scattered over South Wales. Thanks for cuttings.
- R. IRVING.—Sir A. Conan Doyle's announced lecture for the Brighton Dome Mission on "Christianity and the Congo" will probably be very different from what he might easily make it. From our point of view, Christianity must bear the responsibility of the Congo horrors. Christian men, from a Christian country, commit them; and the Christian Powers, who could put an end to them, talk and talk, and do nothing. Great Britain seems to be the chief sinner in this miserable diplomatic concert.
- JESSE JOHNSON.—Sorry that illness prevented you from going over to Birmingham to hear our Town Hall lectures. We note your delight at learning from friends that they were "such a huge success." Mr. Foote is, generally speaking, well, but rather tired. Your enclosures shall be dealt with next week.
- H. IRVING.—Mr. Foote was not there, and knows nothing about it. You may rely on it that Bradlaugh had a good reason for what he did—if he did it.
- 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.

Considering the wretched weather, and the fact that all the poster advertising was destroyed by the great storm during the week, Mr. Foote had a very good audience at the St. Pancras Public Baths on Sunday evening. His lecture on "The Martyrdom of Ferrer" was listened to with profound attention, and enthusiastically applauded at the finish. A satisfactory feature of the meeting was the presence of

such a large proportion of strangers. Mr. Charlton made an excellent chairman.

Mr. Foote will be doing no more platform work until the new year. He starts again on January 9 at St. James's Hall. In the meanwhile he will try to overtake his arrears of literary and other work.

Mr. Lloyd delivers the second (and last) lecture of this course at the St. Pancras Baths this evening (Dec. 12). We hope the local "saints" will see that he has a good audience and a hearty reception.

"Arley Lane," who contributes the brightly written "Pulpit and Pew" columns to the *Birmingham Weekly Mercury*, devoted his space in the last issue of that journal to Mr. Foote's lecture in the great Town Hall on "The Martyrdom of Ferrer." He opened by referring to the size of the audience. "A solid mass of men," he said, "filled the floor of the Town Hall and ran up to the back of the great gallery." Later on he observed that "the thousands of the Town Hall warmly approved and accepted the creed" enunciated by the lecturer from Thomas Paine—"The world is my country, mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion." Of the character of the audience he wrote as follows:—

"The Town Hall audience of Sunday afternoon had an unusual feature. It was mainly composed of men. Not rascals. Not slummers. Not the unemployable. To estimate them was not difficult. I watched them into the hall. I watched them out. I scanned them very closely during the lecture. They were, indubitably, the pick of the workers. They were the bees of the industrial hive. I saw no residuum. No trace of the scum that fills the interstices at a political meeting was visible. Well-clothed, well-conducted, attentive, and intelligent, the men of that great meeting sat and drank in every word. Instead of nine women and children to one man, which is about the proportion of the churches, I reckoned about nine men to one woman."

The descriptive report of the lecture itself was admirably done. "Arley Lane" is an expert at that business.

We are glad that "Arley Lane" put the following passage into his report, as it is calculated to do the Birmingham folk some good. Speaking of Ferrer the lecturer said:—

"He believed that no man had a right to dogmatise to a child.

Here came thunderous cheers, which might have reached to the Cathedral.

Continuing, Mr. Foote declared that to tell a child for truth what was but speculation, was to take advantage of the child's helpless innocence.

And again the people cheered."

We are delighted to see that passage going the round of too bigoted Birmingham through the hospitable and impartial medium of its *Weekly Mercury*.

St. James's Hall, London, has been secured for Sunday evening Freethought lectures during January, February, and March, under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd. Under the same auspices, Sunday evening lectures are being arranged at Stratford Town Hall in January, and at Shore-ditch Town Hall in April.

We were unable to call attention last week to the appeal of the Liverpool Branch for donations towards a presentation to Mr. H. Percy Ward, who is leaving before the end of January for the United States, where he has accepted a lecturing engagement for twelve months, with a view to settling in that country. We hope the presentation will be substantial enough to serve as an encouragement to Mr. Ward. Subscriptions should be forwarded to Mr. John Ross, the Branch treasurer, 13 Carlingford-street, Liverpool.

The Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch had a social gathering at the Cordwainers' Hall on Wednesday evening, December 1. Old friendships were renewed and fresh ones made. Incidentally, purchases were effected of numerous useful articles brought together by the ladies, on whose zeal and energy the function mainly depended. They were also to the front in providing ideas for the program, and helping the throng of youngsters to enjoy themselves. A gratifying result of this harmonious effort is that the Branch stands in a better financial condition than it has done for some years past, and the members expect to do good work for Freethought in the coming year.

Mr. Heaford's lecture on Ferrer at South Shields Assembly Hall last Sunday was very well attended. Councillor J. W. Johnston, of Newcastle, presided, and was supported by Mr. Elijah Copland and others. The harsh treatment of Ferrer

as depicted by the lecturer made a deep impression upon the audience, which included many old friends of Freethought from the surrounding district.

London "saints" will bear in mind that the Annual Dinner takes place at the Holborn Restaurant on Tuesday evening, January 11—which happens to be the N. S. S. President's birthday. The tickets will be 4s. each, as usual.

Mr. Parker H. Sercombe, a Freethought writer and lecturer at Chicago, who is a man of ability and is doing good work in his own way, is calling, apparently on his own account, a World's Rationalist Congress at Barcelona on October 14, 1910—the first anniversary of the shooting of Francisco Ferrer. Mr. Sercombe might have reflected that no one man has a right to summon an International Freethought Congress, or any serious prospect of success in the enterprise. And his notion that the Spanish authorities are bound in some mysterious way to recognise legal rights in "rational citizens of other nations" which they do not recognise in Spanish citizens, is perfectly idle. Moreover—and this is the most important point of all—European Freethinkers have already arranged, through their constitutionally formed International Federation, for the holding of the 1910 Congress at Brussels. We have no doubt whatever that American Freethinkers will be represented there.

"I must thank you, by the way," a correspondent writes to us "for the two lectures you gave at the Manchester Secular Hall the other Sunday. They were magnificent, and it is a pity that the Ferrer lecture cannot be printed as a pamphlet. I wish it could. I took seven friends—four ladies and three men—to hear you, and I fancy it must have been a revelation to some of them."

From a review in last week's *Athenæum* we see that the late Professor John Stuart Blackie, of Edinburgh, saw and heard Bradlaugh in the early days of the Hall of Science. Blackie describes his visit to Bradlaugh's headquarters in a letter written at the time. His description and opinion of Bradlaugh will be of interest to our readers:—

"A bull verily a big Ajax, tall and broad—made by nature for a battering-ram against God and man. Having a fancy for closely looking at Nature, I determined to go and hear him preach in his Atheistic church on Sunday evening in the East End. It was a notable exhibition. A terrible tearing assault against the Book of Exodus and its anthropomorphic representations of the unseen God. Eloquence powerful and fervid, of the first order; really a remarkable man; and from his point of view triumphant over those who hold by the infallibility of the record instead of the Divinity of the dispensation. He made incidentally a public profession of Atheism, which caused me to write him a long letter in order to bring out what show of reason he gives to such monstrosity. I imagine that in the Socratic way I may be able to do him some good. He is a manly, honest fellow, and quite worthy of gentlemanly treatment, which he seldom receives."

What Bradlaugh replied to Blackie's letter does not appear.

Will the editors of the *War Cry* and the *Spectator* please note? In a new edition of Richard Jefferies' *Story of My Heart*, published by Mr. Thomas B. Mosher, of Portland, Maine, it is admitted in the Preface that the account of Jefferies' death-bed conversion to Christianity "can no longer be accepted as the truth," and the writer, whose initials show him to be Mr. Mosher himself, goes on to give the real facts of the case, as stated by Mr. Salt and repeated by Mr. Thomas in their biographies of Jefferies. Mr. Mosher's honesty in this matter, and his willingness to withdraw an inaccurate though popular assertion, stand in marked contrast with the insolence with which some English journalists have assailed those who ventured to maintain that in Jefferies' *Story* must be sought the true record of what he himself described as his "most serious convictions."

THE SERMON TRADE.

English clergymen who are driven to purchase their sermons have to pay considerably more than their American confrères. A syndicate established in the United States undertakes to provide pastors of any denomination with one sermon a week for an inclusive payment of £2 a year. In the prospectus of the syndicate, the sermons for sale are guaranteed to contain from 2,200 to 2,500 words, and described as being "strictly up to date, and containing allusions to current affairs of national interest. We shall not furnish our service to more than one minister in any given city, so no patron need fear an accusation of plagiarism."

—*Daily Chronicle*, Nov. 20.

Scientific Fact and Supernatural Fiction.

WHEN the Victorian period was nearing its close, many of our leading scientists and men of letters entertained the opinion that with the practically unanimous acceptance of evolutionary teachings by the thoughtful few, the religious traditions and prejudices of the thoughtless many, had received a shattering blow from which they would never recover. The view was widely held that, once a large and growing minority of the community was sufficiently enlightened to reject such fantastic legends as the story of Jonah and the Whale, Balaam's Ass, the conversational serpent of the Garden of Eden, or, to select an extreme instance, the resurrection of Jesus, we were all safely on the road that leads to the mental millennium. But the concepts even of many "advanced" people concerning the postulate of Natural Causation, particularly when applied to mental and physical phenomena, still remain in a very amorphous and nebulous condition. Numbers of those who have outgrown the grosser forms of supernaturalism continue to speak with semi-profundity of a Great First Cause which rules and regulates the workings of the material universe.

This aspect of metaphysical confusion is admirably illustrated by the popular proposition that the universe, as we now behold it, necessitates the belief in the generating and controlling agencies of some supreme Mind. It is here, on the other hand, contended that philosophical reasoning and biological discoveries unite in demanding a verdict of proven for the proposition that matter is not the outcome of mind, but that mind is the outcome of matter.

If we desire to study the problem of the genesis of mental faculty on scientific principles, it is necessary to adopt the biological method of investigating the phenomena of feeling and sensation as displayed in their earliest and rudest beginnings by the simplest living things. It is essential to remember that the most primitive semi-animal and semi-plant organisms share so many characteristics in common, that the biological world accepted Haeckel's suggestion and relegated these single-celled organisms to a neuter kingdom of Protists.

When microscopically examined, the motile activities of zoospores, such as the protogenes of Haeckel, are found to be little more complicated than the movements we observe when drops of oil are suspended in water. As the tree of life is slowly ascended, it is made manifest that the physical and psychical activities displayed by organisms have steadily become more and more multitudinous and involved, until the highest development of mental phenomena is attained by the paragon of animals—man himself.

The researches of phy-iological psychologists—as distinguished from "paper psychologists"—warrant the conclusion that in the lowest forms of life yet scientifically studied undifferentiated sentience is strictly confined to those organisms that are destitute of nerve structures—save such that possibly do not reach the limit of microscopic visibility. But when living forms that are slightly higher in the zoological scale are investigated, and the dim outlines of nerve structure and organisation begin to appear, the fundamental faculty of simple sensation advances towards the region of consciousness; and with the subsequent ampler developments of nerve structures, consciousness fully emerges from primitive tactual sensation.

In the varying grades of organic nature, from the lowest, through the median, to the highest, sensational and mental manifestations are invariably associated with nerve structure and function. The mind of man, made up as it is of his senses and intellect, emotions and will, is to be traced exclusively to his own individual experiences, plus the mental organisation and registered experiences of his race, bequeathed to him through hereditary transmission by his ancestors, immediate and remote. The genesis, maintenance, and development

of mind depend absolutely upon food consumed and oxygen breathed. Divorced from oxygenation and metabolism of organic particles, we possess not the slightest evidence of psychical activities throughout the entire range of the animal kingdom.

The remarkable influences exercised upon the human brain and nervous system by stimulants and narcotics are plainly indicative of the unbreakable connection of mind and body. The exhilarating effects of tea and coffee and alcoholic beverages, the soothing sensations which accompany the smoking of tobacco, or even, we are told, the mildest indulgence in opium, unite to testify to the unquestionable interdependence of bodily and mental states. If, remarks Professor Bain, after laborious mental application the waste liquids expelled from the body be chemically examined, these discharges will be found heavily charged with phosphates, thus proving the previous strain upon the brain and nervous system. Even a poor dyspeptic, suffering martyrdom from a deranged digestive apparatus, may become quite philosophical and resigned over a cup of well-made coffee and a fragrant cigar. Illustrations of a similar nature could be multiplied by the score, but the foregoing fully suffice. The proposition is firmly established that mental faculty, even in its most exalted manifestations, is the evolutionary outcome of the most primitive modes of tactual response to environmental stimuli.

Now the "Infinite and Eternal Mind," whose space occupancy at the back of phenomenal existence is alleged and practically vouched for by sundry theological and metaphysically minded men, obviously bears not the remotest resemblance to that feeling and reasoning faculty which is displayed by man and his lower animal relations. Unless we are to imagine that infinite intellect and intelligence are derivable from nescience, which is palpably absurd, there is no logical alternative to the firmly established principle that the existence of mental states is quite inconceivable apart from the personal, *plus* the parental hereditary experiences, bequeathed "principal and interest" to the offspring, which thus render possible the building up of the fabric of sensation, memory, and reason in the animal world. Mind, therefore, as we experience it—and apart from human experience the term is devoid of meaning—mind, in company with its never absent colleague, the body, passes through its periods of infancy, childhood, adolescence, maturity, and senility. No one has yet succeeded in severing any legitimate conception of intellect from the functioning of nerve and brain structures. The evolutionary processes by which these neural architectures have been erected, constituted as they were, and are, by the ceaseless play of the environing factors upon the sensitive organism, were adumbrated in the previous outline of the simultaneous and successive evolution of nerve structures and psychical states.

All human knowledge is strictly relative. In other words, we are enabled to realise differences and agreements between objects by comparing one with the other. Even when dealing with abstractions such as dawn and dusk, beauty and deformity, vice and virtue, pleasure and pain, the comparative method remains indispensable. No matter how complicated or abstruse any mental image may be, we always discover, after tracing its component parts to their genesis, that these are built up from simple perceptions of likenesses or unlikenesses between entities of given altitudes or dimensions.

Whether the Christian theologian makes the admission or not, he almost invariably pictures the "Infinite Mind" as existing before the foundations of the universe were laid. The difficulty of conceiving the manner in which the Infinite Mind was brought into being appears quite insuperable on lines of mere carnal reason. Presumably, before the Infinite mind dawned on chaos, that series of experiential states which forms the basis of memory and reason in the world of animal life did not exist. As the Infinite Mind constituted the sum total of existence, nothing happened; and as nothing happened,

it was quite impossible to find anything to think about or remember. We are, of course, at the mercy of the stereotyped retort that the finite cannot judge the infinite. Nevertheless, when metaphysics has done its worst, we are still comforted by the reflection that all human judgments are finite, including the judgment that the finite cannot judge the infinite.

The most potent argumentative weapons against theological misconceptions have not always been supplied by the intellectual armories of those who have openly assailed supernatural assumptions. Many critical and careful students of the apologetic writings of Bishop Butler, and the Design Argument fallacies of Paley, have derived from these their first sceptical impressions. Similarly, one of the most crushing arguments against Creation was furnished by Dean Mansel. In his celebrated Bampton Lectures on the Limits of Religious Thought, Mansel, who was one of the subtlest metaphysicians of the nineteenth century, demonstrated the logical impossibility of an infinite existence ever possessing the power to create anything. An infinite and eternal being must, in the nature of the terms, have existed for *all time*, and during the same limitless period must have occupied *all space*. The eternal being, in order to be eternal, must have existed through all time; the infinite and eternal being must have occupied *all space for all time*. Therefore, as the infinite and eternal being occupied *all space for all time*, there was no surplus space to occupy, and it consequently follows by logical necessity that the universe could never have been created, and is only rationally conceivable in terms of self-existence.

A logical analysis of Theistic arguments and assumptions, which continue to carry great weight not only with the avowedly orthodox but with nothingarians in general, plainly reveals the utterly irrational and inconsequential nature of the unwarranted assertions which form the philosophical stock-in-trade of the theological profession. When thus examined, Theistic implications and assumptions stand forth in all their naked deformity, with all the verbiage with which they have been enfolded ruthlessly stripped away. The words and phrases of metaphysical supernaturalists seldom or never bear any logical or just relationship to the ideas they are supposed to represent. And while words constitute the counters of wise men, but remain the money of men who are otherwise, ample scope is ever afforded to the Theistic metaphysicians of all the creeds to utilise their illogical and unscientific systems of verbal cobwebbery to the glory of mental confusion and to the detriment of any clear or consistent method of reasoning which is likely to be helpful in laying the foundations and erecting the scaffoldings of the future temple of Science and Humanity.

T. F. P.

The Drama of the Poor.

AS a man may be known by his bookshelf, so may a people be known by its drama. To the illustrious author of the immortal tragedies in the South-East of London all hail! there must be rubbing of hands in the ecclesiastical dovecotes of Southwark. There never was a quack doctor yet who disagreed with his patients if they thought they were ill, and almost incurable, for has he not the one and only cure?

Tragedy screams at every hoarding; it has a message to wives, to sweethearts, to married people: firstly to come to see the play, and secondly to take conjugal secrets to the clergyman if in doubt. This pandering to "the cloth" explains the brazen and disgusting posters one sees, painted in the most lurid colors, and it also explains their non-suppression.

The sensuous beauty of their titles betrays the fact that the inspired originator understands the law of demand and supply; there is nothing metaphysical in them; they do not mystify the finer perceptions of truth; they do not risk misinterpretation, and a

spade is not mistaken for a silver salver. *The Girl who Took the Wrong Turning, A Woman's Cross Roads, Through the Divorce Court, The Bad Girl of the Family* (who is a fair knockout—see the *Daily Chronicle*), with their euphemistic headings, are not liable to be construed as problematical.

There is that air of finality about them which is the hall mark of genius; therefore hail! favored one of the Muses Nine; for a cunning humbug you equal your brother professionals whose audience consists of men with intellects forever swaddled in the long clothes of hocus-pocus and of woman whose finer emotions are paralysed with your black magic. In poverty-stricken districts an impartial observer cannot fail to notice that the most prosperous places are churches and public-houses; if the former fail to pay as a business concern, then it is hopeless to expect anything to thrive in their place. About the latter there is no immediate concern.

In my mind's eye there is Southwark, Bermondsey, and Walworth—three of the most wretched districts in London, and their central Mecca of Art lies in the vicinity of the famous "Elephant and Castle," where the audiences are treated to the familiar orgy of virtue triumphant. Freethinkers know that virtue; Freethinkers know that vice. It is found in Part the Second of Shelley's "Peter Bell the Third": "There are mincing women mewling."

The patient reader will ask, What has this to do with our cause? A select few who ban *Blanco Posnet* can apparently look on with sleek satisfaction at the presentation of plays portraying man with his most savage passions; gaols, convicts, murders, robberies, parsons, churches, all appear with unerring precision.

This is the fare slimly licked over in one of the leading Nonconformist dailies, the diplomatic writer of which walks the tight-rope between respectability and prostitution of what brains he possesses.

Thus do the emissaries of a dying creed welcome the assistance of any help, however disreputable: it enlarges evil; it distorts true virtue. It paints vice in its worst colors, it manufactures sin (they the once sole agents of this commodity), and the spiritual medicine-men are then ready with their sovereign remedy—eternal salvation, or something as nebulous.

"God save the people" sounds well"; his commission agents take efficient precautions that he shall do nothing of the kind; for, two days' journey from England, are not the clerical hands dyed with blood in preventing even a mortal to educate the people?

And the drama; this Irish stew of claptrap and shoddy sentiment is foisted on a crowd which deserves something better. Can one wonder that a people with nothing higher to look to fall an easy prey for the tentacles and capacious maw of that Giant Octopus the Church?

J. N. R.

A Representative Sixpenny Novel.

I HAVE sometimes wondered why religious teachers fulminate with so much vehemence against the bulk of stories read clandestinely by schoolboys while they have seldom anything to say against the wishy-washy sensationalism of many of the novels read by "boys"—some of them pretty old—to whom school-days are only a memory. I think I have now discovered a reason. As a rule, the "Deadwood Dick" type of book beloved by the schoolboy seldom makes the good fortune of its hero depend upon the kind interposition of "Providence"; while in the latter type of book there are usually intercalated pious and soothing explanations to show that "virtue" is rewarded and "vice" is punished by the direct act of God.

There has recently been placed in my way a representative sixpenny novel written by a well-known English writer and published by a well-known English firm of publishers. It is a depressing thought that any such book should have a considerable vogue. The publishers' preface says: "The sixpenny edition of the popular novel has become a household requirement." When Freethinkers have any occasion to be dissatisfied with the progress their cause is making, they should sample some of these sixpenny novels, which

are sold by the million, and they will find in them a cogent reason not only for intellectual laziness but also for intellectual disease. It is remarkable to find that the sensational story is becoming one of the weapons of orthodoxy. I am informed that the number of religious periodicals and Sunday stories which are largely devoted to a trashy sensationalism is astonishing. During recent years there has been a tremendous increase in the output of such publications.

The particular book to which I refer is a story about a young Englishman who ran away to sea from a comfortable home, and who refused to listen to his father's solicitations to return. He left at the age of sixteen, and after eight years' experience of a sailor's life, during which period he never seems to have thought of visiting his father, who naturally felt resentment at such unfilial treatment, he is wandering the streets of Melbourne with 10s. 9d. in his pocket, half resolved to go to the gold mines. A half-drunk miner tries to embrace a beautiful young lady, and our young sailor saves her from insult, for which she thanks him very prettily. He then goes to a Sailors' Home, has a meal, and meets an old shipmate in company with a well-spoken gentleman, who represents himself to be the owner of a ship which is to make a voyage to England. The hero and his friend are engaged respectively as mate and second mate. Their captain does nothing but drink rum, and most of his duties devolve upon the hero. The employer goes on the voyage, and the ship is not far off the Australian coast when it is pursued by a police-boat. Shots are exchanged, the police-boat is disabled, and the ship gets away to sea. The ship, it turns out, has passengers on board—an old gentleman and his daughter—the latter, of course, being the beautiful lady whom the hero had helped in the streets of Melbourne. To shorten the summary, it also turns out that, on a slight acquaintance, the old gentleman had accepted the offer of the owner of the ship to take him to England along with several boxes of bullion belonging to the former. Jealousy about the girl springs up between the owner and the hero. Further developments show that the reputed owner is not the real owner. He is a ticket-of-leave man, who has stolen the ship, harrassing the agents by representing himself to be the real owner, and he has employed a rascally crew to assist him in the nefarious designs of killing the old gentleman and annexing his daughter and the gold. After a lot of impossible adventures and successful stratagems the old man and his daughter, the second mate, and a faithful boatswain are got off in a calm in the long boat, which is a few days after picked up by a gunboat. The hero is left with the pseudo-owner and the rascally crew. The crew drink and become impatient, and to pacify them their villainous leader shows them the big boxes in the cabin. The boxes, however, our hero has already found out, only contain lead. The ship, after being long becalmed, is struck by a tornado, from which she is saved by the skill of the hero. All hands to the pumps! A drunk sailor sets fire to the ship below. There is the inevitable case of gunpowder in the stern. The hero and the Irish steward get a raft rushed together, and the villain and his associates rush for the boxes. They find but lead, and the villain is hurled by the drunken sailors into the flames of the hold. The hero and steward get away on the raft. Soon after, bang goes the gunpowder, and the crew are killed. The rum-drinking captain had anticipated matters by striking up a row with his employer, who killed him and threw him to the sharks which followed the ship. After a day or two on the raft the hero and steward are picked up by the gunboat which had already picked up the occupants of the long boat. The hero finds a paper on the gunboat with an advertisement asking for his whereabouts as his father has died intestate and he is therefore his heir. Marriage of the hero and the beautiful young lady.

I regret that it has been impossible to compress this thrilling narrative into smaller space. But it is easy to see that in such a volume there is an immense wealth of thrilling incident and detail. The coincidences are delightful, and the melodrama altogether could not be more melodramatic. The lady is, of course, wealthy; and at the end his father's fortune comes in very opportunely for the adorable hero. A magnificent touch is given by way of finish when their baby girl goo-goo's to a visitor to the effect that Ma calls her by the name of the fateful ship on which Pa sailed as mate at Melbourne.

It is to be observed that, in order that the story might work out to the writer's plan, the self-denying though poor and proud young hero refused the young lady's offer at the beginning to be introduced to her father as a reward for his attention when she ran the risk of being insulted. He had still a lot to do for her.

Now one would not imagine that such a work was susceptible of including many expressions of piety. But the author is able to salve his conscience and point his moral that virtue and heroism are always rewarded by Providence with material benefits. When the hero, by almost superhuman

efforts, has saved the boatswain from drowning, he dreams that his mother is reading to him about the Valley of the Shadow of Death in the *Pilgrim's Progress*—the book he loved best. He heard her voice saying the words: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me: Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." And he was comforted. The heroine's comment upon hearing that he had recovered from his adventure was "Thank God." When the hero was told of her words he said devoutly: "Yes, the end of all is Thank God." It was not suggested what would have been said to God if things had been otherwise.

The boatswain, like the owner, had been a tough customer, and they too were originally in league about the fate of the passengers and the destination of the gold; but the boatswain "ratted" after his life was saved by the hero, and not unnaturally shares in the pious ejaculations with which at times of crisis the book is interlarded.

When the hero tells the lady's father of the danger they are in on board the ship, and discusses the possibilities of escape, he remarks: "Do not give way, sir; do not fear for her; she shall be safe. There is a God above us still. But for heaven's sake let us be careful not to betray ourselves." "Yes," said the old gentleman, "we shall conquer if there is a heaven above us."

It is really unnecessary to comment upon the incongruities and impossibilities of this superficial piffle. But again we may pertinently inquire: How if things went otherwise? How if they did not conquer? What about God and heaven then? What about the daily tragedies that baffle us by their mysterious cruelty and injustice? We do not need to go to fiction for such things; we can find them in the daily newspapers. What help does the cant of the religious teacher furnish to face or solve such things? None at all. It merely weakens us mentally and morally, and makes life with its burdens less tolerable. If a personal Director of life be introduced (supernatural and all-powerful), such a method only makes confusion worse confounded. But in this work of fiction everything works out right in the end. The hero prays that he may be the means of saving the heroine, and his prayer is answered. Therefore we have another proof of the general belief in the efficacy of prayer. But however it turns out, the Christian is always complacent about the result. If the prayer is answered, well and good: there you are. If it is not, God's wisdom cannot err, and no answer is a good enough answer for the pious and devout.

By the way, did anybody ever know of an Irishman—even an Irish steward—who pronounced "here" as "hare"? The author also seems rather out of it in one of his nautical expressions, regarding which any cabin boy could have put him right. On several occasions he writes of people on board ship going from the forepart of it towards the stern as going "astern." The repetition of this mistake irritates the reader. As there will probably be new editions of the book, it should be corrected. One always speaks or writes of a person on board ship who goes towards the stern as going "aft." If he is going towards the bow he is described as going "forward." It seems to be too true that we are going sadly far "astern" in our literary tastes; and orthodox religion is largely to blame for this lamentable decadence. For a hundred readers of such drivel as I have been calling attention to you will probably find ten who read Meredith. No prize is offered to the reader who first spots the book referred to.

SIMPLE SANDY.

In Memoriam.

FRED BONTE.—DIED NOVEMBER 27, 1909.

In light more clear than any earthly ray
He lived and fought and died. When shadows flee
And night slips from the earth, the majesty
Of morning breaks the dawn; so Truth's bright day
Broke through the night of Faith for him whose way
Is trod unto its end. His mind grew free,
And then his thoughts were fashioned inwardly
By Truth alone. For Truth itself were they.

And now he sleeps. Another soldier's eyes
Have bravely closed.....Freethinkers! let us rise
And fight; for one by one, with failing breath,
Like leaves slow scattering downwards to the brink
Of autumn pools, our Freethought warriors sink
Into the sweet, dim restfulness of death.

THOMAS MOULT.

Correspondence.

THE LORDS AND VAGRANTS.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—May I be permitted to call attention to the fact that the scandalous Vagrant Act (which goes back to very early Tudor times, when flogging at the cart's tail for both sexes was in full favor) was amended by the House of Commons so recently as the year 1898? I gather from Mr. Collinson's new pamphlet, *The Flogging of Vagrants*, published by the Humanitarian League, that in that year the Home Secretary made a promise to Mr. E. H. Pickersgill, M.P., that he would leave out the clause relating to the power of flogging when the statute came up for consideration. He did so, but the Lords restored it, and the Home Office, apparently too feeble to resist, allowed the subject to pass, the upshot being that the flogging clause has remained in full force; and at the Middlesex Sessions, Dorset, Gloucester, Staffordshire, and other Courts, advantage has been taken of it.

Undoubtedly the power to flog homeless men, decrepit from premature old age, for the heinous crime of begging or "sleeping out," would have been abrogated on this occasion but for the action of the House of Lords in thwarting the Home Office and the Commons. The Lords, it is needless to say, have ever been reactionary in matters concerning the punishment of adult and juvenile delinquents; and if anything were needed to prove the absolute uselessness of that House, here you have it.

END OR MEND.

We can never honor Voltaire too long nor too deeply for the vehemence and sincerity of his abhorrence of the military spirit. Nowhere do we feel more distinctly that he marked the end of the mediæval temper, than in his noble protests against the glory of bloodshed. The great orators of the church to the very last donned the robes of their most sumptuous rhetoric, when they were called to consecrate the virtues of the victorious soldier. The pages of the Old Testament supplied them with a hundred baleful heroes to whom they might liken their warrior, and a hundred cruel and bloody tropes with which they might decorate the funeral oration. So long as the atrocities of the Hebrew chiefs and people, their treacheries and slaughters, were held sacred and celebrated with unction, it was not likely that the voice of the peacemaker could make itself heard. Voltaire not only held up these demoralising records to the odium they deserve; he directly taxed the clergy with their failure to discharge the very highest part of their duty.—*John Morley.*

The evolution of morals is a patent fact to any student of human nature and human history, for the operation of this stupendous law persists alike in the world of matter and of mind. Parental sympathy has been shown the matrix and starting point of all love; and as the coral insect, building under the darkness of great waters with steadfast instinct, reaches into the light at last, to make a home for fair creatures with wings and fronds, so sympathy for offspring, working blindly in the fish and fowl, in the great ape and vanished being whose eyes first glowed with conscious intelligence, has fought upwards and brought man to the moral altitude where now he stands. His zenith is not yet, but the rational spirit looks forward, and hope grows justified when the dark history of the past is contrasted with the brighter spirit of yesterday and the noble prophecy of tomorrow.—*Eden Phillpotts.*

FIRE SCREENS.

A negro preacher in a Georgia town was edified on one occasion by the recital of a dream had by a member of his church.

"I was a-dreamin' all dis time," said the narrator, "dat I was in Ole Satan's dominions. I tell you, pabson, dat was shore a bad dream."

"Was dere any white men dere?" asked the dusky divine.

"Shure dere was—plenty of 'em," the other hastened to assure his minister.

"What was dey a-doin'?"

"Ebery one of 'em," was the answer, "was a holdin' a cullud passon between him an' de fire."

AFTER EMERSON.

"That wealthy young broker has given his motor to a well-known actress."

"Yes. He says his father taught him to hitch his wagon to a star."

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.
INDOOR.

ST. PANCRAS BATHS (Prince of Wales-road, Kentish Town, N.): 7.30, J. T. Lloyd, "Mind or Matter: Which?"
 ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Church-street, Upper-street, N.): 7.30, F. A. Davies, "Jesus and the Labor Movement."
 KINGSTON HUMANITARIAN SOCIETY (Fife Hall, Fife-road): 7.30, Miss K. B. Kough, "The Bible and the Suffragette."
 WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Public Hall (Minor), Barking-road, Canning Town): 7.30, H. Thurlow, "Is there a God?"

OUTDOOR.

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Highbury Corner): 12 (noon), Sidney Cook, a Lecture. Finsbury Park, 3, Sidney Cook, "How and Why Ferrer Died."

COUNTRY.
INDOOR.

EDINBURGH SECULAR SOCIETY (Club Rooms, 12 Hill-square): 6.30, John Pryde, "Secularism and Morality."
 GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): J. McCabe, 12 (noon), "The Devil in Milton and Goethe"; 6.30, "The Evolution of Morality."—II. Lantern illustrations.
 LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, S. K. Ratcliffe, "To-day and To-morrow in India."
 LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): L. Bergmann, B.Sc., "Can Science Reveal God?"
 MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road. All Saints): C. Cohen, 3, "Spain Under the Crescent and the Cross: a Chapter in the History of Christianity"; 6.30, "The Origin and Growth of God." Tea at 5.
 NEWCASTLE RATIONALIST DEBATING SOCIETY (Vegetarian Café, Nelson-street): 7.30, A. White, "Charles Bradlaugh."
 NOTTINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Cobden Hall, Peachey-street): 7.30, Open Discussion on Spiritualism.
 SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (above Tram Hotel, Market-place): 7.30, Business meeting.

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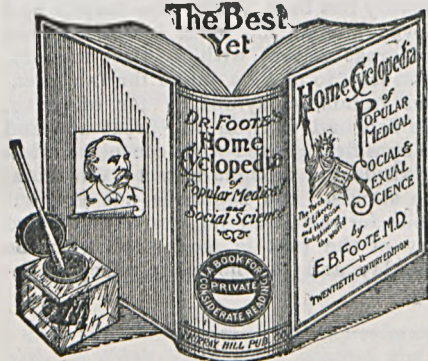
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Secretary—MISS E. M. VANCE.

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

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