

THE Freethinker

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PRICE TWOPENCE

Men reason badly, but nature and destiny are logical.
—EMERSON.

Who Made God?

WHATEVER "blasphemy" there is in this question does not belong to us. It belongs to Mr. Booth-Clibborn, one of General Booth's son-in-laws. We have just seen it on the top of a poster announcing discourses by that gentleman on the first two Sundays in January.

When the good Christians hear that explanation their anger will cool down. The Blasphemy Laws were intended to prevent "infidels" from making Christianity ridiculous; Christians may make it as ridiculous as they please—and it must be allowed that their efforts are crowned with considerable success.

We remember what happened at our trial for "blasphemy" before Mr. Justice North, at the Old Bailey, nearly twenty-seven years ago. (Lord, how the time flies!) We made a long list, which was published in the report of our trial, of the vituperative epithets that Christians applied to each other during the controversy between Catholics and Protestants at the time of what is called the Reformation. It was a tremendous list in every way, and would really be useful to political opponents in the approaching elections. Nothing was omitted that Christian charity could prompt or pious ingenuity suggest. It constituted a perfect debater's slang dictionary. No wonder the judge looked half-mad when we presented those flowers of religious courtesy to the jury; especially when we suggested that anything complained of in the pages of the *Freethinker* was but a poor and feeble imitation of orthodox achievements. But the judge lost his temper entirely when we proceeded to show that the "blasphemy" in our indictment was pale and rapid in comparison with the red and pungent samples we culled from recent numbers of the *War Cry*.

Mr. Booth-Clibborn, having been a Salvationist, and being now "on his own" in the same line of business, is a licensed "blasphemer." If he were an "infidel" the authorities would soon be down upon him. The question at the top of his poster caused a terrible rumpus at Birmingham some years ago. The Secularists were holding Sunday evening meetings in the Bristol-street Board School, and one of their lecturers dealt with the question, "Did God make Man, or did Man make God?" This awful query stirred Birmingham to the very depths. The School Board turned the Secularists out of the building they had profaned. Letters and articles appeared in the local newspapers. There was Hades to pay. Yet the pious Mr. Booth-Clibborn puts "Who Made God?" on a poster in a little strait-laced, clergy-ridden town, and not a dog barks at it. The policeman looks at it and passes on as if it were "Aladdin" or the "Forty Thieves."

We do not deny that Mr. Booth-Clibborn's question is a very sensible one. We are also prepared to say that it admits of an answer.

There is a text in the Bible story of Creation

which runs thus:—

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

The grammar is mixed, but the meaning is clear. God made mankind male and female. That was the ancient idea. But a great deal has been learnt since then, and the modern idea is very different. The declaration of primitive ignorance has to be read upside down in the light of present knowledge. Man thought that God made him. He could not think otherwise. It was the only way of explaining how he came here. And the guess of ignorance satisfied him while he remained ignorant. But he is better instructed now; having investigated and discovered, he has no more use for guesses; he accepts the teachings of Evolution; he knows that the world came, and all that is in it, including himself, in a perfectly natural way; and the more he studies Evolution the more he suspects, or actually perceives, that God did not make him, but that he made God. The old text, therefore, will eventually read in the true Revised Version of the Bible:—

"So man created God in his own image, in the image of man created he him; male and female created he them."

Yes, *them*. For the world has been populous with gods. Down in Egypt, which Shaftesbury so finely called the motherland of superstition, a Greek wit said that it was often easier to find a god than a man. There were gods of every aspect of nature; gods of the sky, gods of the stars, gods of the mountains, gods of the woods, gods of the rivers, and gods of the seas. Lastly, there were gods of every aspect of human nature; as in the splendid Greek pantheon, with its Mars, the god of war—Apollo, the god of light and song—Juno, the goddess of marriage—Venus, the goddess of beauty—and Cupid, the god of love, who is blind because love is blind, and winged because love is swift, and eternally young because love is always young; for time touches all else, but love it cannot touch, and the fragrance of youthful days still lingers in old hearts, and when the passions have burnt themselves out the light of affection gleams in aged eyes, whose possessors are tottering down the hill they once climbed together, and will soon be sleeping together at its foot. Yes, love is youth; we are young to the extent that it remains with us; and without it we are dead, though we are not buried.

The one God of monotheism is no more an actual existence than whiteness or virtue is an actual existence. Whiteness and virtue are general terms, denoting qualities common to many objects and actions. God is also a general term, denoting certain qualities common to the multitude of deities of all ages and climes. We may change the illustration, and say that it is crude supernaturalism refined to the last degree. Supernatural beings have disappeared, and left behind them the conception of supernatural personality. Nature is no longer mapped out in separate provinces; man recognises that it is one and indivisible; consequently the mob of rival gods become incredible; man drops them out of his mind, and accepts one great God in their place. Religion teaches him nothing; his religion is always modified by his growing knowledge, and purified by his growing morality.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Future of Freethought.

To forecast the future is never an easy task—save to fools. To others the complexity of life is too great, the permutations and combinations too numerous and too complex, to admit of profitable prophesying. And the future, when it does arrive, has so often the disconcerting knack of realising itself under forms widely different from our anticipations. The safest plan by far is to follow the old advice, and never prophesy until one knows. Yet some kind of forecast is involved in all thinking and in all action. We act to-day in anticipation that to-morrow will, in general outlines at least, resemble to-day. Otherwise, action would have but a very limited scope, and thinking but little utility. It is true that the past alone will explain the present, and that the present contains the key to the future. But our knowledge of the past is so fragmentary, and our misunderstanding of the present so variegated in its incongruities, that, beyond vague generalisations, it is hardly wise to venture. A safe rule—perhaps the safest rule—is to act with decision where action seems justified, and trust to the future either to confirm the wisdom of our choice or to correct the folly of our decision.

To write, then, on the future of Freethought seems a subject on which to court derision. But, indeed, I have no intention of copying the example of those who are always ready with a cut-and-dried constitution for the society of two thousand years hence, of saying just what the position of Freethought will be this time next year, or giving a date for the conclusion of one of the oldest struggles in human history. It is enough to note some phases of the present, and so pave the way for considerations as to what *may* follow. And, first, it may be noted that the disintegration of Christian doctrine continues not only with unabated, but with accelerated, speed. I say Christian doctrine, because Christian institutions, being rooted in self-interest, evince a tougher vitality than the opinions they are supposed to represent. Quite a number of prominent clergymen, encouraged by the success of the New Theology, now seem to be falling over each other in their haste to disown Christian doctrines which they were preaching a little while ago, and which, once upon a time, the whole of the Christian world announced as the very pillars of their faith. When a prominent Christian newspaper plainly declares that there is not a single one of the Christian symbols or doctrines that does not ante-date Christianity, it would seem as though we were nearing the end. True, it has taken Freethinkers a good century and a half to get this truth driven home to the Christian intelligence, but it seems to be getting home at last.

But it is easily possible to over-estimate the value to Freethought of this "progressive" movement among Christian theologians. A little progress in one direction may be more than compensated for by an arrest of development all round. When, for example, in 1870, what is known as the religious compromise was decided on, it was hailed by some as an advance, on the ground that the religious teaching proposed was less dogmatic than certain other prevalent forms. It is now realised pretty clearly that instead of this being an advance it was actually a mode of retrogression. It served to delay, and still delays, the perfecting of our educational system. Had there been a stronger fight for principle, the covert endowment of religion by the Act of 1870 would have been prevented and all the bitterness of the last thirty years avoided. So with our liberalising theologians of to-day. Their attitude involves no clearly reasoned-out principle. It is more or less a commercialised appreciation of the necessity for concessions to a form of thought that is now too widespread and too insistent to be cried down or ignored.

Really advanced thought has much more to fear from half-hearted compromises than from direct and open opposition. Thousands of people who might

under other conditions become avowed Freethinkers, by finding a form of religious belief a little less obnoxious than that with which they are familiar, have their mental development arrested. The more objectionable features of their creed are eliminated, the remainder is given a rationalistic veneer, and in this way Freethought is robbed of possible recruits, while supernaturalism is assisted by having possible enemies eliminated. "Half a loaf is better than none" is one of those sayings that contain just enough truth to enable them to become fruitful sources of error. Half a loaf may be better than none under certain conditions; but there are times when the acceptance of half a loaf means the prevention of our getting a whole one.

The real value of this liberalising tendency amongst religious preachers is that it is symptomatic. It is an indication of the growth of a current of conviction that is wholly in the right direction. This is not only illustrated by the dropping of definite doctrines, but also by the growth of a so-called social Christianity. Ever since the Renaissance the secular spirit has been in conflict with the Christian spirit of other-worldism. At one time manifested in the contest over the question of whether Pope or King should exercise temporal sovereignty, at another manifested in the struggle against a State-established religion, it reaches the final phase in the declaration that man's primary, if not his whole, concern lies with human welfare this side of the grave. Of course, no class of theologians admit this principle; but the increasing emphasis on the importance of social welfare is an indication of how this conviction has grown among the people. The only danger here—and it is one that is obviously threatening whatever good the modern Labor movement contains—is that the force of social reformers may be weakened by the prospect of a possible alliance with religious organisations. In that case the "social Christianity" will do for social reform what the Protestant Reformation did for Freethought—arrest progress until the underlying evolutionary forces have once more power to assert themselves.

For it is quite a mistake to assume that the religious spirit changes. It remains the same generation after generation. All that changes is the method of expression. The recent murder of Ferrer shows that when opportunity serves the old methods are far from dead or discarded—although, in this case, the world-wide burst of spontaneous indignation shows that such outrages on civilised intelligence can no longer be perpetrated with impunity. What we can reckon on with safety is that the Christian Church, in all its aspects, will continue to be as obstructive to genuine progress as circumstances permit. While it can openly oppose reform, as in Spain or Russia, it will do so. When this is no longer advisable, as is the case in this country, we shall witness a coquetting with reform movements and an attempt to pose as the friend of opinions to which it has historically been always opposed.

On the credit side of the account we can confidently reckon on the continued operation of forces that have already done so much to weaken the power of religion. And not by any means the least of these is the insistent and dissolving influence of an advanced civilisation on primitive ideas. Ideas, like organisms, live in virtue of adaptation to environment; and, when the environment is unfavorable, they undergo modification or suffer destruction. It is in this direction that one has to seek for the ultimate source of strength of Freethought, and for grounds of confidence in the future. Superficially, Freethought has always been in a hopeless position in the face of its historic enemy. On the one side has been a great church backed by all the power of wealth, tradition, social prestige, and the influence of vested interest. Against such a coalition no individual or organisation could have made headway had they represented nothing but themselves. Their real strength lay in the fact that they were in the deepest and truest sense representative of the best and most

progressive forces around them. They were, and are, assured of ultimate victory, because they express what thousands of others are feeling, and because they represent forces against which the most powerful of churches struggle in vain. An individual may be destroyed, a society disbanded, a paper suppressed—these things have happened time after time, but deliberate obstruction is powerless against forces that derive continued sustenance from developing contemporary life. Religion has to face here the question, not of destroying an individual, but of uprooting an idea. And, of all things in the world, an idea is the hardest to destroy—the one thing we know that comes nearest to attaining immortality. Says Ruskin in a too-little-known passage,—

"There is nothing in the world that you cannot keep quiet except the reason in a strong reasoner's brain. You can keep a child quiet in a room, a tiger quiet in its den, you can quiet the winds with shocks of artillery, you can quiet the sea with mounds and bars, but you cannot quiet the thought in a thinker's brain. And there is nothing in the world that you cannot quench except the conviction in a thinker's heart. You can quench the violence of fire, you can quench the bitterness of strife, you can quench ambition, you can quench faith—yes—and though much water cannot quench Love, neither can the floods drown it, yet under ashes at last you can quench Love; but until the time come for ashes to fall to their ashes, you cannot quench the Truth in a strong Thinker's Soul."

With the addition of the truth already emphasised, we have here a brilliant picture of the hopelessness of the task on which religion is engaged. Against material aggression, against the application of physical force, the Christian Church may rise triumphant in the future as it has done in the past. But Freethought is fighting it on the only ground on which a spiritual despotism can be really conquered, and with weapons against which religion can offer no valid defence. The only way to kill one passion, said Spinoza, is by raising another. The only way to kill one idea is by developing an antagonistic one. Ultimately the fight between Religion and Freethought is a contest of rival and irreconcilable ideas. And with the latter deriving its strength from all that is most permanent and progressive in human experience, the nature of the ultimate issue can be plainly foretold by all who intelligently study the course and nature of human evolution. C. COHEN.

The Tenses.

It is a habit with us to speak of past years as dead; but it is a misleading habit. When we say to ourselves to-day that the old year is dead we are speaking metaphorically. In the sense most real to us nothing ever dies. "All things will change," says Tennyson, but "nothing will die."

" 'Tis the world's winter;
Autumn and summer
Are gone long ago;
Earth is dry in the centre,
But spring, a new comer,
A spring rich and strange,
Shall make the winds blow
Round and round,
Thro' and thro',
Here and there
Till the air,
And the ground
Shall be filled with life anew."

In that simple yet beautiful poem, Tennyson affirms the eternity of the world. Because "the world was never made, it will not fade"; it will only change. As "nothing was born," so "nothing will die"; all things will change. Winter is life's night-time, when it sleeps the sleep of the just; but by and by the breath of spring shall fan it back into the waking state once more. There is no such thing as death. The old year has passed away that it may live again in the new.

There is no possible escape from the past. We could not break with it even if we wished ever so

much. The preacher is always urging his hearers to believe the direct opposite. "However black with sin and guilt your past may be," he says, "the moment you put your trust in God, it shall be sunk out of sight and memory for ever." This gospel may act like a soothing draught upon a few simple people; but there is not a word of truth in it. The past declines point-blank to be sunk. This is admitted by the most sensible among the theologians. These, too, preach the gospel of forgiveness, but they so explain it as to divest it of all its Biblical and evangelical signification. "If you repent and believe," they assure their hearers, "God will deal with you as if no hideous past lay behind you, or as if you had never sinned." A god who mocked his own creation in that reckless fashion would be the wickedest of criminals, in whom no sane person could possibly believe. To treat a criminal as if he were a saint would be as useless as it would be absurd, because Nature, with which we cannot help having to do, never ignores the past in its treatment of mankind. It is an inexorable law that to-day should be the direct fruit of yesterday, and to-morrow of both. This law abides, uninterfered with, whatever doctrine of free pardon be preached in the Churches, and applies to believers quite as much as to unbelievers.

The desire to be rid of the past is largely a theological heritage. All pre-Christian time is characterised as wicked. Until he repents and believes, theology looks upon every man as exceedingly sinful, as a lost child of the living God. Not to be a Christian is to be a rebel deserving of hell-fire. From the past we receive a corrupt nature, evil propensities, and a condition of lostness. What parents transmit to their offspring is, not the state of grace into which they were raised through faith in Christ, but the old Adam that lurked among their members and warred against the law of Christ in their spirits; not their Divine sonship, bestowed upon them through the merits of the Redeemer, but the virulent taint of original sin. But this theological interpretation of the law of heredity is essentially false. What the past bequeaths to the present is all that it really possesses. Some go the length of asserting that even acquired characters are transmitted; and although the weight of scientific evidence is against so extravagant a contention, it is beyond controversy that Nature transmits both good and bad qualities with the utmost impartiality. Nor can it be doubted that in the overwhelming majority of instances the good qualities greatly preponderate. There are very few, if any, people in whom the vicious elements outnumber and outweigh the virtuous. The bulk of even the so-called gutter class are more sinned against than sinning. The submerged tenth, the waifs and strays of society, are generally more the victims of a bad environment than of a bad heredity. At any rate, Nature's absolute impartiality cannot be impugned. With equal indifference she passes on from parent to child both good and bad qualities; and, as a rule, the good ones predominate. With respect to the evil qualities, however, what is needed is not forgiveness but elimination. Man's chief duty is to see to it that the inheritance, which he has received from the past, is improved as much as possible before he hands it over to the future. Indeed, it is incumbent upon us to judge the past in the light of to-day, and for the benefit of to-morrow.

Robertson, of Brighton, preached a notable sermon on "Progress through Oblivion of the Past," in which he vigorously maintained that the recollection of either the vices or the virtues of bygone days hampers us in the art of character-making. There is doubtless a sense in which the great preacher was right; but there is another sense in which the memory of the past may be of immense service to the present. Past successes ought to prove a strong encouragement in the struggles of the present; and even past failures should be effective warnings against similar failures to-day. To realise a mistake, a false step, or a wrong choice, is to convert it into a valuable servant. Indeed, it is on stepping-stones of our past virtues and vices, victories and defeats,

successes and failures, that we are enabled to rise to higher things in the present.

The old years live again in the new; but no two years are alike. This is an entirely new year, though it carries the old on its back. The same thing is true of human beings. No one stands absolutely unconnected. In each individual there live millions of ancestors. The present generation represents all the generations that have preceded it. If there ever was a first man, he begins life anew in the youngest babe of the twentieth century. We often fancy that there is an infinite distance between us and the savage state, but we are egregiously mistaken. Every one of us carries a savage hidden in his bosom—hidden, not destroyed; overlaid, or plated with a thin layer of civilised manners, not rooted out of the system and annihilated. How many are there in whom the savage has not, on occasion, stood out, naked and unashamed, and asserted itself with ruthless and disastrous force? Verily, "moods of tiger and of ape" survive in the most advanced civilisation on earth, and make a disgraceful exhibition of themselves on the slightest provocation. We indulge in a good deal of tall talk about the growth and progress of the race, especially in the West; but how much has it grown, and how far has it progressed, during the last six thousand years? What we call "progress" means little more than change, which is not always synonymous with advance. In most essential respects the race stood, six thousand years ago, pretty much where it stands to-day. In ancient Babylon, Thebes, Athen, Alexandria, intellectual, moral, and physical giants flourished, with whom very few in the present generation could hope to compete with honor to themselves. Can we name any poet of to-day who has outshined Homer; any Idealist who has improved upon Plato; any artist who has surpassed Phidias; any moralist who has put Confucius, Buddha, Zeno, and Epicurus to shame? The only department in which there has been genuine progress is Physical Science; but everybody knows that this development began anew only about two hundred years ago.

With these facts in mind we need not be surprised at, nor in the least disheartened by, the comparatively small success that has hitherto attended our Freethought propaganda. That there has been progress during the last hundred years cannot be denied. A hundred years ago most Freethinkers were Deists; to-day they are nearly all avowed Atheists or Agnostics. A hundred years ago the Protestant Churches of this country were loyal to historic Christianity; to-day they are so permeated by the spirit of Freethought that scarcely one of them even pretends to be orthodox in the old sense. The Bible, so adroitly assailed by Voltaire, has completely ceased to exist; he laughed the belief in it into nonentity. To the present-day divine it is still inspired in a vague, misty, undefined sense, but not infallible; still God-given, in a wonderfully roundabout way, but not without minor mistakes and slight contradictions. A hundred years ago Christians could not tolerate, but punished in every way possible, Freethinkers who yet formally avowed their faith in God and Immortality; to-day, even pronounced Atheists and Agnostics are but seldom hauled before the courts, and imprisoned under a law which, though not legally obsolete, is yet morally completely out of date and legally inapplicable. There has been progress, certainly; and we should not marvel at its slowness. The forces against which it has to contend are both obstinate and mighty. There is nothing more obstinate than ignorance, and nothing more difficult to suppress than superstition. Behind these two Christianity is entrenched. Ignorance and superstition have always gone hand-in-hand. With the assistance of modern science, Freethought is slowly pulling down the breastwork of ignorance, and, as a consequence, superstition is crumbling of its own accord. Knowledge causes superstition to disintegrate; and, in its true essence, Christianity is only another name for superstition. In its Protestant form it is rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

In the Catholic Church, faith, which is one of the disguises of ignorance, is still supreme; and, for the present, that Church is comparatively safe. Still, we have the satisfaction of knowing that even Catholicism is showing unmistakable signs of breaking up. Anti-clericalism is developing fast, even in the most Catholic countries; and, at bottom, anti-clericalism and anti-supernaturalism are identical.

Thus, at the beginning of another year, they who work for the intellectual emancipation and moral elevation of mankind have every reason to face the future with hearts aglow with hope and courage. Final victory is assured; and in this assurance we may truly wish one another A Happy New Year.

J. T. LLOYD.

Reflections upon the Bible-God and Christianity.

MANY years ago, when I was quite a young man, I was attracted to a Freethought Hall in the South of London by the announcement that a Christian Controversialist would lecture on "Christianity; Worthy of God and Suitable to Man," and that at the close of the lecture questions would be invited.

At that time I had not ventured to address an audience from a Freethought platform; but, nevertheless, on that occasion I made bold to ask one question, and I think it was, in its way, a poser for an ordinary straight-forward Christian. The question was something like this: "Whether the Creation of the Devil, with the foreknowledge, and therefore with the intention, that he would lead thousands of mortals straight to Hell, was Worthy of God and Suitable to Man?" At this time of day I have quite forgotten what the lecturer's reply was, but I remember that at the time it struck me as being peculiarly unsatisfactory and unconvincing.

"Christianity Worthy of God and Suitable to Man"! Good heavens! Could you have a more inappropriate title? Let us examine Christianity; let us look at it in the light of reason and common sense; let us weigh it in the moral and intellectual balances, and then we shall see how in a hundred different ways it is unworthy of a good God and unsuitable to a sensible and moral human being.

But first of all we must ask: What is Christianity? Some Christians will tell us that it is summed up in a belief in the life and practice of the teachings of Jesus Christ; but if you ask them if you can disbelieve entirely in the Old Testament and still be considered a good Christian they will frown and express surprise that you could ask them such a shockingly critical question, and then proceed quite coolly to tell you that most Christians do believe in the Old Testament and that such a belief is still considered a necessary part of the Christian faith. There are some Christians, they will allow, however, who try to throw discredit upon the Old Testament from a critical or historical point of view; some, too, will admit that a good deal of it is mythical, and also that much that is immoral has somehow found its way into the Holy Book; but that the whole of it, from a spiritual point of view, may be considered as the inspired word of a good God, no good Christian they maintain, can for a moment doubt. Here, then, we find the keynote to the whole matter.

To be true Christians, it is still necessary to believe in the Old Testament—just as necessary, in fact, to believe in Genesis as it is in Matthew or Mark, or any other writer of the New Testament. We know that there are some clergymen who think that Darwin was a greater authority on the origin and evolution of man than Moses, and yet call themselves Christians; but while they keep their heresies quiet and do not proclaim them from the pulpit, they are still accepted as good members of the Christian fold. The story of the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden by a devil (who appeared in the form of a serpent) does not strike one as being a

particularly beneficent act on the part of Deity, especially when the alleged fall of these mythical ancestors carried with it the almost certain damnation of the vast majority of subsequent generations of mankind. Nor can we regard the story of the Flood as manifesting any special kindness on the part of God for the poor unfortunate creatures—animals as well as man—who were submerged beneath a ceaseless torrent of water from above; and although it may strike the ordinary Christian as a wonderful achievement on the part of Deity, it is rather puzzling to understand how this "cold water treatment" could be regarded as specially suitable to either man or beast.

Fortunately, we know that neither of these stories is true, otherwise we might draw up a very serious and strong indictment against the Jewish God, and charge him, in plain set terms, as a wicked and malicious monster, destitute of ordinary love or compassion, and without even a particle of remorse. All students and scholars now know that the story of the "Fall of Man" is based upon an old Persian myth, and the doctrine of Evolution demonstrates beyond the possibility of dispute that man is not a fallen being, but that he began as a very lowly organism and has evolved in stages through a variety of animal forms until he has reached the stage called Man. But even the doctrine of Evolution does not reveal a God who is worthy of the worship of a good man—if it be granted, for the sake of argument, that evolution provides any evidence of the existence of God at all. Indeed, if we are to see in the processes of evolution any evidence of the moral qualities of Deity, the fierce and painful struggle through which man has had to pass in his progress towards the higher and more civilised conditions of life would certainly afford evidence of a Being who was unmoved by the misery, the suffering, and the terrible tragedies of human life, and who was, on all occasions, deaf to the agonising cries of suffering humanity in the hour of direst need.

Even Christians will admit that the Hebrew God was often cruel in his methods; as, for instance, when he punished the Egyptians, not for any faults of their own, but because he had himself hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that he would not let the children of Israel go. But though some Christians acknowledge that Yahveh appeared on this occasion to have acted in a particularly cruel and arbitrary fashion, they profess to believe that he was only "cruel to be kind," and that behind this apparent cruelty there was a perfect scheme of moral justice. But when we look at the wholesale sacrifice of human life that followed; the number of innocent men and women and children who were mercilessly slaughtered by the various plagues sent by this precious Deity to demonstrate his power, we may well ask ourselves whether such conduct was worthy of a good God, or suitable to sensible men? The conduct of the Jewish God, as exemplified in the pages of the Holy Bible, demonstrates that he was in turns weak and foolish, savage and cruel, subject to fits of temper, constantly changing his mind, now acting as a cruel capricious monster, now pouring out threats of vengeance, and anon grieving and wailing over his manifold mistakes and disappointments.

These, then, were the chief characteristics of Yahveh, the God of the Old Testament—the "God the Father" of the Christian Trinity. And what shall we say of this same God's scheme of redemption—the scheme by which human beings were to obtain salvation by believing in a God-Man who was sent on earth to die, that by his death the sins of mankind were to be obliterated for ever from the book of Nature?

This God, who is affectionately called "Our Father which art in Heaven" by his votaries, was prepared to allow the innocent to suffer for the guilty, although he must have known that the death of the innocent could in no wise undo the deeds of the wicked, and that a deed once performed was written indelibly

upon the book of Nature from which no leaves could be torn and nothing could be expunged.

In allowing his innocent Son to be thus sacrificed, this Hebrew God added one further crime to the long list recorded against him in the Old Testament, and furnished an additional reason for honest men to exclaim that, from a moral point of view, at least, Christianity is unworthy of acceptance. But if a man honestly said that he could not believe, he was to be condemned, while the wicked, the hypocritical, the thoughtless, and the crafty were to be saved, simply because they servilely proclaimed their belief in a teaching which is not only incredible, but degrading. But if the death of Jesus really saved the world—then we are all saved, Freethinkers as well as Christians, otherwise Jesus did not effect the purpose of his mission.

Many Christians to-day have given up belief in a literal burning hell; they tell us now that the Devil and hell are only figurative expressions, and that all we have to fear are the "stings of conscience" consequent upon the committal of immoral acts. If this be so, Freethinkers have nothing to fear; for they, above all others, strive to live earnest, honest, useful lives and to merit the commendation of the wise among their fellows. But if hell is figurative so also is heaven; indeed, they are both based upon the same foundation. The last resource of the Christian is, that we must follow out the teachings of Jesus if we would be saved. Which of the teachings? All? That we cannot do, and that the Christians dare not try to do themselves. But the good teachings of Jesus are as acceptable to the Freethinker as to the Christian. It is only the absurd and impracticable teachings of Jesus that the Freethinker declines to practise. He says that these are unsuitable to the men of modern times, and this is proved by the fact that to-day the most sincere and ardent believers in Jesus never attempt to put these teachings into practice. The fact is, that Christianity, as an organised system, is out of date. It has had its day—the best and most enlightened men and women of all civilised nations turn away from it either with pity or contempt; they know that as a religion it is a failure, and as such is unworthy of God and unsuitable to man.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

TOO MUCH TO EXPECT.

Inquirer: "Say, doctor, have you been able to reform old Hardcase?"

Minister: "Oh, yes; he's now paying his church dues regularly."

Inquirer: "But I understand that he still abuses his family."

Minister: "Oh, that's a mere detail; you can't expect him to be perfect."

ALARMING THE BRIDE.

A clergyman, noticing the simple appearance of the couple he had just married, decided to give them a few words of advice.

He explained to the young man his duties as a husband, and then told the young lady how she should conduct herself, winding up with the old injunction that she must look to her husband for everything, and, forsaking father and mother, follow him wherever he went.

The bride appeared very much troubled at this, and faltered out:—

"Must I follow him to every place he goes?"

"Yes," said the clergyman; "you must follow him everywhere until death doth you part."

"Gracious!" cried the girl. "If I had known that before I would never have married a postman."

CANNIBAL KING'S PROTEST.

The cannibal chief growled unpleasantly as he arose from the table.

"What is wrong, your Majesty?" stammered the frightened chef.

"Just this," replied the enraged ruler. "There's going to be an international rumpus of heroic dimensions if they send us any more missionaries without the pure food label."

Acid Drops.

Rev. Henry Charles Lang, vicar of All Saints', Southend-on-Sea, has been somewhat notorious for ritualistic practices. It appears, however, that he was all the time an unbeliever in Christianity. A coroner's inquest held upon his dead body on Thursday, December 23, resulted in a verdict of "Suicide." The reverend gentleman, being on the medical register, although he had not been practising for years, had easily obtained prussic acid at a chemist's, and had taken it in his bedroom. On the table, beside the empty bottle, there was a letter for his wife, in which he called her "the only light in my life," adding, "In spite of you and other things I find life insupportable." In what way it was insupportable was not explained, but he seems to have had financial troubles. The startling part of the letter was the following confession of faith—or no-faith:—

"You will think that I am mad, but I am not. I cannot make that excuse. Do not think it is the religion which I have taught outwardly, but for some time I have not really believed. I find two principles, religion and science. Revelation so-called is so variously understood, and is mostly hypocrisy, a thing which men of no creed really act up to; worldly interest usually comes first. Science one can understand, and the assertions of religion are not borne out by scientific facts. I am an Agnostic, that is, do not believe in the possibility of a Deity existing, except as a great creative principle, or first cause. But all the elaborate doctrines of man's recovery seem to be out of harmony with the dealing with the rest of the organised life of the universe."

The last sentence will be better understood if we mention that the Rev. Dr. Lang was a naturalist, and had written a standard work on butterflies.

We fear there are too many psychological tragedies going on in clerical circles. Young men, fresh from the university, enter the Church and get a living and social position at a single step. The mentally unadventurous jog along all right to the end. But those who have active brains read and think, and often find out, when it is practically too late, that they have mistaken their vocation. They continue to teach what they have ceased to believe, and this is a cruel position for a man with any self-respect. There is misery for certain, and sometimes a tragic issue like that in Dr. Lang's case.

Mr. H. H. Arding, senior member of the firm of Arding and Hobbs, at whose Battersea establishment the great fire occurred a few days before Christmas, told his employees that the fire "must be regarded as the providence of God." As the firm was in all probability insured in every direction, while the employees probably were not, this talk about providence must have been more consoling to the speaker than it was to his auditors. Pious people drag their God in by the ears. Mr. Arding did not appear to see that he was representing his God as a frightful criminal. Infinitely superior to that personage was the gallant cook, George Naber, who sacrificed his own life trying to save the young women in the kitchen department. The story of his coolly and deliberately handing those two women down from a top window to the fire escape, and then falling back helpless into the raging fire behind him, makes one hold one's breath at the thought of his heroism—although he probably thought it the commonest thing in the world, which really makes it all the nobler. "God" could have saved everybody and saved nobody. Mr. Arding expressed a hope that "God would spare them to have another building where they could all come together again." Not the dead ones, Mr. Arding, not the dead ones; not those who were smashed to death or cremated alive.

Dr. Clifford holds quite an original view of the Budget. Referring to the fight with the House of Lords, he says it is "a war between Christian and anti-Christian ideals of human liberty." When you look into it, however, you see that Dr. Clifford merely means that Nonconformists are the real Christians, while Churchmen and Catholics are—well, the Devil knows what.

Here is another original idea of Dr. Clifford's. "The fundamental idea for which Free Churchmen stand," he says, "is the equality of all men before the law." This sounds glorious. But the glory fades when one learns that Free Churchmen, including Dr. Clifford, think the equality of all men before the law is quite consistent with making Freethinkers pay rates for the Christian education of Nonconformists' children.

The *British Weekly*, which, it will be recollected, is a Nonconformist organ, says that in the death of King Leopold "the world is relieved of a monster, compared with whom,

Nero was an angel of light." How, then, has Christianity improved the world, after an innings of nearly two thousand years? Nero was a Pagan, and Leopold was a Christian; and the Pagans had the manliness to put an end to Nero's crimes, while the Christians let Leopold continue his greater crimes to the bitter end—that is, to the last breath he drew, dying naturally on a feather bed. How is the Christian method with monsters an improvement on the Pagan method? Dr. Robertson Nicoll might try to answer these questions.

This Christian King of Belgium, whom all the Christian Powers of Europe allowed a free scope in his villainies—except for "words, words, words," which he treated with derision—was buried with great pomp by the priests of the greatest and oldest Church in Christendom. Not a word was said about his diabolical deeds. Yet he was not only a criminal, and a cruel husband, and a brutal father; he was also a most filthy blackguard. Speaking of his private life, Dr. Robertson Nicoll says—and we give his words in preference to our own: "It is hardly possible that anything like a complete story can ever be put in print. The details that passed in conversation are sufficiently notorious, and yet no journalist would dare to make them perfect. Suffice it to say, that for a long course of years King Leopold has been the most utterly depraved sensualist of whom anything is known, and his lusts became more unnatural and more imperious as he became an old man."

One aspect of the King Leopold's character was touched upon in the *Daily Chronicle*. Listen! "For nineteen years the steady and continuous torture and extermination of the Congo natives by the agents of a Christian king and a clique of capitalists whose sole object was the immediate extortion of money went on.....Throughout all these years Leopold was exploiting public sentiment in Europe no less than the rubber fields in Africa. He made protestations of Pharisaic perfection. When he was establishing a new slavery ten times worse than the old, he was devoting some of the blood money of this iniquitous traffic in subscriptions to anti-slavery societies. He received eulogistic addresses from Baptist missionaries in Brussels at the very moment that his agents were dispatching cannibal hordes throughout the Congo regions in order to compel the unhappy natives to bring in rubber on penalty of death or mutilation." Dear pious Baptist missionaries!

The Belgian prime minister must be a Christian. He referred in the Chamber to King Leopold's "great work of civilisation on the Congo." That takes the cake. Satan himself must be green with envy.

Charlatans don't get such a long innings as they used to. The risks of detection are so much greater now. Dr. Cook was acclaimed by the mob in America, while Commander Peary was treated almost as an impostor. The adventurer (as we always thought him) now appears in his true colors—after netting some £30,000, and Commander Peary will come into his own. But the mob won't go wild about him. It always has a sneaking love for a rogue, though it may hate and kick him when the world sees that he has been fooling them. It is the same old mob through all history. The mob at Jerusalem was a typical one. It hailed poor demented Jesus as the Messiah one day, and shouted "Away with him!" a few days afterwards. Of course it was wrong in both cases. He was not the Messiah, and he did not deserve crucifixion; he only wanted medical treatment.

Mr. Herbert Gladstone is leaving the Home Office and going out as Governor-General of South Africa. The political papers of his party are singing his praises; but we believe that few but partisans regard him as having any distinction except his name. It is difficult to see what particular virtue he has displayed as Home Secretary. The one thing he has done that may give him a sort of immortality is reviving the Blasphemy Laws. It is a curious thing that it is always a Liberal Home Secretary who revives those odious laws. Sir William Harcourt sanctioned the prosecution of the *Freethinker* in 1882-3, and did even worse than that by libelling the defendants while they were in prison—from his own safe place of privilege in the House of Commons. We think we understand this curious phenomenon, and the explanation is not very flattering to the Liberal party. But we have not time and space to deal with it at present.

T. P.'s Weekly, in a notice of Mr. Robert Blatchford, says that: "He thinks that 'the time to be happy is now, and the place to be happy is here.'" These words are not Mr. Blatchford's. They are Ingersoll's. The great Freethought

orator's epigram is often repeated and often spoiled. Ingersoll really said: "The time to be happy is now, the place to be happy is here, and the way to be happy is to make others happy." Many writers and speakers act towards Ingersoll as Fuseli felt towards Blake in saying "He's damned good to steal from."

The *Daily News* cartoon, "The Gambler's Last Throw," represented Mr. Balfour, Lord Lansdowne, and their "pals" sheltering behind Mr. Robert Blatchford, who tries to frighten John Bull with a placard bearing the words: "Hi! Hi! Shocking Discovery! The Germans are Coming!" "Socialism" is on Mr. Blatchford's cap and "Atheism" sticks out of his pocket. In the letterpress below he is described as "the most truculent of all Socialists—a Socialist of that dreary type which is concerned with airing a crude and antiquated Atheism." Now this is just like the dear *Daily News*. What on earth has Atheism to do with the German Invasion scare? To begin with, Mr. Blatchford denies that he is an Atheist, though we admit that he is one—if he is definitely anything. In the next place, it is the Church and State party who are working the German Invasion scare for all it is worth,—and they are the devoted champions of religion. In the next place, though we are not meddling with politics, we venture to think that ninety-nine Atheists, at least, out of every hundred, would laugh at this German Invasion scare.

It is the fashion to call Mr. Blatchford a "leader." In a certain sense he is so, but not in the practical sense. The instinct of self-preservation saves him from taking any responsible position even in the Socialist movement. He protests against "leadership" simply because he knows he could not lead. He has always been, and he always will be—unless he loses his head for a bit—a free-lance. There lies the whole strength of his influence and reputation. He is a charming writer, but his very style, with its diffuseness and want of concentration, shows that he is essentially a journalist—and no more. One of the constant mistakes of the multitude—the multitude of all varieties—is to fancy that a man who writes or speaks well and fluently, and perhaps delightfully—is necessarily a thinker. Mr. Blatchford is not a thinker. He is not original. He goes right on well-beaten roads; he is all abroad when he tries to strike out a road of his own. He couldn't very well go wrong in his attack on Christianity. The road to that was asphalted between good side-walks. When he took up the question of Determinism he soon showed his limitations. The only part of his book on that subject of any value is the part in which it required a genius for blundering to go astray; and that part of the book could be endorsed by Free Willers as well as Determinists. The other part, dealing with Determinism in relation to philosophy and ethics, is a failure, and has done far more harm than good. No, Mr. Blatchford is not a thinker; he is a populariser. We are far from being blind to his merits in that direction. What we wish is that he would keep within his depth. In that case there would be no *per contra* to his great services to Freethought.

Writing the foregoing paragraph has afforded us no pleasure. We wish there had been no occasion for it. But the task was forced upon us by the effort in certain quarters to make Atheism in some way responsible for Mr. Blatchford's political peculiarities. When it comes to Atheism, we have a better right to speak than he has. He repudiates the term, for a start, and we accept it. It may also be said that we battled for Atheism long before he was in the Freethought field, and that we may be battling for it when his energies have pressed into more novel enterprises. There is no knowing how far his present associates may tempt him. How wise is that old proverb about bad company!

There seems to be a body called "The Enemies of the Red Flag," with offices at 269 King-street, Hammersmith. A circular with that heading and that address reaches us signed by Sir William Bull, and meant for us, for the envelope is addressed to the Editor of the *Freethinker*. The circular quotes from Engels, Marx, Bobel, Bax, Blatchford, and Hyndman to show that Socialism is hostile to religion. In that respect, we welcome it; we are always glad to know that leaders of public movements, whatever they happen to be, are opposed to religion. That is one good thing, anyhow; at least, it is so from our point of view. In the present case, however, we feel bound to say that Sir William Bull is either ignorant or unscrupulous. If he does not know that there are plenty of Christian Socialists, with leaders like the Rev. R. J. Campbell, the Rev. Conrad Noel, the Rev. S. D. Headlam, and Canon Scott Holland, he has a good deal to learn in the way of information; and if he does know all this, and deliberately conceals it, he has a good

deal to learn in the way of controversial decency. And we have something more special to say. Sir William Bull mentions the *Freethinker* (he prints it the *Free Thinker*) as a "Socialist organ." Now, if he knows this journal at all, he must be aware that it is nothing of the kind. It is a purely Freethought organ. It is neither for nor against Socialism, simply because it is absolutely neutral in party politics; in fact, it does not deal with purely political opinions at all. Neither has the editor, in his personal capacity, ever professed himself a Socialist or written a line in favor of Socialism. It is a great pity that men like Sir William Bull attach so little importance to accuracy. Even a political battle ought to be fought with some regard to the elementary virtues.

The late Lord Kelvin when a boy, being Scotch, attended a Presbyterian church. On one occasion revival services were being held, and some of the people became very excited, uttering loud exclamations and groans, and at last some of the old women began to give vent to their feelings by tossing their Bibles in the air. Willie Thomson was seized by a fit of suppressed laughter, and other boys caught the contagion. The preacher saw what was going on, and, shaking his finger at the black little sinner, he exclaimed: "Ye'll no lach when ye'er in Hell." Whereupon the black little sinner laughed more than ever, and rolled clean over on the floor. What a pity that he took religion so seriously in later life!

Mr. Lloyd George has done some motoring in England, and he says it is "one of the most exquisite of the works of the Great Architect." We hope the Great Architect is satisfied.

Mr. Lloyd George has been stating that he went to a Church school in his youth. "I was there ten years," he says, "and was very well treated by the clergyman of the parish, who kindly offered to make me a pupil teacher, on condition that I should leave the Baptist community and join the Church of England. It was offered me in a kindly spirit, and if I had only accepted it I might have been a curate now." And as everybody in England laughs at curates the audience laughed at this sally. Mr. Lloyd George went on to denounce this sort of thing, this offering a young fellow an honorable position in life "if he would only sell the faith of his fathers." "That is not religion," he exclaimed. We beg his pardon—it is. Mr. Lloyd George's own co-religionists do the same thing themselves. They take care that "infidels," open, honest "infidels" don't go far towards the front in elementary education.

Mr. Allen Upward has been telling the Nonconformists some plain home truths. "The seat of the Nonconformist Conscience," he says, "is too often in the Nonconformist liver." He laughs at the naive belief that they are the party of tolerance. The following is a shrewd thrust—which has often been made at the Nonconformists in our own columns:—

"At the present moment, the Nonconformists imagine themselves to be resisting Anglican teaching in the primary schools. What they are really resisting is the right of the Romanist, the Anglican, the Jew, the Christian Scientist, and the scientist, to refuse to pay for Nonconformist teaching."

Freethinkers do not figure in this little catalogue, but they ought to, for they object to Nonconformist religion as much as they do to Anglican or Catholic religion. With regard to Dr. Clifford's favorite movement, Mr. Upward says:—

"The passive resisters are deliberately trading on the supposed fact that the English public still likes Catholic teaching less than Protestant teaching. They are fighting for a State religion, after their own heart, in the schools, just as their forefathers fought for a State religion, after their own heart, in the churches. The great question that divides them from their opponents is whether the Bible ought, or ought not, to be read to children without explanation. And they propose, as a tolerant compromise, that it shall be read without explanation, or, still worse, with their explanation. That is what Nonconformists honestly believe to be tolerance."

There will be no reply to Mr. Upward. The Nonconformist Conscience is too full of self-righteousness.

We have received the Second Report of W. R. Trotter, British Representative, the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada. It is issued officially from the Labor Congress's office at Winnipeg, and it contains a good deal of matter concerning "the ways that are dark and tricks that are vain" of the Emigration Agency of the Salvation Army, which we propose to deal with a little later on. With the Report is an official circular from the Labor Congress of Canada "To Wage-Earners in Britain and Other Friends of

the Laborer," containing the following pointed reference to the Salvation Army:—

"Already there are evidences that the Salvation Army is making a desperate effort to recover lost 'business.' But after the exposure made of the methods of such organisations, there is little likelihood of the workers being misled as much as formerly and stampeded by their emigration schemes, which are generally undertaken in conjunction with some capitalistic enterprise for mutual profit to the consignor and consignee—the emigrant himself being the object of last and usually least consideration. Column after column of printed 'advice' given to emigrants by these societies may very well be summed up in one of their own phrases which is always emphasised: 'Take the first job that offers.'

There are rumors of many new schemes but none of them has yet matured. Even the much 'boomed' Salvation Army Colony in Alberta is still the combined dream of the directors of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Salvation Army. We can say no more of this scheme at present, it being impossible to criticise a 'Colony' which does not exist in Canada."

The Trade Unionists of Canada speak out plainly about the professional and unscrupulous "benevolence" of the Salvation Army, which talks philanthropy while practising business in a fashion that does credit to General Booth's nose. When will the Trade Unionists of Great Britain have the manliness to speak out as plainly? They know the facts, but they are afraid of everything, or anything, in the shape of religion.

We sympathise with the Rev. W. Brain (good name, Brain!) chaplain of Hull Prison. He is concerned about the fashionable neglect of hell. He complains that "men of the present day do not like to hear about hell, and say they only believe in heaven." He assures them that hell is not disestablished, though it may be disendowed; and they will know it when they get there, as so many of them will do. Still, he has warned them of the warmth to come, and it won't be his fault if they fall into it. It won't be God's fault either, but entirely their own. God made them, and God made hell to receive them, but he doesn't pitch them into it—they walk into it themselves. So that's all right. Yes, but suppose God hadn't made hell; they couldn't have walked into it—could they? So the reverend gentleman's God seems to be at the bottom of the mischief, after all.

What curious ideas some people have of being "poetical." Rev. R. J. Campbell, preaching at the City Temple on a recent Sunday, prefaced his sermon with the customary prayer, which began thus: "We have heard with our ears, O God." What other part of his anatomy has Mr. Campbell ever heard with? We pity any God who has to listen to such stuff every day, year in and year out. It comes as near as possible to everlasting punishment.

Christians are fond of telling "infidels" that the law is the law and must be obeyed. The Blasphemy Laws, for instance, may not be ideally wise and just, but there they are, don't you know?—and while they are there "infidels" must obey them quietly. But how these good Christians cry "Down with the law!" when they don't want to obey it! Rev. Dr. Clifford calls on Nonconformists to defy the law by refusing to pay the Education rate. And here is the *Church Times* calling on parsons to defy the law laid down by the Court of Appeal in the case of Bauister *versus* Thompson—with regard to the assumed right of the clergy to refuse the Communion to a Churchman who marries his deceased wife's sister. Such marriage is now legal in England, and the clergy of the Church of England have to accommodate themselves to the fact. The High Church species, however, declare that they won't do anything of the kind; and the *Church Times* winds up a leading article in support of their attitude by asserting that "This law is not to be defended, it is to be resisted, and by resistance to be destroyed." Such incitement to lawlessness is dead in the teeth of Paul's teaching. But what does that matter? Churches play their own game, without troubling Paul or Peter for advice.

A pious Rip Van Winkle called Robert Hunt, of 22 Richmond-street, Glasgow, writes to the *Church Times* announcing that "the open Bradlaugh Atheism is dead." This gentleman should walk round to the Glasgow Secular Hall in Brunswick-street a few Sunday evenings. He would know then that open Atheism is very much alive. He might also read the *Freethinker* for a few weeks. But perhaps his present attitude is only affectation.

Mr. E. H. Fison, a well-known Ipswich business man, who has been travelling in China, lectured recently at the Town Hall, Lowestoft, with the Mayor presiding, on missionary

work in the Celestial Land. He was sorry to say that the number of converts made by the missionaries hardly amounted to half a million—which was only one-eighth of 1 per cent. of the total population. "Honestly" this was "disappointing." Nor were the Chinese the immoral people they are too often represented. "The theatres," Mr. Fison said, "were absolutely entertaining and entirely harmless, and the gambling seemed no more vicious than whist drives or raffles at church bazaars. In these places the strongest drink was tea, and the utmost decorum and good nature prevailed."

No matter what kind of recreation, or even instruction, is offered to the people on Sunday, the professional exhorters want to put it down. One easily perceives that they are safeguarding their business. Simply this and nothing more. They are now alarmed at the spread of Sunday cinematograph shows, and are moving heaven and earth, and even the other place, to stop this dangerous rivalry. Fortunately (for them) there is a suitable majority on the London County Council, and the clericals hope to gain their object through restrictive regulations passed by that obscurantist body. We trust, however, that the cinematograph people will defeat the reactionists. They can do so if they please, for the old George III. Sunday Act has nothing to do with the London County Council, nor has the London County Council anything to do with it. The proprietors or lessees of halls may easily protect themselves by joint action against County Council intimidation. We have studied this question very closely, and we should be happy to place our knowledge of it at the service of the opponents of Sabbatarianism.

The Libraries Association are setting up a Censorship. They are going to stop the circulation of "pernicious literature." This is a foolish enterprise on their part, for no two people understand "pernicious literature" in precisely the same sense. But if they *must* go on in this way, we suggest that they should ban the Bible, which is far the "bluest" book in general circulation.

"Providence" has been active again. Heavy rains in Italy have caused serious floods. A large artificial lake at Tizzano became overcharged, the dam burst, and nearly a million tons of water swept over the neighboring country. In the Benavente district the shepherds had to fly to the hills or climb trees, where they were obliged to spend three or four days. Several lost the power of speech, and some their reason, through exposure. Floods have also occurred in France and Spain, and thousands of people are plunged in misery. Such was the Christmas present of "Providence" to those favored countries.

"Providence" is often in fine form in America. A splendid Christmas blizzard was got up for the benefit of the New England States. President Taft was hung up by it, many people lost their lives, thousands were snowbound, and the coast was littered with wreckage. It was the best (or worst) performance of the kind for twenty years.

The Bishop of Salisbury says that the clergy of his diocese should not take part in political elections; nevertheless, they should stand up for the House of Lords, oppose Home Rule for Ireland, fight against the disestablishment and disendowment of the Welsh Church, and uphold religious education in Church schools. The Bishop is evidently a sly humorist.

More clerical neutrality in party politics! Rev. G. A. Lawrance, rector of Westdene, Seaford, refuses the use of the village schoolroom for a Liberal meeting. He says it is against his conscience that Liberals should hold meetings. They show such animosity, not only to the Church, but "to everyone of wealth and rank." Just like Jesus Christ, by the way, if the Gospels are true.

Rev. F. Partridge, vicar of Clether, fell from his bicycle dead. Rev. John Dudding, rector of Washingborough, Lincoln, was found dead in his study on Sunday, and the service had to be postponed. "Providence" takes no more care of men of God than it does of Freethought lecturers.

An American boy was asked "Who was the first man?" He replied, "Washington." When reminded of Adam, he said, "Oh, we don't count foreigners." The clergy will have to look after that boy. ~~Top to one~~ he'll become an "infidel" if they don't.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

January 9, St. James's Hall; 11, London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner; 16, St. James's Hall; 23, St. James's Hall; 30, Stratford Town Hall.
 February 6, Manchester; 13, St. James's Hall; 20, St. James's Hall; 27, Birmingham Town Hall.

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 16, Stratford Town Hall; 30, St. James's Hall; February 6, St. James's Hall; 13, Glasgow.
 J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 2, Holloway; 9, Holloway; 23, Stratford Town Hall; 30, Birmingham.
 W. P. BALL.—Warm thanks, in this new year's number, for your past year's weekly batches of useful cuttings.
 G. L. ALWARD.—Thanks for the beautiful card from yourself and Mrs. Alward (two old friends of ours), with the noble extract from Shakespeare.
 M. STEINBERGER.—No room in the new year's number. Shall appear in our next.
 G. LUNN.—Will acknowledge next week. Pleased to hear the *Freethinker* is one of your "best treats," and that you have just been reading the first volume of our *Flowers of Freethought* and "consider them gems."
 HAROLD FRANCIS.—Parcel was sent to you as requested, and we hope you found the contents useful.
 A. MILLAR.—Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd both deliver lectures in the district when they visit Glasgow, but Mr. Foote is unable to do so, being obliged to dash back to London to attend to the *Freethinker*. Your private missionary work is sure to bear fruit—some day, somewhere. Never doubt it.
 F. R. CHASTY.—Branch secretaries should frame their lecture notices strictly on the model of the notices as printed in our weekly list. Any other arrangement is a hindrance; so are superfluous words.
 A. MANCHESTER B.Sc. (we are not sure that we ought to print his name) sends us some cuttings "With the compliments of—," who has just been introduced to the *Freethinker*, and will not fail to purchase it every week in the future. A veritable intellectual treat for 2d. 'Acid Drops' alone are worth 6d. for their pungency, never naming the fine leading articles." Yet many orthodox people still believe that the *Freethinker* is written for illiterate working-men—instead of men and women of all classes who read and think.
 F. A. DAVIES.—Sorry your Trade Union work occupies you so much on Thursday evenings, and thus interferes with your attendance at N.S.S. Executive and other meetings, where we always like to see you. Best wishes for the new year.
 JOHN ROSS.—Yes, we are keeping tolerably well in what you justly call "this detestable weather."
 R. WALSH.—Shall be seen to, and we will write you. The first list of new year's subscriptions to the President's Honorarium Fund will appear in our next issue.
 S. VERA.—We had already seen and dealt with it. Thanks all the same; also for your good wishes for this journal in the new year.
 HARRY BOULTER says that during 1909 he has sold 3,295 copies of the *Freethinker* at outdoor meetings, which "shows that the paper can be sold if it is only pushed." He also suggests that we should give "a strong lead" re heckling parliamentary candidates on Secular Education and the Blasphemy Laws. A series of questions relating to the former appears this week. A series of questions relating to the Blasphemy Laws shall appear in our next.
 F. WOOD.—Thanks for cuttings and good wishes.
 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.
 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.
 THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote opens the new course of lectures at St. James's Hall next Sunday evening (January 9), and his subject will be a very seasonable one—"Shelley and the House of Lords." Mr. Foote will say something about the poet's Atheism, and will recite the powerful poems entitled "To the Men of England" and "Liberty." London Freethinkers would find

this a most suitable occasion for introducing friends and acquaintances to a Freethought meeting. The hall really ought to be filled.

We hope to see a record attendance at the Annual Dinner at the Holborn Restaurant on Tuesday evening, January 11—which happens to be the President's birthday, and very nearly marks the termination of his twentieth year of occupation of the presidential chair, in direct succession to Charles Bradlaugh. The Annual Dinner is always an enjoyable function in itself; this time, perhaps, it will be a little more so than usual. The tickets are 4s. each inclusive. It is hoped that all who mean to be present will secure tickets reasonably early. We should not like to know that some had applied for tickets too late.

Three lectures, under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd., are arranged for Sunday evenings, January 16, 23, and 30, at the Stratford Town Hall. Mr. Cohen is down for the first lecture, Mr. Lloyd follows, and Mr. Foote winds up the course. All seats at these meetings are free.

We beg to call our readers' attention to the Questions for Candidates, issued by the Secular Education League, which appear on another page of this week's *Freethinker*. It is of the highest importance that Freethinkers should bring this matter before the attention of parliamentary candidates at public meetings. It is not enough to put the questions in writing to candidates. Publicity is requisite, partly to ventilate the subject of Secular Education, and partly to secure straightforward replies. We appeal to Freethinkers to press this matter to the utmost. Other questions have plenty of friends to push them to the front. Freethinkers should concentrate on this one.

We don't see why the *Freethinker* should not have a considerable number of subscribers in America. It has a good few there already, and we are receiving many applications for specimen copies. One applicant, from Nebraska, has been reading our *Comic Sermons and Bible God*, and says he was "never more delighted and amused" with anything in his life. He expects he won't be disappointed in the paper. So do we.

A subscriber writes to us from Benalla, Victoria, with subscription, which will be acknowledged next week, saying: "It is now two years since I made the acquaintance of the *Freethinker*, and every issue increases my debt of gratitude." The correspondent had been an ardent and acceptable Church worker.

The new King of Belgium is already giving annoyance to the Clericals. He seems to be a man—and the country wants something of that sort. It is reported that he means to free himself from Leopold's pious advisers, and has selected as tutor for his children a scholar of anti-clerical tendencies. It is said that the Pope is alarmed. We hope to see the good news confirmed.

A few weeks ago we called attention to the fact that Mr. Parker H. Sercombe, of Chicago, had called "all on his own" an International Freethought Congress at Barcelona on October 14, 1910, the first anniversary of Ferrer's martyrdom. We could not help feeling amused at the "coolness" of this proceeding. The International Freethought Congress is already an institution, and the one for 1910 has long been decided to be held at Brussels. This decision, of course, was arrived at, not by one man, at Chicago or elsewhere, but by the representatives of all the European and American Freethought societies who were present at the last Congress; and the business arrangements are, as usual, in the hands of the International Freethought Federation. Mr. Sercombe's notice has been inserted, we trust out of mere politeness, in several American Freethought papers; but the editor of the *Blue Grass Blade*, Lexington, Kentucky, takes it quite seriously. "The suggestion," he says, "is a good one. The *Blade* hopes it can be brought to a successful consummation. As President of the Rationalist Association, the *Blade's* editor promises all possible assistance to that end. By all means let the Congress be held." This is magnificent—in its way. Not a thought is given to the views of foreign countries. It is a fine display of the old "lick creation" American spirit. We hoped that this spirit was about dead. Certainly we did not expect to see it flourishing in Freethought circles in America. We suggest that Mr. Sercombe and Mr. Charlsworth should think the matter over again, after carefully looking at the large but not overwhelming position of the United States on the map of the world. The land of the Stars and Stripes is inhabited by a grand nation. Of course. But there are others.

The West Ham Branch will hold a concert and dance in the small room of the Forest Gate Public Hall, Woodgrange-road, on Saturday evening, January 8, at 7.30. Admission free to all Freethinkers, who will receive a hearty welcome.

La Pensée, the organ of the Belgian Freethinkers, publishes an obituary notice of the late Mr. F. Bonte, drawing its materials from our own notice in the *Freethinker*. Our contemporary remarks that Mr. Bonte's death is "a loss which the Freethinkers who have learnt to know him will feel deeply." Mr. Bonte's pamphlet, which we first published under the title of *From Fiction to Fact*, was translated and partly rewritten by himself and published in Belgium under the title of *Illusions Perdues (Lost Illusions)*. Many thousands of copies have been circulated on the continent. Mr. Bonte also translated his pamphlet into Flemish, and that edition also was widely circulated.

Considering Mr. Bonte's abilities and attainments, as well as his fine character, we were naturally pleased with his frequent testimony to the value of our own writings. We have already alluded to this fact, and we may be pardoned for being (once for all) more explicit. Not very long before his death, Mr. Bonte wrote to us: "I am not flattering when I say, and I have said it to many, that I find no writing equal to yours, so clear, forcible, and outright. When you have to fill up a corner in the *Freethinker* you cannot do better than take a few sentences from your own books."

A Catholic priest sends us the following letter:—

"Sedgley, Staffordshire,

DEAR SIR,—

Dec. 22, 1909.

Allow me as a Catholic priest to thank you for the manly and straightforward remarks on the French religious question in the 'Acid Drops' of this week's *Freethinker*.

I would that both sides in this great controversy, which you rightly say must finally resolve itself into a contest between the Catholic Church and Infidelity, were always inspired with the fairness and candor invariably displayed in your able and interesting paper.

I have read and taken in the *Freethinker* for nearly three years, and always find it very readable and instructive. I first came across it in a free library and was attracted by the uncompromising attitude of its writers and their justice withal to their adversaries. You don't mince matters, and I respect you for it.

Yours truly,

W. MORITZ WESTON."

We are pleased to receive this letter. It is creditable to the writer and to ourselves. It compliments us just at the point where a compliment is welcome. We never mean to mince matters, but we do wish to be fair and candid. Controversy is nothing but a scuffle when those characteristics are absent. We have always endeavored to treat our adversaries with justice; and the above letter shows that we have to some extent succeeded.

One thing we liked, and loved, in the late Mr. Bonte was his sweet impartiality. He thought evil of no man unless he was compelled to. When we visited him at West Kirby, less than three weeks before his death, and talked with him about many things, he mentioned that he had ordered a copy of Mr. Joseph McCabe's pamphlet on Ferrer. Now we had read the pamphlet, and we noticed what an immoral character it gave to the Belgian priests, of whom the writer professed a personal knowledge; and, as Mr. Bonte's was a Belgian family, and he himself had spent a great deal of his time in Belgium, we thought we would ask him if he agreed with Mr. McCabe. He said at once that he did not. "There are black sheep," he said, "in every flock; but, speaking generally, the Belgian priests are virtuous men, and far better educated than they were in my youth." We have meant to place that reply of Mr. Bonte's on record, and we take this as the psychological moment. It is a suitable acknowledgment of the Rev. W. Moritz Weston's letter.

We have never meddled, except in the case of public crimes, with the personal characters of our adversaries. We have, indeed, as little taste for scandal as any man breathing. Nature has blessed us with an absolute incuriosity in that direction. We are perfectly aware, also, that the world is made up of good, bad, and indifferent people, and that there must be good, bad, and indifferent people in all Churches, as there are in all other collections of human beings. The world has to go on with the men and women who are in it, and not with the men and women who do not yet exist. And, to tell the plain truth, we are all—even the best of us—a bit mixed. The pharisaic attitude is therefore as foolish as it is loathsome. We have always felt that, and have given ourselves no airs. We fight principles, not persons. Ours is a war of ideas. We hate Christianity, but we do not hate Christians. And we cheerfully admit that slander on either side is equally criminal and detestable.

At the Year's End.

AT certain moments in a man's life he instinctively allows himself the luxury of retrospection, and the majority of people have so exaggerated the importance of the last night in December that it has become to them the only time for looking backwards, and the occasion for watch-night services and drunken orgies, for unusual mirth and sadness, and for exaggerated heart-searchings, hand-shakings, and sentimental moralisings, according to the temperament of the individual. During the following eleven months and thirty days these people pursue their lives with so little thought of time that New Year's Eve looms before them typical of everything coming to an end. They seem to forget that years and months are simply names that have been adopted for the convenience of ordinary social life, and are therefore merely relative terms. Indeed, they are so far from being fixed periods of time that the New Year arrives in London some minutes earlier than Manchester, nearly half an hour earlier than Dublin, and some hours later than Sydney, upon a date when the Jewish year is already well on its way. When the new style of Calendar was adopted by the Roman Catholics in this country three hundred years ago, and the new year began eleven days earlier, the Protestants were so filled with hatred towards their fellow-Christians that they refused to follow suit, and it was more than a century before they abandoned the old Calendar. New Year's Day has always been a moveable feast; so moveable that the Almighty must have his work cut out to keep himself well informed in all these little changes in the habits and customs of his creatures here below. It is a most important work, for it would otherwise be rather bewildering to receive a petition from one individual eleven days earlier than from another, each apparently referring to the same year. In fact, at present there are so many New Year's Days, Mohammedan, Greek, Jewish, and Christian, and so many clocks telling different hours in different places, that the New Year prayers and petitions must keep a whole staff of heavenly clerks occupied in tabulating them all the year round.

There is a certain amount of evil produced by such new year celebrations, just as there is by the Christian method of conversion. Indeed, the two performances are closely akin. In the latter case a man will—naturally—postpone the day of repentance until the last possible moment, probably until the time when he is no longer able to take pleasure in the gratification of his appetites. And in a similar manner he will, during the year, neglect to check inclinations that become harmful as they develop into habits, easing his conscience by telling himself—sub-consciously, of course—that all will be made straight when the last night of the year comes round. With the dawn of the New Year he resolves to "turn over a new leaf," and fails ignominiously, for habits cannot be cast off like old garments. And as this setting up of the year's end as a sort of penitentiary is almost always a religious institution, we may see a distinct resemblance between the Christian idea of conversion and the Christian treatment of New Year's Eve. This resemblance extends to Christmas also. At that season of the year a man will become a generous hypocrite, full of artificial good-will towards his fellows, and then treating them in an entirely different manner for the remainder of the twelve months. So, at the year's end, he becomes artificially meditative, repentant, and overloaded with good resolutions that are only made to be broken.

Yet the fact that we are just reaching the end of one of those periods that are called "years" for the convenience of civil life possesses some significance for Freethinkers. But we regard it from quite a different standpoint. We do not look upon it with the melancholy sadness of an awful leave-taking. The mind of Eugénie de Guérin was perhaps the most beautiful of all the Christian mystics, and her

"Journal," the most delicately spiritual work the world has ever seen, yet her year-ends seem to have been occasions of terrible mental agony. How poignant are these passages, for instance, written on December 31, 1839:—

"The last day of the year must not pass like another: it is too full, too solemn and touching, too near to eternity not to affect my soul very deeply.....*So ends a year!* Alas! alas! time moves on like water, like the river I hear flowing under my window, which widens in proportion as its banks sink down. How much of the banks have fallen into the days that are passed!..... How quickly we pass away! Oh! how brief is this world! The earth is but a step on our way. They are waiting for me on high....."

Such an attitude towards the dying year is not only morbid and abnormal, but utterly futile; and, needless to say, it is totally repugnant to Freethinkers. Neither do we pester an Almighty Father who must be heartily sick of New Year petitions by the time the Christian celebrations arrive; and we do not deliberately torture ourselves by recalling and examining every thought and action of the year that has gone. We simply realise that we have passed another milestone in the path of Life, and, shaking the dust from our feet, press forward with eager steps towards the goal to which our eyes are turned. There is no time for halting, or for vain regrets. The errors we have made, the stumblings of our feet along the uneven, rocky path, the mistaken turning into some by-path that led us nowhere—these are not recalled that we might shed over them foolish tears of repentance, but that we might profit by experience and learn to avoid the false paths and rutts ahead. Only in this way are we able to step into the future with confidence. That is all the year's end means to us, and a day's end means the same. If we desire to watch our actions at all, let us be for ever on the watch. Apart from its recognition in our social life, the passing of a year ought to possess a significance just as small, and just as great, as does the ending of a week or a day.

I well remember how in the old days I would watch the passing of the year in the softened light shining through the midnight gloom of my village church. In the depths of the silence, as we knelt at prayer, I imagined that I could almost hear the rustling of angels' wings. I was egotistical enough at that period of my life to believe that God was very near to me. And with the singing of the old, familiar hymn—

"Days and moments quickly flying
Blend the living with the dead....."

the New Year dawned, and we all left the church fondly imagining that our lives had been consecrated anew. But the years have fled, and scientific knowledge is spreading, and men and women are beginning to realise that lives cannot be consecrated in such a manner: that in Nature there is no beginning afresh, and no ending; that habits cannot be checked at a moment's notice; and their rules of conduct are no longer applied once in each year, but to every thought and action as the hours and days pass along. And the more this scientific knowledge influences their lives, the more reliable will their conduct become—

"By the laws that are iron,
Grand and eternal,
We all must accomplish
Our cycle of living,"

wrote Goethe in his wonderful "Psalm of Life," and if we would accomplish our lives wisely and well, we must not vaguely review them at the end of each twelve months, but every one of our deeds must be regulated, day by day, according to the needs of society, and guided by Science alone. For, as the great German Freethinker who lies sleeping at Weimar would have said:—

"Man alone doeth
What else doeth none:
'Tis his to distinguish,
To choose and to judge;
He can to the moment
Eternity lend."

It is the glory of man to be helpful and good. And if any one of us needs inspiration and encouragement for the coming year, let him turn, not to the gloomy, tear-stained altar raised to the worship of a sleeping God, but to the work that has been accomplished by the nobler sons of Humanity in the ages that are past. Then will he realise that the torch of liberty has been placed in our hands, and through the year he will help to bear it nobly into dark places. For not until every nook and cranny have been lighted up, and the shadows of superstition driven away from every corner of the earth, can the words of the immortal Swinburne be fulfilled:—

"Though before thee the thron'd Cytherean
Be fallen, and hidden her head,
Yet thy kingdom shall pass, Galilean,
Thy dead shall go down to thee dead."

THOMAS MOULT.

The Sacrifice of the First-Born.

THIS paper is the continuation of a subject only partly dealt with in the last of the "Narratives in Genesis"—that is to say, Human sacrifice. And, in commencing, it is scarcely necessary to state that no account of any sacrifice of the first-born is to be found in the book of Genesis, though the practice was prevalent in Canaan during the whole period in which the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are represented as sojourning there.

In an article on "The Gods of Canaan," by Professor Sayce, which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* some years back, the writer says: "The calamities which befell mankind were, the Canaanites believed, the signs of divine anger, and must be propitiated by the sacrifice of that which was nearest and dearest to the worshiper. The Sun-god Baal was not only a god of beneficence and creation, he was also a jealous god, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children; not the father of men merely, but their destroyer as well. To him, therefore, the parent had to bring his first-born, his only one; to resign him to death without tears or regret, while the cries of the innocent sufferer were drowned in the noise of flutes and tamborines, and the image of the stern deity was crowned with flowers. And the sacrifice had to be made by fire—by that pure element which formed the very essence of the Sun-god, and through which he dealt both life and death. The human victim was burned alive, a mode of death which the Jew of later times euphemistically called 'passing through the fire.'.....It was no sign of savagery or brutality, but of profound self-sacrifice which led the worshiper to give even more than his own life to the offended gods.....The worshiper did not go to his religion to learn the role of right and wrong; his religious duty consisted in winning the favor of the gods, or deprecating their resentment; and this could only be effected by sacrifice and offering, and the strict performance of the ritual."

The foregoing is, perhaps, the most terrible picture that can be imagined of the evil wrought by priest-craft in an age of dense ignorance. That such an inhuman rite could really be practised among all the ancient peoples of Canaan, the Israelites included, almost passes understanding; but that such was indeed the case is beyond the possibility of doubt. It is, however, often erroneously stated that the practice was confined to the worship of Molech, the god of the Ammonites, and to that of Baal; but this is because only these two deities happen to be named in the Old Testament in connection with the rite. (See Lev. xviii. 21; xx. 2-5; Jer. xix. 5; xxxii. 35.)

The first question to be considered is as to whether the practice was rife amongst the Israelites in Old Testament times, and if so, for how long? The answer to this query is, that from the earliest times right up to the Exile the cruel religious rite mentioned was in general use. In proof of this state-

ment I turn first to the following passage, which I have previously cited for another purpose:—

Judg. iii. 5-6.—“And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites.....and they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.”

This is the earliest period (as I have before remarked) to which we can trace the history of the Jews. Whether the Israelites of this period were of Canaanitish descent, or not, does not much matter; they intermarried with the people of the land, and after a generation or two all would be Canaanites alike. Moreover, the so-called “Israelites” served the Canaanitish gods; that is to say, they gave their first-born sons or daughters as living burnt offerings to the deities of the land, as did the older Canaanites. This point settled, it is not surprising that future generations should continue the practice which their fathers and fathers’ fathers believed to be the bounden duty of every man who took a wife. Every married couple would know—and the priests of the period would see that they did not forget—that the first child belonged to the god, and must be given in the way prescribed; after that, all other children born might be counted their own.

In deducing evidence from the Hebrew writings it should be borne in mind that the historical books have been compiled from older writings, and have been edited by Yahvist writers, who have stigmatised the worship of any other god than Yahveh as rebellion and “doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.” Taking the book of Judges we find the following:—

Judg. iii. 7.—The Israelites “served the Baalim and the Asheroth.”

Judg. vi. 30.—“Bring out thy son that he may die: because he hath broken down the altar of Baal,” etc.

Judg. viii. 33.—The Israelites “went a whoring after the Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god.”

Judg. x. 6.—The Israelites “served the Baalim,” and the gods of Zidon, of Moab, of the Ammonites, and of the Philistines. “And they forsook Yahveh, and served him not.”

Though the sacrifice of the first-born is not mentioned in the foregoing passages, that cruel rite formed part of the worship of “the Baalim,” and must be understood as having been religiously performed.

After the period of the Judges we come to king Saul and his son Jonathan, respecting whom it is stated in 1 Chron. viii. 33-34 and ix. 39-40:—

“And Saul begat Jonathan, and Malchi-shua, and Abinadab, and Esh-baal. And the son of Jonathan was Merib-baal.”

The only point here is that Saul named one of his sons *Esh-baal*, that is to say, “Man of Baal,” and that Jonathan named a son *Merib-baal*, which means “Baal contendeth”: from which fact it is evident that both Saul and Jonathan must have been worshippers of Baal. The compiler of 2 Samuel has, however, changed the word *baal* in these two names into *bosheth*, which denotes “shame” (2 Sam. ii. 8; iv. 4). We have thus *Ish bosheth* (“man of shame”) and *Mephi-bosheth*, the latter being a scribe’s error for *Merib-bosheth*. It goes without saying that no man would name his child “Man of shame” or “Shame contendeth”: on the other hand, the appellation *Baal*—which signifies “Lord, master, husband”—was the greatest and most honored name in the land of Canaan.

Coming to the reign of Solomon, we are told that that king built “a high place for Chemosh,” the god of the Moabites, and another “for Molech,” the god of the Ammonites, “in the mount that is before Jerusalem” (1 Kings xi. 7). Having built altars for sacrificing to these gods, we cannot suppose that the customary offerings of the first-born were withheld, notwithstanding the fact that “the Lord” was specially gracious to Solomon.

We come, next, to a period during which these in-human sacrifices are stated to have been actually offered.

1. The compiler of 2 Kings states that the people of the northern kingdom—the kingdom of Israel—

had, during the whole period of its existence, “caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire,” etc. (2 Kings xvii. 17).

2. Ahaz, king of Judah, “burnt his children in the fire,” etc. (2 Chron. xxviii. 3).

3. Manasseh, king of Judah, “made his children to pass through the fire,” etc. (2 Chron. xxxvi. 6).

4. Good king Josiah “defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire,” etc. (2 Kings xxii. 10).

Professor Sayce says: “Baal was but a title which was applied to the Sun-god wherever or in whatever form he might be worshiped. *There was a time when the God of the Hebrews had been addressed by the same title.*” This time was during, and prior to, the period we are now considering. Hosea, who lived in the reigns of Jothan, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, speaking in the name of “the Lord,” says:—

“And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me *Ish* [‘my husband’]; and shalt call me no more *Baali* [‘my Baal’].—Hos. ii. 16.

At this time, there can be no doubt, “the Lord” was addressed as *Baal*, “lord and master.” Micah, who lived during the same period as Hosea, says of the practices prevalent in his days:—

“Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

It was in the reign of Josiah that the book of Deuteronomy first appeared (B.C. 621), and it was in consequence of commands in that book (such as the following) that that king attempted to put down the sacrifice of the first-born:—

Deut. xviii. 10.—“There shall not be found with thee any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire.”

This was the first prohibition, supposed to emanate from “the Lord,” of the cruel practice; but a religious rite that had been in use for centuries could not be abolished so easily. Notwithstanding the action taken by King Josiah, sacrifices of the first-born continued to be made, as before. Jeremiah, who lived from the time of Josiah to the beginning of the Exile, raised his voice against the practice, but in vain. Ezekiel, who wrote up to the Exile (and later), states that the fiendish rite was continued “unto this day” (xx. 26, 31). He also says, speaking in the name of “the Lord,”—

“And they have caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass through the fire.....For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it” (Ezek. xxiii. 37, 39).

Here it is evident that the first-born were sacrificed in the worship of Yahveh, though the people might have had an image of that deity, as well as of other gods.

Returning to Jeremiah, we find that no less than three times (vii. 30-31; xix. 5; xxxii. 35) that prophet, speaking in the name of “the Lord,” declares that the latter god did not desire such sacrifices, and had, in fact, never required them. Taking the first of these pronouncements, the god Yahveh says:—

“For the children of Judah.....have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded not, neither came it into my mind.”

Here, it will be seen, the god Yahveh disclaims having ever commanded the Israelites to sacrifice their first-born to him, or even having ever thought of doing so. But alas, for human nature, Jeremiah has three times uttered a “calculated lie.” The god Yahveh *did* command such sacrifices. Several centuries before the appearance of the book of Deuteronomy the Israelites had a collection of laws known as the *Book of the Covenant*—which laws were probably common to all the nations in Canaan, the only difference being in the name of the god who was represented as giving them. This ancient code of laws was afterwards incorporated with the later laws

written after the Exile; but from its primitive character it can be easily recognised, and is a complete code in itself: it comprises the laws commencing Exodus xx. 22, and ending Exodus xxiii. 33. The following is the command relating to the first-born:—

Exod. xxii. 29-30.—“Thou shalt not delay to offer of the abundance of thy fruits, and of thy liquors. *The first-born of thy sons shalt thou give unto me.* Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with its dam; *on the eighth day thou shalt give it me.*”

It was in obedience to this command that the Israelites, from the earliest times, had sacrificed their first-born to Yahveh, Baal, or Molech—which ever god they happened to serve at the time. After the Exile, when more humane feelings prevailed, circumcision on the eighth day after the birth took the place of “passing through the fire” on that day; and in the later laws the first-born was ordered to be “redeemed” (Exod. xii. 15; xxxiv. 19-20; xviii. 15-16). According to one passage (Num. iii. 12-13) the taking of the Levites into the Service of Yahveh is stated to have been accepted by “the Lord” instead of the offering of the first-born in sacrifice; according to another passage (Num. xviii. 15-16), the first-born was redeemed by the payment of five shekels. Which ever of these be correct, one thing at least is certain: after the Exile the inhuman rite of “passing through the fire” ceased to be practised, and circumcision took its place.

ABRACADABRA.

The Deadly Similarity.

By L. K. WASHBURN.

MANY persons believe that Jesus was a character totally distinct from all others that have appeared on earth; not only in his origin, but in his nature, in his teachings, and in his works. They set him not only apart from humanity, but above it. They admit that he wore the physical guise of man, but declare that under this guise was a god.

It is not our purpose to show that this faith has been bestowed in the past upon numerous individuals who have lived and died upon our globe, but we make the assertion, which is well attested by the facts, that Jesus was not the first being to be regarded as divine. Gods were quite common in the early history of our race, and it was nothing remarkable for divinities to inhabit mountains, groves, and vales in many lands.

We wish merely to review some of the works of Jesus and note how they resemble those of other characters who claimed the favor of God.

But, first, let us say that a person born according to the scriptures might be expected to order his career with more or less reference to the same authority.

We wish to declare that Jesus was a Jew, and that whoever wrote the Gospel-dramas formed their hero on Hebrew lines and painted his life after Hebrew models. As the account of his birth is not at all peculiar so also we may say that his so-called miracles were not new or strange.

“A rolling stone gathers no moss.” Not so a rolling story. Let a wonder-tale start the tiniest baby and in a few years it will grow to be a giant in size.

Whether the miracles of Jesus were genuine and part of his life work, or whether they were fabrications of a later period and were added to his character to enhance his claim to divinity is no part of our present concern.

There is a deadly similarity between many of the works of Jesus and those of certain ancient Hebrew prophets, and this similarity suggests that the later writers, who gave to the world the story of the Nazarene, stole a part of their material from older authors.

Elijah and Elisha were wonder-twins, and they furnished the Gospel writers with matter to embellish their hero.

Elijah went into the wilderness, as did Jesus, and fasted forty days and forty nights. Elijah had communion with God on Mount Horeb while Jesus had a fierce encounter with the Devil. Angels ministered unto both. The only difference in the two narratives seems to be that Elijah ate enough to last him forty days on his journey to Horeb, while Jesus partook of refreshments after his duel with the Devil was over.

Elijah raised the widow's son from the dead, and Elisha raised the son of the Shunamite woman. Jesus called back to life the ruler's daughter and raised Lazarus from the dead after he had been in the grave four days.

Elijah made the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil last for years. Elisha made the pot of oil multiply itself until vessels enough were filled to give the widow sufficient funds

to pay her debts. Jesus turned six waterpots of water to wine at a marriage feast where this important accessory had been forgotten.

Elijah anointed Elisha prophet in his place. John baptised Jesus to preach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven.

Elijah was a hairy man, and was girt with a girdle of leather about the loins; John wore a suit of camel's hair and a leather girdle about his loins.

Elijah cast his mantle upon Elisha when he was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, and Elisha said to the prophet, “Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow thee.” Elijah said, “Go back again, for what have I done to thee?”

A disciple wished to follow Jesus, but asked first to go and bury his father; but Jesus said, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.”

Elijah went up into heaven in a fiery chariot, drawn by fiery horses. Jesus was carried up into heaven.

Elisha and Elijah both parted the waters of Jordan; Jesus stilled the winds and the waves and calmed the raging sea.

Elisha cursed the little children in the name of the Lord; Jesus cursed the barren fig-tree.

Elisha, in a time of drought, fed one hundred men with twenty barley loaves and some ears of corn, and they all had enough and some was left. Jesus fed thousands of men and women with five loaves and two small fishes, and had enough left over to start a restaurant.

Elisha cured the leprosy of Naaman, and, what was more, he could make lepers; Jesus cured several lepers.

Elisha made an iron axe float on the surface of the water; Jesus walked on the sea.

The similarity of the miracles wrought by Jesus and the two Hebrew prophets is deadly, and certainly militates against the younger of these wonder-workers.

—Truthseeker (New York).

Secular Education and the General Election.

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(1) In the event of his being returned to Parliament as member for will Mr. pledge himself to support such an amendment of the Education Act as will secure that there shall be no teaching of religion in State-supported Elementary Schools in school hours or at the public expense?

(2) Is it just and fair that the religious views of special Churches or sections of the community should be taught in public schools at the national expense?

(3) Has the Liberal party any more right to establish and endow “Simple Bible Teaching” in the elementary public schools than the Tory party has to establish and endow the dogmatic religious teaching of the Church of England?

(4) Considering that every fresh Education Bill is merely an attempted redistribution of ecclesiastical power, and that no such redistribution is ever likely to satisfy the rival ecclesiastical parties, would it not bring about peace and educational efficiency if this constant quarrel of the sects were put an end to at once and for ever by the introduction of Secular Education?

(5) Considering that every civilised State moves towards the policy of treating religion as not a national or public, but a personal and private matter, will the candidate vote in favor of that policy in England through the removal of religious teaching from State-supported schools?

(6) Is it statesmanship to introduce year after year a new Education Bill, founded on no principle, embodying no rational policy, and known to be predoomed to ignominious failure?

(7) Why should England remain behind her own Colonies in the matter of Secular Education, and conspicuously behind her ally Japan, and her good friend France? Will the candidate support a proper effort in the House of Commons, if he is returned for this constituency, to put England abreast of the nations to which she is politically most related?

These questions should be put to candidates at public meetings. Which question is most suitable to the particular occasion must be left to the questioner's judgment. In many cases more than one question might be put at the same meeting; so that if the candidate evades one question he may possibly be obliged to give a proper answer to another.

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INDOOR.

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Church-street, Upper-street, N.): 7.30, Rev. A. Hyatt, "Bible Allegories and their True Meanings."

OUTDOOR.

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Highbury Corner): 12 (noon), Sidney Cook, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, H. Percy Ward, "The Truth About God and Christ."

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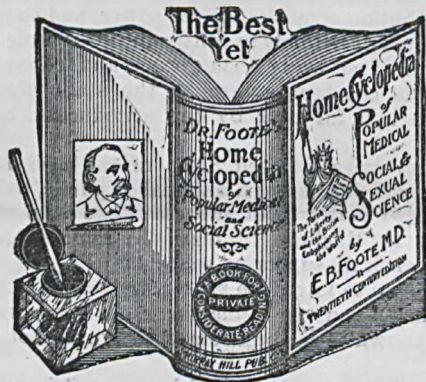
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