

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE

*It appears to be the people of no religion who behave properly.*—Mr. SHEPHERD LITTLE, Stipendiary Magistrate, Liverpool.

## A Nightmare in Fifty-Nine Volumes.

IN a religious paper the other day I saw an advertisement to the effect that someone had fifty-nine volumes of the *Christian World Pulpit* for sale. For the benefit of the uninitiated I must explain that the *Christian World Pulpit* contains exclusively the reports of sermons. Ever since I saw the advertisement it has been in my mind's eye. *Fifty-nine volumes of sermons.* Allow an average of five sermons to each issue, with fifty-two issues a year, and we reach a grand total of *three thousand and sixty-eight sermons.* And they are advertised for sale! Therefore the advertiser expects to find someone desirous of becoming the possessor of 3,068 sermons in one consignment! One's imagination staggers at the prospect of such colossal confidence in one's fellow-creatures.

Is there anyone who really wishes to purchase over 3,000 sermons at once? What can anyone want with them? Paper-makers buy their material by weight, not by the volume. Shopkeepers could buy their wrappers at a much lower rate than an advertiser obviously expects to get. They are not handy enough for any intending purchaser to use as weapons against any possible feline disturber of his midnight repose. No publisher would desire to reprint the earlier sermons as probably valuable pamphlets. Nor could they be bought for the purpose of replacing the historic egg at election meetings. And surely it cannot be that any person would buy them to read. Fancy sitting down to read 3,000 sermons! No; that way madness lies.

Three thousand and sixty-eight sermons! Allow thirty minutes for the delivery of each sermon. This gives us 1,584 hours. Allow a working day of ten hours, and we have 153 days, or twenty-two weeks. Great Jehosophat! fancy listening to a sermon or reading a sermon twenty-two weeks' long! Could human nature survive the strain? Juries have had to listen to speeches of several days' duration from counsel; but then they could always ease their feelings by bringing in a verdict for the other side. In this case no such redress is open. If anyone commenced listening on New Year's Day, the sermon would only be finished in time for the summer holidays.

Why on earth did the vendor want to take in the *Christian World Pulpit* during fifty-nine volumes of its existence? Or, having taken them in, why preserve them? Or, having preserved them, why announce his ill deed to the world by advertising them? And for sale, too! One could understand his presenting them to some public institution. This is a recognised method of at once disposing of useless printed matter and acquiring a reputation for philanthropy. If they were lettered under various titles they might be sold to some of those American millionaires who stock their libraries by the yard—much as some enterprising publisher disposed of a complete edition of an unsaleable cookery book. But these are plainly

lettered "*Christian World Pulpit*," naked and unashamed. Anybody who buys them must know what he is purchasing. His friends and casual visitors will see them. They will remain in the house like a family skeleton, or some evil tradition that refuses to be smothered. Perhaps it is all a joke. Let us hope so.

These fifty-nine volumes of sermons have haunted me. The advertisement was only a short one, but never since I saw in the streets of Glasgow two posters side by side, one announcing the second advent and the other the visit of a famous clog dancer, but so placed that on a level line they read "The second coming of our Lord. The greatest clog dancer on earth," has a couple of lines of print so burnt itself on my mind. Of course, we know, on reflection, that given time, fifty-nine volumes of sermons are produced, and a much larger number than this; but the fact is not often brought before us in so vivid a light. And when this does happen one feels towards it as one does towards an everyday fact that is suddenly endowed with an altogether new significance. All sorts of ideas suggest themselves. One feels almost as though there had been recovered a lost world.

For the beginnings of these fifty-nine volumes would really represent a vanished world. They would carry us back to pre-Darwinian days. One can imagine reading in their pages statements of the old argument for design before it was shivered by the touch of Darwinian biology. We should see the orthodox teachings about the Bible, about inspiration, about heaven and hell, still generally accepted. In their pages one would uncover a world as far removed mentally from the present as we are socially distinct from a tribe of Africans.

One thinks of the people who sat, week after week, listening to these sermons. Of how the more thoughtful may have deluded themselves with the belief that they were getting information on ethics, history, sociology, science, even religion. One also has a thought for those mentally somnolent ones who never labored under any such delusion, but who valued the sermons because, to them, they taught nothing and suggested nothing, but merely induced a comfortable, unreflecting, and properly orthodox state of mind. To some of both classes disappointment must have come. Some may have discovered that they were being taught nothing, and their places in church would know them no more. Others would be startled by discovering that, in spite of all possible precautions, gleams of common sense would creep into the sermon, and the peacefulness of mind that comes from the feeling that one's preacher may be trusted not to say anything usefully true or truthfully new, would be impossible. A thought, too, for those who attended these sermons for business reasons, for those who went because their wives took them, or because they wanted wives to take them, or because other people's wives took them.

I think also of the people who preached these three thousand sermons. Of the young men of good average intelligence who entered the pulpit believing not only what they taught but also that they would be moulding the lives of their fellow creatures. And then of their discovery that they were, may be, under the control of their deacons, who kept a careful watch upon their utterance; and, like some

unauthorised inquisition, ever ready to prepare them for a dissenting *auto-da-fé* on any lapse from their own unenlightened orthodoxy. Or of the preacher's gradual discovery that he had been training himself and being trained for the preaching of a lie, with the prospect of social ostracism or starvation if they spoke out; of the career of self-inflicted dishonesty if they remained silent. How many unrecorded tragedies are covered by these 3,000 sermons no man knows, nor ever will know. Or of the preachers whom nature itself destined for the pulpit in an unbelieving age. Those who, weak-minded by nature, had their congenital infirmity confirmed and made ineradicable by their theological training. Doubtless, to them, the pulpit was a real home, giving them, as Ruskin puts it, the reputation of wisdom without their ever having taken the trouble or gone through the pain of acquiring it.

The production of fifty-nine volumes of sermons does not impress me. With rare exceptions, one sermon is much like another as regards both matter and method. The selection of a text presents no difficulty, since it may easily be made to mean anything—literal history or esoteric symbology. Three or four anecdotes cribbed from *Ten Thousand Anecdotes for Preachers*, or some such production, but introduced as from the preacher's own experience, to give an air of worldly experience to the whole. A few reflections upon current topics, not of so decided a character as to offend anyone in the congregation, will do to give the sermon an appearance of being up to date. But, on the other hand, generally admitted evils may be vigorously denounced, and commonly accepted virtues strongly praised. Everything that is good must be labelled "Christian," and everything objectionable called Pagan, or Materialistic, or Heathen. Above all—and this is one of the great secrets of sermon production—when it comes to purely religious matters, there are no verifiable facts to limit the output. Lecturers on science, history, sociology, even on politics, have, in varying measures, to reckon with facts. And facts have an awkward habit of pulling a speaker up short. They crop up in his memory uninvited, and often unwelcome. They may even compel him to admit his ignorance on various points. The religious preacher is subject to none of these limitations. Doctrines are, in these days, whatever one chooses to make them. He may preach on heaven or hell, on God, Devil, angels, or the soul, without running the risk of anyone calling for the production of facts. There are none to check him, and as no one living *knows* any more about any of these topics than he does, the only limit to the production of sermons is the strength of the preacher's lungs or the patience of his audience.

But the fifty-nine volumes of sermons remain—a solid, a colossal, an inexpugnable fact. Someone who disguises himself behind the *nom de plume* of "Clericus" has, with malice aforethought, saved up this long-drawn-out sermonistic agony, and threatens to let it loose on the nation. What can be his object? What right has he to think that England holds a person desirous of becoming the possessor of this nightmare in cloth binding? I am devoured with curiosity. Everything else fails to interest me. The German scare passes unnoticed, election literature leaves me unmoved. Is the advertisement a hoax, or is it genuine? Will the volumes find a purchaser? Will some deluded person purchase under the impression that he is getting an encyclopædia of general information, or a selection of the "World's Great Masterpieces of Wit and Humor"? And, if he does purchase, will he straightway hunt up "Clericus" with an axe by way of getting satisfaction? Hang it all! I feel inclined to purchase them myself—at a price—and preserve fifty-nine volumes of sermons as a specimen of British barbarism in 1910. But fifty-n— oh, horror!

C. COHEN.

## Devotional Fatuity.

THE supreme emphasis of Evangelicalism is always upon the love of God. What the New Testament writer meant by the phrase, "God is love," is not at all clear; but on the lips of evangelical divines it has invariably denoted the absence from the Deity of any emotion contrary to love. Accepting, for argument's sake, the assumption that a personal God exists, what evidence is there that he is love, or even that he is capable of loving at all? Of course, a perfervid Evangelical never condescends to argument. He fancies himself the possessor of a special faculty, by means of which he knows the unknowable and enjoys converse with the incomprehensible. Speaking of the love of God, he says: "I am not going to argue about it, I seek to enjoy it. I am not going to prove it, but to proclaim it. We will not discuss the *menu*, but sit down to the feast." Such is the pride that is deemed consistent with Christian humility; but the pride is as illusive as the humility. If a feast is provided it is wise to sit down to it; but, strangely enough, no spiritual feast exists in the absence of faith, so that unbelievers have never had a chance of sitting down to it. They only *feel* the love of God who *believe* in it. The Rev. J. H. Jowett contributes an article to the *Christian World* for January 6, the purpose of which is to "attempt to vivify that most tremendous commonplace, 'God loves you.' If we could be sure of that, and live in it, the assurance would be a strange minister of personal redemption." What saves the lost is, not the *fact* but the *assurance* that there is a Savior. Were it the fact that saved, none would be lost; as it is, none are saved except the few who have developed the assurance. The astonishing thing is that the divines do not seem to realise that in thus describing the way of salvation they are constructing the most cogent argument against it, and that in representing the efficacy of the love of God as wholly dependent upon the faith of its alleged objects, they are most effectually disproving its actuality.

Mr. Jowett has talked and written so much about the love of God that he naturally fancies he knows all about it. He can tell us exactly what it is like, and what it is not like, wherein it resembles, and wherein it differs from, human love. "When, therefore, I want to think of the love of God to thee and me," he says, "I do not reject the helpful suggestion of human motherhood, and fatherhood, and wifehood, and husbandhood, and childhood. Nay, rather do I listen to their music all the more eagerly, and in their love-strains I hear sweet snatches of the songs above, faint echoes of the wonderful love of God. No, the love of our Father in heaven is not altogether unlike the love of all good fathers on earth. It is like and yet very unlike." How he knows all this the reverend gentleman does not take the trouble to inform us; and we are bold enough to assert that he does not know it. It is not a knowable subject, although a subject on which a professional theologian can dogmatise without end.

Let us now test a few of Mr. Jowett's statements concerning the love of God. His first assertion is that "God's love is the most *real* thing in the Universe." By "real" he means "enduring," but of the enduring nature of this love he adduces no proof whatever. Very eloquently he depicts the transiency of all material substances, everything being in a state of flux and passing away. "Where, then, shall we look for the real?" he asks, and answers,

"In the love of God. There is nothing transitory about it, nothing fickle, nothing capricious, nothing shadowy, nothing unreal. God's love abides, the permanent background in the moving play. We cannot awake and know it absent; and while we sleep it never steals away. It is the most real thing in the Universe."

But we who know it not want some higher assurance of its reality than the bare word of a man like to ourselves. Quoting Scripture is of no use whatever. What we demand is evidence, demonstration, verifi-

There are two classes of people who dread ridicule—priests and fools.—*Goldsmith*.

ation, and this Mr. Jowett does not attempt to produce.

His second assertion is that "God's love is the biggest thing in the Universe." To enable us to appreciate its amazing bigness, he enumerates a few of the biggest things we know. "Well," he says, "first of all, there is sin." Then comes the following lurid picture of what the preacher calls sin:—

"Take up your newspaper in these days when everything is dragged into a glaring publicity, when nothing is allowed to remain veiled or concealed. Read the accounts from the police-courts, or sometimes worse still, read the police-work done by the newspaper itself. Let the hideousness pile itself before your gaze. Then add to it the sin, often the blacker sin, of which the police can take no account. Think of the vice which is clever enough to keep within the circle of legal virtue. Think of the indecency which does not become obscenity. Think of the unfairness which does not break the law of theft. Think of the well-trimmed or suggestive gossip which guards itself from the law of libel. Think of the insinuations which are not indictments, and the enmity which is not scandal. Again, let the hideousness pile itself up like a mountain. Then go into your own heart. Firmly examine the range of your own sinfulness. Note the extent of your corruption. Mark how the rottenness infests some of your presumably finest fruit. Then exercise your imagination upon similar maladies in the lives of others; and then let your burdened imagination roam scout-like around the world. Again, I say, let the hideousness accumulate pile upon pile! What then? God's love is bigger still!"

"God's love is bigger still!" Now, putting the greater bigness against the smaller, what do we find? "God's book declares," adds Mr. Jowett, "that human sin, amazing and gigantic as it is, yet, when compared with God's love, it is as a stone dropped in the immeasurable sea!" What has the reverend gentleman done? He has woven the strongest possible argument against the reality of this biggest thing in the Universe. The fact that the hideousness of human sin has been allowed to exist and to pile itself up like a mountain proves that the infinitely bigger fact of God's redeeming love in Christ has never existed except in the theologian's fertile brain. These two facts inevitably annihilate each other. But, as Mr. Jowett himself abundantly shows, the fact of sin, meeting us at every turn, is so real that it cannot be denied; and the fact of sin, being undeniable, relegates God's love into the category of empty dreams.

No doubt the belief in the love of God ministers not a little consolation to emotional people. It flatters their vanity to think that the Sovereign of the Universe is in love with them, and can be happy only when assured that his affection is requited. They exult over the glorious thought that they are beloved of his Heavenly Majesty. But the vividness of their fellowship with him is measured by the strength of their belief in him. If their belief has been carefully nurtured from childhood, and if they have always made full use of the various "means of grace" at their disposal, each of them may be able to say, "God loves me as though I were everybody and there were no one else to share it." But such experiences, so conditioned, such testimonies, as well arising, are utterly devoid of evidential value, as well as ethically useless. What we have to consider is, not the experiences of individual believers, but the condition of the world at large; and he who maintains that the state of things on our little planet, even in the most favored portion of it, is consistent with the belief in God's love as the biggest and most powerful thing in the Universe must be hopelessly blinded by prejudice and entirely unfitted to weigh evidence. "Our God loves everybody," says Mr. Jowett; and yet he permitted Spain to murder Ferrer, and gave King Leopold a free hand to perpetrate the most brutal and horrible offences in the Congo Free State that he might have millions to expend on his pleasures. It is easy enough for a preacher to sing,—

"O love that wilt not let me go,"

but the truth is that this imaginary love of God *does* let people go and do exactly as they please. What is

the bitter and heated controversy about the respective strengths of the navies of England and Germany, now going on in the newspapers and on innumerable platforms, but a pertinent refutation of the Christian claim that the world is governed by a Being whose love is the biggest thing in the Universe? The world is still governed by the sword, not by Divine love; Christian London is kept in comparative order by the police, not by the grace of God; and our only hope of improvement lies in the gradual development and dissemination of humanitarian principles and social instincts, not in the conversion of the people to Christian beliefs.

As a rule, devotional literature is poor stuff. Fortunately, the bulk of it is ephemeral. It is only when written by men of genius, such as Augustine and Thomas a Kempis, that it becomes immortal; but even then the ethical influence exerted by it makes for evil. Devotional writers are usually emotional degenerates, and their one object is to work upon the feelings of their readers. Plato says that inspiration is a species of insanity, and there can be no doubt but that religious excitement often ends in lunacy. Religion overworks the emotional nature, calling upon it to enter into relations with the infinite and eternal, when it is only intended and qualified for activity in the finite and temporal sphere. The highest and noblest love of which we are naturally capable is earthly love, love and service of one another as denizens of this world. To love God is to waste our most precious possession, and can only result in the impoverishment of the love of man. A popular preacher exclaimed the other day that without the Fatherhood of God the Brotherhood of Man is an impossibility. Well, we have had the Fatherhood of God for two thousand years, but the Brotherhood of Man has not yet arrived; and it is a certainty that, in proportion as it is being realised, the Fatherhood of God is being dropped. What is needed now, above everything else, is the concentration of human attention and activities upon human interests and social problems, and the consequent disappearance of supernatural beliefs and Divine worship. The service of man ought to be our supreme and only concern. J. T. LLOYD.

## The Narratives in Genesis.

### A SO-CALLED PREDICTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

WHEN dealing with Circumcision I had occasion to refer to the fact that the great apostle of the Gentiles, having set himself up as a teacher in opposition to the twelve Jewish apostles, and having found that the indecent rite mentioned was a stumbling-block to the Gentiles, took upon himself to set it aside as unnecessary to salvation. His plea for this action, it may be remembered, was that as Abraham had found favor with God before the institution of circumcision—Abraham "believed in the Lord," and the Lord "counted it to him for righteousness"—so also would the Gentiles be saved by faith without submitting to that rite. Continuing his search through the Hebrew scriptures, this self-styled "apostle" next made the discovery that amongst the promises represented as made to Abraham was a prediction referring to Jesus Christ. He says:—

"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, 'In thee shall all the nations be blessed.' So then they which be of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham.....that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus..... Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not 'And to seeds,' as of many; but as of one, 'And to thy seed,' which is Christ.....And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Gal. iii. 8, 9, 14, 16, 29).

Here Paul says that the "seed" promised to Abraham refers to Jesus Christ; afterwards he says that this "seed" refers to all Christians who have faith

in that doubtful personage; first the seed means one person only—Christ; next, it means many persons—all the believers in Christ.

The passages of "scripture" to which the apostle of the Gentiles refers—for there are three—are the following: Genesis xii. 8; xviii. 18; xxii. 17, 18. Of these the last is perhaps the plainest. In this passage "the Lord" is represented as saying to Abraham:—

"In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply *thy seed* as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and *thy seed* shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in *thy seed* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

The last twelve words of this passage, though as plain as any other part of the Yahvist writer's narrative, have been more perverted than perhaps any other twelve words in the Old Testament. Christian commentators without exception are agreed in saying that the words "in *thy seed* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" are a prediction relating to Jesus Christ. According to these perverters of holy writ, the third "thy seed" has a totally different meaning to the first and second "thy seed," though all three occur in the same passage. The first two, they all admit, refer to the whole of Abraham's posterity; but the third, they say (following the misrepresentation of Paul), refers to one person only—Jesus Christ.

Now, the argument employed by Paul respecting "seed" and "seeds" is simply ridiculous. The word "seed" (Heb. *zara*) is a noun in the singular, somewhat analagous to the word "sheep"—a word that may be either singular or plural in meaning. According to Paul's style of reasoning, it might be said that because in a certain passage the word "sheep" was used, and not "sheeps," therefore the writer must be referring to only one animal. The Hebrew word "seed" occurs more than two hundred times in the Old Testament, and in nearly every case it has a plural signification, denoting "children, descendants, posterity": the word "seeds" is not used at all.

Christian commentators, in common with Paul, completely ignore the fact that the very same word is twice employed in the same passage, and in each case refers, not to one person, but to a whole nation.

- 1.—"I will multiply *thy seed* as the stars of the heavens."
- 2.—"*Thy seed* shall possess the gate of his enemies."
- 3.—"In *thy seed* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

In the Hebrew the root is the same in all three sentences: "thy seed" = *zara-ka*. It is scarcely necessary to say that in each case the word "seed" refers to the Hebrew nation which was reputed to have been derived from Abraham. This "seed" was to be great in numbers; it was to be sufficiently powerful to overthrow all its enemies; and (in the egotistic opinion of the Jewish sacred writers) it was to bring a blessing on all other nations that came in contact with it. This "blessing" was to be consummated by those nations being taught to worship the Hebrew deity, and so becoming proselytes to Judaism. The following prediction shows how the Hebrew writers understood the passage in Genesis:—

Isaiah xix. 19, 21, 24.—"In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord.....And the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day; yea, they shall worship with sacrifice and oblation, and shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and shall perform it.....In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the earth."

That the foregoing patriotic prediction was destined never to be fulfilled—that neither the Egyptians nor the Assyrians ever embraced Judaism—does not affect the matter under consideration. The passage indicates clearly what was meant by the statement that the "seed" of Abraham should be a blessing to other nations. And to make the matter, if possible, still plainer, I select two more of these predictions respecting the glorious future of the Jewish nation.

Isaiah lxi. 9.—"And *their seed* shall be known among the nations, and *their offspring* among the peoples: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that *they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.*"

Zech. viii. 13, 23.—"And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and *ye shall be a blessing*.....In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, shall even take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

It is needless to say that neither of the foregoing predictions was ever fulfilled: on the contrary, the Jews in all subsequent ages have been despised and persecuted; and though through all the vicissitudes of their unhappy position among the nations they remained faithful to the god Yahveh, history shows that they cling to a broken reed. The passages here quoted place the fact beyond all doubt that the ancient Hebrew writers believed that the Jewish nation would in the near future be a blessing to all surrounding nations—in accordance with the predictions respecting "the seed of Abraham" in Genesis.

Again, two of the New Testament writers, Matthew and Luke, have each inserted in his Gospel a genealogy, designed to show that Jesus was a lineal descendant of David and of Abraham. In each case the descent is traced from Abraham to "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." Each of these evangelists, if he had thought for a minute, might have saved himself the trouble of concocting a pedigree for a person of whom nothing was known; for if the angel's statement to Mary be true—"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee," etc.—then Jesus was begotten, not by his reputed father Joseph, but by the Holy Ghost. It follows from this, that of the whole Jewish nation that called itself "the seed of Abraham," Jesus was the only individual who could not be legitimately so described. Every name in the genealogy, from Isaac down to Joseph, might by blood relationship be one of Abraham's "seed"; but this relationship did not extend to Jesus, who had been begotten by the Ghost. Mary, apparently, had no share in the begetting, her part being limited to nourishing what had already been begotten: consequently in no sense could Jesus Christ be called "the seed of Abraham."

Paul, it will thus be seen, was as far out in his argument respecting "the seed" of Abraham, as in that relating to circumcision. Yet, strange as it may appear, there are people who believe that the writings ascribed to that apostle in the New Testament were inspired by God.

ABRACADABRA.

## Lying About Ingersoll.

BY GEORGE MACDONALD.

LAST June it came to our notice that David Eugene Olson, an evangelist, had repeated from the pulpit and published in the religious press, East and West, the affidavit of one Archie E. Berry, of St. John's, Oregon, that his father, Joeiel S. Berry, was the brother of Mrs. R. G. Ingersoll, and received the dying confession and recantation of Colonel Ingersoll in the presence of his daughter, Maud R. Ingersoll. Berry also affirmed that Mrs. Ingersoll was a strict Baptist and that Colonel Ingersoll advised his daughter to live the life of her mother.

Every statement in the affidavit was untrue. No one named Berry was near Colonel Ingersoll at the time of his death. Mrs. Ingersoll's maiden name being Parker, she had no brother named Berry; she was not, and is not, a Baptist, nor did Miss Ingersoll receive any such advice from her father. Colonel Ingersoll did not "confess" or "recant," and to have advised his daughter to live the life of her mother would have been to recommend that she should live that of himself, since their lives were the

same, Mrs. Ingersoll being, like her husband, a Freethinker.

The imposition was exposed in the *Truthseeker* of June 19, and that the facts reached Evangelist Olson there can be no doubt. Nevertheless, while conducting revival services in Silverton, Oregon, during the present month, Evangelist Olson repeated the falsehoods of the affidavit, and when local Freethinkers challenged its truth he brought the affiant to Silverton, placed him in the pulpit, and had him reiterate the statement that he is a nephew of Mrs. Ingersoll and that Miss Maud Ingersoll was present when her father made his "confession" to Joel Berry.

The Freethinkers next come out with a four-page publication, called the *Agnostic*, issued as a supplement to the *Silverton Leader*, in which our article of June 19, entitled "Lying Extraordinary," is given in full, with other matter appropriate to the issue. The *Leader* announces that Evangelist Olson has purchased a page of the paper in which to reply.

A subscriber in Silverton applied to the *Truthseeker* for a restatement of the denial, and we are glad to be able to forward the following:—

"MY DEAR MR. MACDONALD,—

I most emphatically deny that Mr. Archie E. Berry, or his father, heard my father recant in my presence or in the presence of any other person.

Neither Mr. Berry nor his father is known to me or to any member of my family.

My father never recanted to anyone, and any person who says that he did or abets him in such an assertion, wilfully, cruelly, and maliciously lies.

Sincerely yours,

New York, Dec. 8, 1909. MAUD R. INGERSOLL."

"MY DEAR MR. MACDONALD,—

I wish to deny most emphatically that I ever had a brother by the name of Berry, or that Archie Berry is my nephew. My father's name was Parker, my mother's name was Lyon, and I have no knowledge of anyone by the name of Berry in any branch of either family. I will give the Rev. David Olson one thousand dollars if he proves that Archie Berry is my nephew, and one thousand dollars more if he proves that he or his father, or anyone else, heard my husband recant on his death-bed, or at any other time. The whole recantation story is a monstrous lie. Last June I exposed the Rev. David Olson, and I wish to declare that every time he tells this story he knows himself to be a malicious falsifier. He and his tool, Berry, should be shunned by every reputable person.

New York, Dec. 8, 1909. EVA A. INGERSOLL."

Here is an inducement for Evangelist Olson and the fellow Berry to furnish the proof that they are not conscienceless liars. If Berry is a nephew of Mrs. Ingersoll the fact can be easily substantiated. If Mrs. Ingersoll's maiden name was Berry, that also is susceptible of proof. If Joel Berry was present at Ingersoll's "dying bed," as the affidavit states, somebody must have seen him, and yet three persons have solemnly affirmed before a notary that Colonel Ingersoll died sitting in a chair; that only members of the family were there—these being Eva A. Ingersoll, Sue Sharkey, and Sue M. Farrell—and we understand that Miss Maud Ingersoll was absent; that Colonel Ingersoll's convictions on the subject of religion remained absolutely unchanged, and that there was no "death-bed" conversation with any person. How did Joel Berry get there? The explanation is apparent; he was put there in the perverted imagination of his lying son Archie, and not otherwise.

The evangelist, Olson, is preaching and exhorting for money. He is dependent upon collections and contributions. Here is an opportunity for him to save himself the trouble of passing the hat for a few months. When the Editor of the *Truthseeker* compiled and published *Ingersoll as He Is*, he exhorted the readers, when they heard a preacher accuse Ingersoll of anything discreditable, to at once challenge the statement and offer to wager one hundred dollars that the accusation could not be

proved. The Editor promised to cover the preacher's money. This promise is still good. Mr. Berry and the Rev. Olson can have one hundred dollars from the *Truthseeker* on each of the propositions concerning Colonel Ingersoll contained in the affidavit of Berry that they will show to be true.

Friends of Colonel Ingersoll have spoken in accents of despair about the prospect and possibility of ever persuading the preachers and other Christians to cease promulgating the volume of falsehoods they have invented about or adapted to the great Agnostic. Some are so trusting as to suppose that if these evangelists once learn the falsity of their stories, and if the public is made acquainted with the truth, the lying will cease. We indulge in no such bright anticipations. The fabrications are an essential part of the body of the Christian faith, and as true as the rest of it. Refuting them is only a detail of the work of Freethinkers, a part of the task which includes showing that the whole system is fabulous and fraudulent, from its mythical creation and fall of man to its ghost parented redeemer, and thence onward through its miracles and legends, creeds, credentials, and falsified history. There have been Berrys and Olsons in every generation, some of them accounted inspired, and each has made his contribution to Christian mythology. Those of our day are, after all, perhaps, performing an unintended service for truth. We know that they are unreliable; we prove them to be untruthful; we expose their base prevarications, their absolute and unfounded fictions; and when we have done this we are justified in asking why we should place any trust in their spiritual and religious predecessors when the evangelists of our own day are such unmitigated liars. Since we must suffer these afflictions we should turn them to profit as far as we can, learning from them the lesson that the champions of religion tell what they wish were true, though it be the exact opposite of the truth; and that they have done so from the beginning and will do to the end.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

### When I Die.

WHEN under Life's grey sky  
The dark clouds softly lie,  
And the hour of sleep draws nigh,  
Shall I clasp my hands, and sigh:  
"Holy Father, hear my cry?"  
Not I.

When the light fades from mine eye,  
As my friends stand sadly by,  
Shall I lose heart and cry  
To the cold and heedless sky:  
"God forgive me, ere I die?"  
Not I.

But to the end will I  
Unthinking faith defy,  
And to the last rely  
On calm philosophy—  
Yes, I!  
Would I my life deny,  
And give to 'Truth the lie?  
Not I.

When Death stands very nigh,  
And the wherefore and the why  
Will soon receive reply;  
When each friend, with glist'ning eye,  
Sadly whispers, "Friend, goodbye,"  
Shall I then, with fearful sigh,  
"God of mercy!" weakly cry?  
Not I:  
I'll close my eyes, and softly say,  
"Goodbye."

ALLAN ALDWINCKLE,

## Acid Drops.

Prophet Baxter is dead. He was one of the biggest fools or the biggest frauds of his age. But, after all, it doesn't really matter which he was. The important fact is the credulity of the Christian public who hung upon the lips of this paltry oracle. Nothing could undeceive them. Every time the date arrived at which he had prophesied the second coming of Christ, he calmly moved the date forward, and they accepted the new chronology with implicit faith. Towards the end of his career the old fellow fixed the great event at a date when he himself was not likely to be alive, so he couldn't very well be found out again. No doubt he will be mourned by thousands of pious asses. Yet it is doubtful if his paper can be carried on successfully now. Its immense circulation at one time confirmed Carlyle's famous theory as to the inhabitants of this island.

The Invasion Scare really seems to have been started by Old Baxter. Nearly twenty years ago he prophesied that France would give Germany a licking and conquer Great Britain. This, he said, was "not a very difficult task, especially when you remember that between Dover and the Isle of Wight there are no fewer than 103 places where a hostile force could land without difficulty." Such was the prophecy, but "It hasn't come off up to yet," as the comic song says. It is Germany that is going to invade us at one of those 103 convenient points—or elsewhere. What a world it is! And what a world it might have been if it had only muzzled the prophets.

Balzac's *Contes Drolatiques* is, in its way, a French classic. At Bow-street Police Court recently, 272 copies of it in an English translation, under the title of *Droll Stories*, were ordered to be destroyed, the magistrate saying that he was convinced a more filthy publication had not been seen in London for a long time—though in saying this he must have forgotten the Bible. We believe this is the first time the sale of this book has been interfered with, and it was first published some forty years ago by John Camden Hotten, if we are not mistaken. It was commonly reported that the translator was a young journalist who has since become a highly respectable Tory.

When the great Thomas Paine was on his death-bed a New Jerusalem Churchite told him that his Church had found the key to the proper interpretation of the Bible, which had been lost for two thousand years. "Dear me," said Paine, "it must be very rusty."

It appears that "Christendom is still astray from Bible truth." This is announced on a printed card advertising some Sunday evening free lectures at Avondale Hall, Landor-road, Clapham. The object of these lectures is "To set forth the glorious purpose of God respecting Man and our Earth, and to demonstrate, by an appeal to the Scriptures, that the clergy in their teaching are fatally astray." What a happy family it is, to be sure!

Mr. Will Crooks—we don't know whether to call him M.P. or not yet—has been imitating Satan lately by going to and fro and up and down in the world. Will is fond of anecdotes, and he sometimes tells a "chestnut" as this season's production. While at Melbourne, he told a large audience that if he had his way he would "pull down every pulpit in the world" because "we want the preacher on the floor among the people." Then he told a story of a London cab accident. "Let us save the horse," a bystander said. "No, let us save the man," said another. "Save the horse," replied the first; "the man's only the parson, and we won't want him for a week." Not bad. But it's an old story, Will; and as you do a bit of preaching yourself occasionally, and are at least an amateur, you needn't be too hard on the professionals.

Jewish ministers, assembled at the Jews' College, Queen-square House, Guildford-street, London, have been discussing the question of mixed marriages. Judaism stands to lose by Jews marrying Gentiles, and it means bad business for the rabbis, who don't like it. But how can mixed marriages be stopped while Jews and Gentiles fancy each other, under the operation of the law of contrast? It is easy enough to see that persecution stereotyped the Jews during all those centuries of Christian bigotry, and that as they gain freedom they will be absorbed into the surrounding populations by inter-marriage. And the inter-marriages will not always be between Jews and Christians. There are plenty of non-Christians nowadays. Even a blue-eyed Atheist and a black-eyed Jewess might fall in love with

each other. And the Jewess isn't very likely to make the Atheist a Jew. There's the totem, you know.

Rev. Dr. B. Salomon bewailed a sad phenomenon in Jewry. "It was a matter of painful knowledge," he told the assembled rabbis, "that movements of the highest moment to their brethren had, as their leaders, men who lived in utter defiance of the most holy tenets of their faith—men whose own life was an utter negation of all that their followers strove for." Is this a slap at Zangwill? Anyhow, we are glad to hear Dr. Salomon's jeremiad. It shows that the men of light and leading, amongst the Jews as well as amongst the Christians, are apt to be Freethinkers, at least in their heart of hearts.

The Bishop of London's chief concern at present is about Church-school religious teaching and the preservation of the Established Church in Wales. Everything else is secondary. It reminds us of the gentleman who was sure there was nothing like leather.

Bishop Ingram thanks the Circulating Libraries for trying to exclude immoral literature from their lists. Clergymen have a wonderful interest in immoral literature. Is it because they have been brought up so much on the Bible?

Some weeks ago we drew attention to a hypocritical prayer for the general elections issued by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. We have now to draw attention to a prayer to match it issued by the National Council of Free Churches, and signed by Evan Jones (president), David Brook (ex-president), J. Monro Gibson, John Clifford, Charles H. Kelly, J. G. Greenhough, W. J. Townsend, James Travis, F. B. Meyer, R. F. Horton, J. Scott Lidgett, J. Rendel Harris, J. H. Jowett, and Thomas Law (secretary). This precious document is worth putting on record in our columns:—

"Dear Friends,—The General Election which is about to take place is the most important in the life and well-being of the nation of any that has happened, or is likely to happen, in our time. The most momentous issues are involved. The crisis is essentially religious. It is our privilege, as it is our duty, to pour out our hearts before God.

Let us, then, draw near to Him with a true heart and with the full assurance of faith, seeking day and night His guidance and help throughout this critical time. Let us gather together and pray that we and our fellow-citizens may not forget that our vote and influence are a trust from God, to be used for His glory; and we must in this, as in all other matters, seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. Let us pray that we may faithfully and wisely make choice of fit persons to serve in the great council of the nation, and that all things may be so ordered and settled that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established amongst us for all generations."

Reading between the lines, it is easy to see that this pious rigmarole, with its blasphemous prostitution of the name of God, means "We must fight hard to send the Liberals back with a thumping majority." And it was easy to see that the Archbishops' prayer meant the opposite. The way in which these charlatans keep their faces is wonderful. Comedians on the theatrical stage are miles behind them.

We wonder what amount of "divino leading" it would take to induce Dr. Clifford to vote for the Conservative candidate? It is almost amusing to see the airs these pious guides of the people give themselves. As though all the prayers said or printed influence the election one way or the other. As the elections draw nearer the cry is not for more prayers, but for more carriages and more workers. Even the Nonconformist preachers who are standing for election follow suit in this. Mr. Silvester Horne, who is contesting Ipswich, has arranged to address sixty meetings before the day of the election, but we do not believe that he has arranged for a single prayer-meeting during the whole of the campaign. Still, the game of humbug must be kept up, and we may trust our religious leaders to demonstrate their fitness as players.

The *Christian World* sneers at the clerical authorities of Salisbury for trying to influence voters in that city. But it quotes "Gipsy" Smith's deliverance that no one should go to church and pray "Thy kingdom come" and then vote against Lloyd George, without any accompanying deprecatory remarks. But the *C. W.* agrees with "Gipsy" Smith's politics, and that makes all the difference.

"God is with us" was sung at a Free Church Council demonstration in support of the Liberal candidate at

Southend-on-Sea. The first verse of this hymn is a fair sample from bulk:—

"God is with us, God is with us,  
So our brave forefathers sang;  
Far across the field of battle  
Loud their holy war-cry rang;  
Never once they feared nor faltered,  
Never once they ceased to sing—  
God is with us, God is with us,  
Christ our Lord shall rule as King."

Christ *your* Lord shall rule as King! Oh, yes. We quite understand what will happen if you get your own way. Christ *will* rule; that is to say, *you* will rule in his name. And a charming state of affairs it will be for all who don't bow the knee to your King. —

Nonconformists are going into the political arena as Nonconformists. One of their leading preachers is standing as Liberal candidate for Ipswich, and a swarm of other preachers, from all parts of the country, are helping him, at least on the platform. If this policy develops—and it seems likely to—Freethinkers will be faced with a new danger. Religious fanaticism will be imported into politics, and Freethinkers will meet it, and suffer by it, at every turn. It will be a fresh means of ostracising them from political and politico-social activities. Freethinkers may be compelled to form a party of their own, before very long, and to fight Nonconformists, as well as Anglicans and Catholics, all along the line. It may even be a fight for existence.

The *Methodist Times* also warns its readers that the issue in this election is "profoundly religious." And it is profoundly religious because, apparently, it is the supremacy of the House of Lords that is the vital issue. And one feels bound to conclude that this is a religious issue because the House of Lords is not favorable to Nonconformists. Why otherwise the fact of the House of Lords being a vital question makes it a religious issue is difficult to see. The people in the one House are about as religious as the people in the other, and as at present constituted, may be trusted to defend established religion against its enemies. From the days of the Greeks onward humbug has always been a prominent ingredient in political life, and the strength of the dose is intensified when religion plays a prominent part. What one really gathers from the religious organs on both sides is that politics is only being used as a cover for religious interests. If only they had the courage to say frankly what they are after we could respect these religious partisans more than we do. The one thing certain is, that this looking at national affairs from the standpoint of a sectarian supernaturalism helps more than ought else to hinder the development of that intelligent foresight which is the only safeguard of a political democracy.

Still another Call to Prayer. This one is issued by the Council of the Evangelical Alliance, and is signed by Lords, Bishops, and clergymen. It emphasises "the special need for divine guidance in view of the solemnity of the times through which our country is passing," and calls for a Week of Prayer, so that "Christians of all Churches may heartily unite in pleading before the Throne of God for guidance" in voting for the right candidates. Well, the right candidates are sure to get in—in the opinion of those who top the polls; and the wrong candidates—in the opinion of all the others. It was ever thus. And it ever will be—God or no God.

Here is a frank confession of failure—in one direction at least—from the Rev. R. F. Horton. Dr. Horton has just concluded thirty years of preaching, and he says:—

"It must be owned, looking back.....after thirty years, that the results are at first sight somewhat disappointing. I never succeeded myself in attracting the working man to Christ except in a few isolated instances, and though there have been in these later days many gifted teachers and preachers who make a strong appeal to the working people, yet, as a whole, the working population of Europe is apparently more indifferent to the religion of Jesus Christ and to the Church of Christ than it was a generation ago."

It is to be observed that Dr. Horton gives up the elaborate pretence, so generally put forward, that the working class is profoundly religious, and merely stays away from church. It is the Christian religion he finds people indifferent towards, and we agree with his diagnosis.

Of course, Dr. Horton is convinced that Christianity is a religion that the working man *ought* to adopt but he won't, and apparently feels no need for it. Christianity is necessary to the democracy, he says, because, without God, or worship, or moral ideals, sympathy, or love, it may become a tyrant much worse than a mediæval monarch. We quite

agree that a democracy in this state of moral denudation is a most undesirable thing, only Dr. Horton evidently believes that love, sympathy, and moral ideals are all dependent upon a belief in God, and with this we do not agree. *Individuals* may exist without these things, but society cannot, for the simple reason that they are the conditions that make a society possible. An understanding of this truth would do away with nine-tenths of the nonsense that fills the ordinary sermon, and make it much more interesting reading than it is usually. A given society may at any time present a larger or smaller number of lives that are morally undesirable, but the bulk of its life must maintain a certain standard of decency. When other people talk of an immoral society they either mean that its moral ideals take a form different from their own or they select a few abnormal specimens as samples of the rest. And these no more represent the people described than the records of our divorce courts and police courts represent English life.

Dr. Horton is the more puzzled at the indifference of the people to Christianity because, he says, democracy is entirely the creation of Christianity. Really, one might as well talk of the flying machine, or vote by ballot, or the telephone, as being the creation of Christianity. And he repeats the fiction that in the ancient world all labor was slave labor; the truth being that slave labor and free labor existed side by side. But all that Dr. Horton can mean by democracy being the creation of Christianity is that it has developed, for it did not even originate, in Christian times. And more than any other cause, the diffusion of knowledge among the people has been responsible for this development. For knowledge is the one absolute leveller of all artificial distinctions. Even under an autocracy or an oligarchy it has raised the lowest to a level with the highest, as in the days of old Rome it made a slave the equal of an emperor. Science has, in fact, been the great developmental force here as elsewhere. Purely economic forces have also played their part, as also have the long struggles between crown and aristocracy, during which many popular rights were won. But where does Christianity come in? Dr. Horton says it is all because Jesus Christ was a carpenter. As though the democratic organisations of to-day rest upon the alleged carpentering of a mythical personage some 2,000 years ago! The truth is, that when people, during periods of upheaval, have sought for democratic ideals, they have, as Professor Seely pointed out was the case during the French Revolution, ignored Christianity altogether and gone back to Pagan Rome for their examples. Christian times provided nothing suitable until modern Freethought began to play its part in the liberation of the human spirit.

A poor old woman who keeps a small grocery store at Cracow has got into sad trouble over the saints. She bought a lot of waste paper for wrapping up her customers' purchases. Unfortunately, it consisted of unsold copies of a Roman Catholic journal, containing pictures of saints and prayers. "To what base uses we may come," the saints might have said to each other, as one got round some soft sugar, and another a half-pound of butter, and another a bar of soap. But this did not satisfy the saints' worshippers. They had the old woman prosecuted for "irreligious behavior," and the court sentenced her to seven days' arrest and a twenty-four hours' fast. She appealed to the Upper Court at Vienna, but the sentence of the lower court was confirmed, the judges holding that in using pictures of saints for such a purpose she was showing disrespect and contempt for the institutions of the Catholic Church. We shudder to think of the sentence that might have been passed on the old woman if she had bought that consecrated paper for what Coleridge called post-culinary purposes.

Here is another curious case, also from Cracow. A Jewish rabbi, travelling between Prague and Cracow, fell against the door of the railway carriage just as it closed with the customary railway bang. Two of his fingers were caught in the door and crushed. He brought an action against the railway company, with a claim for damages. For the defence it was urged that the rabbi was saying his prayers at the time, and was not paying attention to what was going on around him. The judge then dismissed the case, and said that on a journey people should have their wits about them, and if they pray while travelling they must put up with what they get. Well, we quite admit that to pray while travelling is a sad waste of time, but what of the Christian advice to "pray without ceasing"? And what are we to think of a Providence that takes advantage of a poor devil's attention being engaged in prayer to seize the opportunity of crushing his fingers? We wonder whether the rabbi will ever preach again on how prayers are answered?

Ghosts have been playing pranks at the Emlyn Arms Inn, Llanarthney, Carmarthenshire. Even a visit from a teetotal Chief Constable did not stop them. "The whole affair," says a long report in the London *Daily Chronicle*, is "simply inexplicable." Nonsense! One would attach more importance to a ghost story from a less remote situation. Why don't the spooks appear at one (or more) of the famous great public-houses which are the principal landmarks of Christian London? They have a marvellous way of shunning light and publicity.

Mr. Henry Jones, an old schoolfellow of Mr. Lloyd George, and a shopkeeper at Chwilog, near Pwllheli, Carnarvonshire, went to a prayer-meeting with some members of his family. While he was seeking the Lord his little daughter Nesta was burnt to death in a fire which destroyed the shop and house. We wonder what the bereaved father and mother think of Providence and the efficacy of prayer now.

We have received a copy of a Paris paper, *La Guerre Sociale*, containing a full report of a speech at the Tivoli-Vauxhall to an audience of four thousand people by Sébastien Faure, one of the first orators in France. The subject was Secular Education. And the orator's position was that the State should let all opinions alone, not only religious opinions, but all other opinions; and that Catholics, Freethinkers, Protestants, Jews, etc., should all have equal freedom to preserve and promote their beliefs. It will be remembered, perhaps, that we ourselves said, a few weeks ago, that a government monopoly of education was an odious tyranny. Sébastien Faure took the same position:—

"I reject such a monopoly on principle; a lover of liberty, I cannot accept that solution by authority. What! We have protested, we protest, and we shall continue to protest against the closure, in Spain, of the rational schools founded by Ferrer and his co-workers. We cannot tolerate that Catholic and monarchical Spain should close schools that it does not like and which constitute in their eyes a public danger. And shall we tolerate the same thing in France? Shall we close the Catholic schools here because they displease our rulers, the masters of the hour, and because they constitute in their eyes a public danger? It is inadmissible."

Faure went on to say that the persecution of religionists would redouble their ardor. Moreover, the suppression of religious schools and teaching, even when purely voluntary, was a very dangerous policy. It could be used both ways. The reactionists had been in power before, and might be again, and if they carried on a crusade against freethought and secular education the friends of those movements would have lost even the right of protest. For who can complain when his own policy is employed against himself? Give the Christian schools complete liberty. Secular schools will beat them in a free competition. They will give a better education both of head and heart, and the Christian schools will die a natural death. Such was the argument of Sébastien Faure, presented with all his natural eloquence.

What an incredibly marvellous thing the grace of God is. At least, so says Principal Griffith Jones, of Bradford; and he ought to know, being one of God's own appointed messengers to mankind. "God's last, best gift, the key to the soul's true heaven," this reverend gentleman tells us, "is a regenerated memory." "A regenerated memory" is a memory that whitewashes an ugly past, a memory that "transfigures the mistakes and failures and sins of the days of old." The possession of such a memory may prove exceedingly soothing to a bad man, whose past is black with criminal thoughts and deeds; but, after all said and done, it is a lying memory, and the peace and joy it yields are poisoned at the very roots. The grace of forgiveness, as explained by the Principal, represents God as playing fast and loose with his own moral law, and as cruelly trifling with human destiny.

That wise body, the House of Lords, amended the new Oaths Act after it left the House of Commons. It was originally meant that witnesses in future should do without Holy Writ altogether, and just lift up the right hand, Scotch fashion, and swear by Almighty God; but the Lords added that the uplifted hand must hold a copy of the Old or New Testament. This means the New Testament for certain. Probably the pious peers don't know that the Old Testament is not published separately.

"Kissing the Book" is done for, but it has existed long enough to show that the God of the Bible is an imaginary personage. Had he been a real one he would have resented the billions of flat lies told over his name by the Testament-Kissers, especially in County Courts, where the atmosphere is often enough to sicken Ananias.

George Fox considered Kissing the Book a Protestant innovation. He said that the old method was to swear holding the Gospels with three fingers above the back, to typify the Holy Trinity, and two below, signifying the damnation of body and soul that would follow perjury. A man who had lost a finger would be in a fix.

After grandiosely saying that "the right of free speech is a fundamental article of the Liberal creed"—which it never was—the *Daily News* went on making fun of the "Radical rowdyism" displayed at Conservative meetings. We do not think it is politics to say, on our part, that hereditary legislators are an anachronism, and it speaks ill for the common-sense of Great Britain that they have been allowed to exist so long. The whole idea comes down from the ages of superstition. We are prepared to laugh at the peerage with anybody. But we are not prepared to laugh at violations of the right of peaceable and orderly public meeting. And the *Daily News* ought to be ashamed of itself for making light of this offence, when committed by its own side. The right of free speech should be respected all round.

Edison (we don't give initials—there is only one Edison) has been saying what a wonderful world this will be in another two hundred years. Science is going to revolutionise human life. We are still very ignorant. We are only animals yet. "We are just coming out of the dog stage," Edison says, "and getting a glimpse of our environment. We don't know; we just suspect a few things, and it will take an enormous evolution of our brains to bring us anywhere. Our practice of shooting one another in war is a proof that we are still animals. The make-up of our society is hideous." We believe that Edison understands how much superstition has hindered that "enormous evolution" of the human brain.

Blizzards of exceptional severity and destructiveness have visited America lately. But why grumble? Are not the Lord's tender mercies over all his works? And does not the Holy Book say that he doeth all things well?

Mr. P. Lyttleton Gell, writing as a Churchman in the *Heanor Parish Magazine*, calls on the faithful to resist the "ceaseless encroachments of Secularism and Paganism," and declares that "our national welfare depends upon our national Christianity." Coal, iron, and our island position, have nothing to do with it. Of course! And perhaps Mr. Gell will explain the wonderful progress of heathen Japan.

James Thomson ("B. V."), the Atheist poet, used to say that the clergy would have to go in for smoking pews some day, unless they wanted to see the last male worshiper leave the Church. It appears that this prediction is already fulfilled in Peru. Smoking is so far recognised in Lima Cathedral that spittoons are provided, and the preacher smokes as well as the congregation.

The preliminary Bishop's Inquiry into the complaints made against the Rev. John G. Lax has resulted in the Commissioners finding that there is a *prima facie* ground for instituting further proceedings against him. On his own evidence his name seems appropriate to his behavior.

#### FAITH VERSUS REASON.

"Because it is incredible I hold  
The dogma true," an ancient Father said,  
And well said too, for when with reason cold  
Your faith you test it is already dead:  
Faith ever feels that reason is its foe,  
And ever doth denounce the questioning mind;  
And would even now by rack and thumbscrew show  
Its hatred, were its will with power combined.  
Faith, of all words the most unequivocal,  
Whose meaning varies with the latitude,  
Of blood and tears has been more prodigal  
Than all the other terms that men delude:  
Poor foolish man! from birth to death the prey  
Of pompous words that madden and betray.

—Bertram Dobell, "A Century of Sonnets."

Battles will be succeeded by discoveries; peoples will conquer no more, they will become grand and enlightened; there will be no more warriors, but workers; man will search, teach, and invent; to exterminate will cease to be a glory. Destroyers will give place to creators.—Victor Hugo.



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, January 16, St. James's Hall, Great Portland-street, London, W.; at 7.30, "Mr. Blatchford, the *Daily Mail*, and the Prince of Peace."

January 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 23, Stratford Town Hall; 30, Birmingham.

J. D. (Dundee) subscribing to the President's Honorarium Fund, says: "I admire and appreciate the fearless manner in which you continuously war against all kinds of superstition. I hope to add a little more during the year."

"Mac" (Glasgow).—Overlooked last week. Sorry. But it is often a wonder to us that we overlook so little—with no sub-editor, no secretary, and no clerk.

A. NIMMO.—Nobody can tell you what is the greatest book in the world. It is a matter of opinion, and not like a mountain, a matter of measurement. We say "Shakespeare"—but we shan't quarrel with anyone who says "Tupper."

W. J. WATTS.—The Liberal canvasser who, in answer to your queries about the Blasphemy Laws, told you that Colonel Ingersoll was a despicable creature who ran away during the Civil War, is—well, a Christian. For the rest, he will find his description in the catalogue in Revelation of those who are to have "their portion in the lake that burneth with brimstone and fire"; so, if his own holy book is true, he'll be happy some day. Of course there isn't a grain of truth in the yarn he told you. Thanks for your efforts to promote our circulation.

W. F. CLAYTON.—The Christian lady who fears she won't see you in heaven may look for you in vain in the other place. Glad you are so fond of the *Freethinker*, after reading it for six months. Mental freedom, as you say, is the great thing; and it is what we are fighting for. Nothing is much good, and no society progressive, without it.

H. MEREDITH.—Thanks.

W. P. BALL.—Much obliged for cuttings.

M. BARNARD.—Your letter is flattering, but praise is more stimulating than the contrary—to those who can stand it.

F. WOOD.—Thanks.

G. F. H. McCLUSKEY AND HENRY TUCKER (Plymouth), subscribing to the President's Fund, express a hope "that the full amount will be forthcoming during the first three months of the year instead of dragging painfully through the whole twelve."

WM. STEVENS.—There is no one whose good wishes we would sooner receive. The good wishes of one very near and dear to you we always had, and have, for they are a perpetual possession.

LEONORA TYSON.—You have not caught us tripping. We did not advise disorder at public meetings. You don't appear to understand "heckle." It has absolutely nothing to do with disorder. It is a Scotch word, signifying the asking of questions at question time, after the candidate's speech.

JOHN ROSS.—Mr. Foote is keeping pretty well, in spite of the trying weather. Your good wishes are cordially reciprocated.

ENQUIRER.—You are probably thinking of a passage in J. S. Mill's *Autobiography*. Mill's father said that reading Butler's *Analogy* made him a confirmed sceptic.

G. R. BALLARD.—There is truth in what you say, but its publication in our columns would be indiscreet. Glad the *Freethinker* has been so much to you.

JAMES MOFFAT.—Glad you are still in the land of the living. When you resolve to give your sets of the *National Reformer* and *Freethinker* away, please give them to the N. S. S. or the Secular Society, Ltd. We remember Mr. Turberville well, in connection with whose death you saw Bradlaugh at Yeovil in the seventies.

ISABELLA ROBERTS.—Place for a lady. Thanks for good wishes.

RICHARD JOHNSON.—We are quite sure of your generous intention, and your way would probably be the best, if it were feasible. Will deal with rest of your letter next week.

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.

PERSONS remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send halfpenny stamps.

THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

### Sugar Plums.

The audiences at St. James's Hall have always to be worked up again with every fresh course of lectures. This is one of the penalties of non-continuity. There were special disadvantages, too, connected with the opening night last Sunday; partly due to the weather, partly to the political turmoil of the elections, and partly to the difficulty of effective advertising in the midst of such excitement. Naturally the audience was not quite up to Mr. Foote's general good level, although the lecture on "Shelley and the House of Lords" was highly relished, and the reading of the song "To the Men of England" brought the house down. Mr. Victor Roger, the chairman, also succeeded in drawing one opponent to the platform, who was suitably answered. We fear the disadvantages will tell again to-day (Jan. 16); we therefore ask the London "saints" to make a special effort to give publicity to this evening's lecture, which ought to be attractive in itself. Mr. Foote's subject will be "Mr. Blatchford, the *Daily Mail*, and the Prince of Peace."

Mr. Cohen starts the new course of Sunday lectures at the Stratford Town Hall this evening (Jan. 16). The subject is a good one, the lecture is sure to be a good one, and we hope the local "saints" will manage to get the hall crowded.

Paisley Freethinkers have decided to re-form the N. S. S. Branch in their town. Mr. E. Ross Griffiths has been deputed to make the necessary arrangements, and will be glad to hear from local "saints" who wish to join.

Sheffield Freethinkers have also decided to form an N. S. S. Branch for their town and district. Mr. L. Cheetham, of Waleswood, near Sheffield, is acting as secretary *pro tem*. All who are willing to join are requested to communicate with him. There should be a fine field for Secular propaganda in the locality.

Mr. Robert Stirton, of Dundee, who collects quarterly amongst the local "saints" for the President's Honorarium Fund (and wonders why the same cannot be done elsewhere) encloses with his latest remittance a letter from a sub-collector who forwards the amount *he* has got together. "It is easily done," the writer of this letter says, "—a hint to the faithful is sufficient to fetch their contributions immediately, and it makes one wish that the circle of one's Free-thinking friends were larger. And it bears testimony to the appreciation of the *Freethinker*, and the esteem in which Mr. Foote is held."

A public debate has been arranged to take place at the Stratford Town Hall on Wednesday evening, January 19, between Mr. W. J. Ramsey and the Rev. G. F. Allpress, of the Brickfields Congregational Church, on "Christianity versus Secularism." Mr. Councillor Hurry presides and all seats are free.

Mr. W. Heaford lectures on Francisco Ferrer at the Odd-fellows' Hall, Forest-road, Edinburgh, on Sunday next (Jan. 23), in the afternoon at 3 and evening at 7.

Our veteran friend, Mr. J. W. de Caux, writes us: "That you may live long with your brilliant intellect unimpaired is my sincere wish." We are sure of the "sincere wish" anyway.

Many letters reached Mr. Foote on Tuesday morning, and it was impossible to answer them all this week. A number stand over for our next issue.

### President's Honorarium Fund.

#### SECOND LIST OF SUBSCRIPTIONS—1910.

Previously acknowledged, £54 17s. A. P., £2 2s.; J. D. (Dundee), £5; John Sumner, £1 1s.; S. M. Peacock, 10s. 6d.; J. D., £5; W. E. Pugh, 10s.; L. Gjimore, £2; J. Dunlop, £1; G. Miall, 5s.; Dr. and Mrs. Laing, £2 2s.; H. Walsh, £1; B. Dobell, 10s. 6d.; Robert Stirton and Friends (Dundee), quarterly, £1 18s. 6d.; "Mac" (Glasgow), 10s.; R. Walsh, £2; W. H. Morrish, £1; J. J. Hanks, 5s.; M. Barnard, 5s.; G. R. Ballard, 2s.; Robert Avis, £1; H. C., 10s.; A. H. Deacon, 2s. 6d.; G. F. H. McCluskey, £1; Henry Tucker, 10s.; Wm. Stevens, £2 2s.; J. Roeckel, £1 1s.; Mrs. J. Roeckel, £1 1s.; E. Wilson, 10s. 6d.; F. J. Voisey, 10s. 6d.; J. Lazarnick, 10s. 6d.; Richard Johnson, £5; W. Dodd, £1; Mrs. Henry Forrer, £1; Mrs. J. A. Capon, 10s.; W. H. Hicks, 10s. 6d.; S. Dobson, 6s.; E. A. Hammond, 2s. 6d.; S. Holmes, £2; E. Lechmere, 10s. 6d.; Irvine Williamson, 2s.; James Moffat, 10s.; F. P., 10s.; J. W. de Caux, £2 2s.; G. White, 10s.; Wm. Horrocks, £2 2s.; Mrs. C. C., £1 1s.; K. C. C., £1 1s.; F. N. Williams, 12s.; J. H. Gartrell, £1 1s.

## Words to Freethinkers.

I DESIRE to say a few words of my own by way of supplement to the new year's circular in last week's *Freethinker* concerning the President's Honorarium Fund.

I wish to point out to the Freethought party generally, and especially to the readers of this journal, that I have a considerable burden to bear, in addition to receiving no salary or payment of any kind for my editorial work. And it must be obvious that my editorial work is a great deal more than mere supervision. I am by far the most extensive contributor to the paper. My articles and paragraphs and answers to correspondents scarcely ever extend to less than eight columns, and more frequently to ten or twelve, and sometimes more than this. Besides all this pen and brain work I do all the drudgery of the paper, reading the proofs and pages myself, without the aid of anyone. For I have no sub-editor, no secretary, and no clerk. All that my brain devises has to be done with my own eyes and hands. Friends who know what it means often wonder how I get through this continuous labor, and I occasionally wonder myself. But I do it, and I suppose I shall go on doing it till I drop.

During the time that the paper was supported by the capital of the Freethought Publishing Company certain payments were made to regular contributors. Since I took over the paper, in August 1908—the Company having come to the end of its resources, and the shareholders agreeing to my doing what I could—I have continued those payments to the regular contributors, with slight acknowledgments to some of the others. I am not boasting or complaining of this, but merely stating it as a fact.

Now as the Freethought Publishing Company lost money every year by carrying on the *Freethinker* and its adjuncts, it is only natural that I should lose too. My loss is not as great as the Company's,—I mean nominally; since the Company's balance-sheet included salary to me, although it was latterly not paid, and figured amongst the Company's debts,—while my balance-sheet, of course, does not include that ostensible expenditure. My loss is absolute loss. I have to make up a deficit, and I have to make it up, necessarily, out of the President's Honorarium Fund.

Freethinkers will see, therefore, that in no slight degree, they are supporting the paper in subscribing towards this Fund. Some day it may be different. I would much rather take payment from the paper than from a subscription; but there is little likelihood of that yet, although the circulation of the paper surely if slowly improves; and I am only concerned at present with the immediate future.

The "glorious free press" of England is a very limited affair. It does not include the great "organs of public opinion," which are simply commercial enterprises. It consists of a few journals that fight for principles; journals with limited circulations, and deriving next to no benefit from advertisements. These journals have a very hard and bitter struggle, and every now and then one of them goes under. And the struggle of a definitely Freethought journal is the hardest and bitterest of all; for it offers the public nothing but intellectual fare; it cannot promise its readers the millennium very shortly; it does not offer them the prospect of a large increase of material enjoyment in the near future; it merely expounds certain principles which are true, and consequently valuable to humanity, but only in the long run decisively, when we shall all be dead and nearly all of us forgotten. Those who can accept such a lofty and unselfish gospel are naturally not as numerous (yet) as the votaries of selfish superstition. Our progress is certain—but it must be slow.

My wife once remarked to me that this paper and that paper prospered and made money while mine didn't. Why was it? There seemed more work and brains

in my paper; why didn't it bring me even bread-and-cheese? I smiled at her simplicity. "Ah, my dear," I said, "you see they sell people what they want, and I sell them what they don't want."

One fact alone will show how difficult it is to maintain a Freethought paper. That fact is this. Few men have ever been able to do it. Heaps of Freethought papers were started before Holyoake's *Reasoner*. He kept that going for many years, but it was a good deal like Jesus Christ,—it died, was buried, and rose again, not once, but several times. Bradlaugh kept the *National Reformer* going for some twenty-eight years. I have kept the *Freethinker* going for nearly twenty-nine years. What can be said of all the other ventures that have been launched during the last half a century? I repeat that few men have ever been able to maintain a Freethought paper in this country.

Nor is the state of affairs any better in America. Mr. Ellis, in Canada, had to turn *Secular Thought* from a weekly into a monthly. The gallant old *Boston Investigator* had to go under in the United States. Of all the Freethought papers that exist there now, only the *Truthseeker* has had a really long life, and that is owing to the devotion of the Macdonald brothers, one of whom killed himself at the task, while the other must be toiling like a galley slave amidst no great encouragements. There never was a harder fighter than Joseph Symes, but he had to drop the *Liberator* at last at Melbourne.

Do not let it be supposed that I am depreciating the work of my gallant contributors. I am delighted to praise and congratulate them. They deserve all the credit, and far more than all the reward, they are ever likely to get. I gratefully own that I have had the best brains of the party helping me on the *Freethinker*,—which, by the way, is a tribute to me as well as to them, as I am sure they would be the very last to deny. But a Freethought paper was never yet kept going merely by contributors. The fate of Bradlaugh's paper after his death was an illustration of that truth. So was the fate of "Saladin's" paper after his death. A paper must have an editor, and the editor of a Freethought paper must be a leader in the front of the battle against superstition and tyranny. But here I am getting perilously near egotism, and I must leave my readers to fill in the rest for themselves.

It will be seen by this that the maintenance of a Freethought paper is one of the most difficult tasks in the world. I have put my life into the *Freethinker*—and I have less life now than when I started it. I should be glad if the improving circulation of the paper led up to a modest provision for whatever old age may lie before me, at least while I retain any capacity for work. Meanwhile, however, I have both to keep myself and family and partly keep the paper; and one's inevitable expenses increase as one gets older; to do one's work well one has to save one's strength in various directions. Frankly, I feel plenty of work left in me yet, but I must not throw any energy away.

The Freethought party will pardon me, I hope, for saying that I don't think it has quite recognised the value of the *Freethinker*. It is our great channel of publicity and intercourse. Societies come and go, and wax and wane, but the paper holds the field all the time. I venture to say it is the positively indispensable thing. Just for once, then, I ask the party to remember this. And if I give my life, my all, to the paper and the movement, they should not shrink from helping both in the way that is open to them. I bespeak their liberality to the President's Honorarium Fund. I might start a separate Fund for the paper, but what is the use of multiplying funds? It comes to the same thing in the end.

G. W. FOOTE.

Knowledge is power. A race of giants could not level the Alps; but ordinary men, equipped with science, bore through them, and make easy channels for the intercourse of divided nations.—G. W. Foote, "*Flowers of Freethought*."

## Bible Stories Retold.

## THE STORY OF SAMSON—(continued).

WE saw in our previous article, in connection with the birth of Samson, that his was a heavenly story with an earthly meaning. We watched him grow in wisdom and in stature, and in the favor of a Philistine maiden; and we left him comin' thro' the rye with the bonnie lassie O! who was shortly to become his wife. And we now proceed to Timnah to be present at the celebration of the wedding feast.

Samson, accompanied by his father and mother, went down from Zorah to Timnah, to the lady's abode. On the way he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion he had slain, and lo! a swarm of bees had utilised it as a hive. And, like little Jack Horner, he put in his thumb and pulled out a "plum," in the shape of some delicious honey that was much more delectable than either "Californian" or "Scotch Heather." And "he took it in his hand, and went on, eating as he went." Samson was ever a dutiful son, and he gave some to his father and his mother, and they took it in their hand, and went on, eating as they went. As they drew near to Timnah his fiancée came out to meet them, and Samson gave her some of the honey, and she took it in her hand, and went on, eating as she went.

We have noticed this little incident of the lion and the honey because of the important issues to which it gave rise at the wedding feast. Thirty young men of the Philistines were invited to the festivities to be companions to Samson. And as the feast was to last seven days, by way of diversion, he propounded a riddle relative to the lion and the honey, on which both sides had an equal bet. If they failed to solve it, they were each to give Samson a new linen garment and a change of raiment; and if they succeeded, Samson was to give each of them the same. "Out of the eater came forth meat, And out of the strong came forth sweetness." That riddle was a puzzler; and for three days those thirty young men racked their brains in search of a solution. But it was no go; and they were getting dreadfully concerned about the linen garments and changes of raiment. Everything being fair in love and riddles, they secretly approached Samson's wife to get her to coax the solution out of her husband. After such meanness we are not surprised to learn that they didn't even promise to give the bride a new linen garment as a reward, a present that we may be sure would have been acceptable on such an occasion. Indeed, they went so far as to use threats, saying: "Entice thy husband to declare the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire."

The sacred narrative at this point presents a riddle that is even more difficult of solution than Samson's. And if any reader desires to play the part of the Philistine in the piece, and undertake to solve the following numerical puzzle, we will willingly stake the half of our yearly salary as contributor to the *Freethinker*. The young men, we read, "could not in three days declare the riddle. And it came to pass on the seventh day" that they came to Samson's wife, seeking her aid. The Septuagint and the Syriac say that they came on the fourth day, which is certainly in keeping with the former statement that "in three days," etc. But the inspired Word of God says it was the seventh day, and so we take it at that. But it also declares that because Samson refused to be "drawn" by his wife "she wept before him the seven days while their feast lasted." So whether the young men came to her on the fourth or on the seventh day does not affect the latter statement, which is equally irreconcilable with either. The narrative is still further complicated by the assumption that Samson's wife had pressed him for several days, and that it was on the last day of the feast she made a final desperate effort to squeeze the secret out of him.

When Samson's wife first tried the gentle art of persuasion on her husband, he said, "Why, I have not told it to my mother, and shall I tell thee?"

Now this was a very injudicious thing for a husband to say to a wife whom he just newly married, and her Philistine monkey was up in a moment. "What a pity it is, Samson," she said, "that you didn't stay with your mother. Surely she musn't have known you were out when you came away down to Timnah." Which shows that the female nature among the Philistines was much the same as it is to-day among civilised Christians. Samson had asked for it, so to speak, and he got it. However, she ultimately managed to extract from Samson's modesty the story of his wonderful encounter with the lion, and the source of the honey she had so much enjoyed and in a very short time the young men were able to solve the riddle and claim the clothes. Samson easily divined where the solution had come from, and very pointedly said so. Turning to the spokesman of the party, he exploded thus: "If ye had not ploughed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." And his wife was so pleased at this flattering metaphorical allusion to her femininity that she repented of the unkind things she had said about his mother.

Samson, however, was compelled to pay up; and so he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men, and stripped off their garments, and presented the young Philistines with the dead men's clothes. If there had been thirty lions in the path, Samson would doubtless have killed them, and stripped off their skins, and paid his debt with these. But the lions of that district had become very wary; and whenever they caught sight of Samson they used to fly for their lives, and only began to roar when they knew they were at a safe distance. But Samson wasn't satisfied. The purpose of his life, as announced by the angel before his birth, was to "save Israel out of the hands of the Philistines"; and in this first encounter he had only come off second best. So he washed his hands of them all, his wife included, and once more trod the road back to Zorah and sought the comfort of his mother's affection.

We have more than once noticed this beautiful filial affection of Samson's. His mother and he were lovingly confidential, and had no secrets from each other. No sooner, as we have seen, did he form an amorous attachment in Timnah than he hastily flew back to Zorah to acquaint his mother of the circumstance. There is something very touching in this gentle deference of Samson to his mother; and if there had been any truth in the promise attached to the fifth commandment, undoubtedly Samson's days would have been "long in the land." But alas! for the fickleness of divine promises, he was out off in the midst of his years, having only had one wife (and that for a short period) and two concubines.

But Samson grew restive at home: his place was evidently among the Philistines. And so "it came to pass after awhile, in the time of the wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid." Why he should have visited her "with a kid" is not very apparent. It would have been more in keeping with the wonders of the story if he had visited her with a young lion. Samson insisted upon the restoration of his conjugal rights; but the lady's father objected, as he had "given" her to a fellow-Philistine. "I thought," he said, "that thou had'st utterly hated her, and so I gave her to thy companion who solved the riddle." This was adding insult to injury, and if the old man had been Samson's equal in age and strength, there would have been a terrific slaughter on one side or the other. The father-in-law saw that he had misjudged Samson's feelings, and so he wished to make amends. "Is not her younger sister fairer than she?" he said; "take her, I pray thee, instead." "What!" said Samson, "and be had up for bigamy: not me. I want my own wife—no other will do,—and if I don't get her, I will be blameless of the consequences." What Samson did with the little kid that he had carried all the way from Zorah, the sacred narrative does not tell us, but tradition has it that it found its way back to its native land, and, in course of time grew an Aaronical whisker, after the manner of goats is.

Samson took such an ingenious method of avenging the loss of his wife, that we fear to spoil it in the telling, and so, quote the words of the record.

"Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst of every two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks and the standing corn, and also the vineyards."

It was a noble revenge; and if he had not yet "begun" to save Israel out of the hands of the Philistines, at all events, he had let them see that he was not a man to be played with. After thus smiting the Philistines with burning foxes' tails (for Samson used strange weapons) "he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam."

It was at this place that Samson played another of his memorable diabolical jokes. The Philistines followed him to this hiding place in his native land, and his countrymen were afraid of trouble. So Samson allowed himself to be bound with ropes, and delivered over to the enemy. The Philistines were in high glee, and "shouted as they met him." But their joy was short lived; they didn't know Samson; nor had they any acquaintance with the mighty spiritual powers he had on his side. The Philistine "Houdinis" were only very small fry, who used to practise their art in the public market-places for paltry coppers. But Samson used his for high and lofty ends. No sooner did the Philistines think that he was safely their prisoner, securely bound with ropes, than the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the ropes became as cotton thread." The binding with ropes was a mere strategy on Samson's part, of which his countrymen and the Philistines alike were ignorant; and which served as the prelude to an event which would have been unbelievable had it not been recorded in sacred history. While the Philistines stood aghast, "he found a new jawbone of an ass, and smote a thousand men therewith." For as Longfellow truly observes: "A wonderful man was this Samson." With the heroic courage of those old warriors who died

"fighting fearful odds,  
For the ashes of their fathers and the temples of their gods."

he laid about him right and left with that wonderful jawbone of an ass, until there was not a single man of the whole of those thousand Philistines who was left to tell the tale. If ever there was a man who fought against "fearful odds," it was Samson; but, unlike those old warriors, he himself survived to immortalise in imperishable song the classic combat. For, like Caius Julius Cæsar, he was a man who could

"both write and fight,  
And in both was he equally skilful."

Picture in your mind's eye, dear reader, our hero in the midst of a thousand dead and dying Philistines who would never again behold the land that gave them birth,—the only man who stood erect beside that fallen mass of humanity. Behold him! the monarch of all he surveyed, with one foot upon the chieftain's chest, and with dark and fiery eyes, brandishing his victorious jawbone; and listen to his thrilling, inspired description of the combat, in words that will live as long as time endures:—

"With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps,  
With the jawbone of an ass have I smitten a thousand men."

If every other achievement of Samson's had failed to secure him immortal fame, his poetry alone would have been sufficient. It was this poetry of Samson's that first led to the discovery of the Bible "as literature." And amid all the destructive work of the critics, this sublime production of creative genius remains unimpaired—a light to lighten the Gentiles, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

But while Samson's poetry has survived the ravages of time, the fates have not been so kind to his jawbone. Indeed, Samson himself aided the fates by his thoughtlessness. And it came to pass when he had made an end of speaking (*i.e.*, when he had finished the classic oration over the Philistine chieftain's lifeless body), "he cast away the jawbone out

of his hand." And all the Palestine exploration parties, like all the king's horses and all the king's men, in their efforts with Humpty Dumpty, have not been able to find it again. If only Samson had had the prophetic instinct to see how much of an American millionaire's money that relic would one day realise, he would not so carelessly have "cast away the jawbone out of his hand." Young Mr. Rockefeller, who writes such charming personal letters to the members of his Bible class, would doubtless have regarded it as a priceless treasure.

Samson next went down to Gaza, and saw there a "lady," who, seeing that he was a stranger, took him in. Samson was interested in old china, and as the lady had a large and valuable collection, they discussed its merits until all the hostleries in the town were closed. The lady very generously invited Samson to stay the night with her. She hadn't a spare bed, but *that* didn't matter. Samson might have known that his sins would find him out, sooner or later. In this case it was sooner. It was told the Gazites that Samson had accepted the lady's hospitality, and so they laid wait for him until the morning, intending to kill him. But Samson got wind of their intentions, and he arose at midnight, while the watchers slept, and laid hold of the gates of the city, and the two posts, and part of the city wall, and laid them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the mountain that is before Hebron, fifteen thousand feet above the level of the sea. For as Longfellow truly observes: "A wonderful man was this Samson." Jules Verne would have interpreted this as "fifteen thousand miles below the bottom of the sea," but it is well known that Jules Verne used to exaggerate both ways, horizontally and perpendicularly. Indeed, the imaginative Jules would have made Samson, with his wonderful jawbone, slay ten thousand Philistines, instead of the paltry ten hundred as recorded by the sacred writer.

And here, for the present, we leave Samson climbing the mountain in the darkness, with the city gate and posts on his shoulders, while the enemy in waiting are sleeping the sleep of the just below; thus fulfilling the saying of the prophet:—

"The heights by great men reached and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight,  
But they, while their companions slept,  
Were toiling upward in the night."

JOSEPH BRYCE.

### William Dowling's Sonnets.

"The poet hath no creed; his mind is lit with Nature's intuition."—WILLIAM DOWLING.

It is apparent that Freethought can claim the flower of the working classes. A glance at the audiences at Freethought meetings is sufficient to confirm this. It is the same with literature. If one reckons the most distinguished writers, the list is certain to contain a goodly proportion of Freethinkers, for Liberty never fails of her heritage. Quite recently a volume of verse came into our hands—*Sonnets, Personal and Pastoral* (Kegan Paul; 1909). The work was marked by a maturity of expression and artistry far from the common. A further acquaintance with the book revealed the fact that the author was a mechanic, and the verse was the outcome of the scant leisure of a busy life.

The whole thing was a romance of intellectual effort, and one wondered that such powerful writing should have been evolved by one whose strenuous days had been passed in a workshop. Here was a poet of no mean ability, a singer who had mastered the art of sonnet writing. His work challenged comparison with the most cultured writers of the day. Moreover, the work was so good, so personal. The sonnets were extraordinarily varied, ranging from dreamy reveries on aspects of nature to biting denunciation of priestcraft. The poems abounded with

splendid single lines, and the thought was often illuminated by striking metaphors.

We saw from the scathing lines addressed to ex-President Roosevelt, as well as those on the grave of Swinburne, that Mr. Dowsing was in sympathy with the traditional Freethought of almost all great poets. The sonnet on Roosevelt's lying description of Paine as a "dirty little Atheist" is well worth quotation:—

"Not 'dirty,' but a heart as clean as light,  
As clean and guileless as his babyhood,  
A noble man, if not of noble blood;  
Nobility deep based on love of right.  
Not 'little,' but a mind of giant might,  
A Gulliver astride the bigot brood.  
No pulpit saint, but one that acted good,  
And always scorned the blackguard's speech and  
An 'Atheist' he was to barren fools. [spite.

O poor, near-minded sheep, whom custom rules,  
If e'er they reach the golden gates, they'll find  
That heaven is filled with Atheists such as he."

These lines on Swinburne's grave are powerful:—

"Scorner of creeds and burial rites, he sleeps  
Immovable in immobility.  
And while his light o'er future ages creeps  
The ravished sea declaims in agony.  
O give me back my soul! And till she sweeps  
O'er earthen graves shall sigh the disconsolate sea."

"Pan and Christ" contain some striking thoughts:—

"Men thought the great millennium was nigh.  
Ah! what a dragon it has proved to be!  
A bloody monster, by black priestcraft fed!  
From Erin, o'er the Caucasus steppes 'tis led,  
Fierce ravaging on human liberty.  
And now, with greater truth and conscience free,  
'Twere better to cry out—'Great Christ is dead!'"

It is long since we have handled a book so individual in tone. We are not so rich in honest and outspoken poets that we can afford to disregard Mr. Dowsing. He has reached no more than the prime of life, and, if we may judge by this book, there is no reason why he should not further enrich and give value to contemporary poetry. Mr. Dowsing is to be congratulated on the fact that he has withstood the temptation to gain distinction by sheer novelty of effect. It is so easy to catch the ear by banjo sentimentalism. It is a harder thing to use English in its purity, in its tested forms, and to compel attention as Mr. Dowsing does. It is significant that the sonnets in the volume are of an excellence so uniform that there is difficulty in selecting one rather than another for quotation. The poet is attracted by so many things from the "thunderous happenings" of London to questions concerning the deeper issues of life and death. At their best they reach a remarkable pitch of true poetry. Liberty needs all her poets. We hope that the present volume is the herald of even fuller inspiration.

C. E. S.

LAUGHING AT SUPERSTITION.

There is an old story of a man who was plagued by the Devil. The fiend was always dropping in at inconvenient times, and making the poor fellow's life a hell on earth. He sprinkled holy water on the floor, but by and by the "old un" hopped about successfully on the dry spots. He flung things at him, but all in vain. At last he resolved on desperate measures. He plucked up his courage, looked the Devil straight in the face, and laughed at him. That ended the battle. The Devil could not stand laughter. He fled that moment and never returned.—Superstition is the Devil, Treat it to a hearty, wholesome laugh. It is the surest exorcism, and you will find laughter medicinal for mind and body too.—G. W. Foote, "Flowers of Freethought."

Wisdom never forgives. Whatever resistance we have offered to her law, she avenges for ever;—the lost hour can never be redeemed, and the accomplished wrong never atoned for. The best that can be done afterwards, but for that, had been better; the falsest of all the cries of peace, where there is no peace, is that of the pardon of sin, as the mob expect it. Wisdom can "put away" sin, but she cannot pardon it; and she is apt, in her haste, to put away the sinner as well, when the black ægis is on her breast.—John Ruskin.

Correspondence.

CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIALISM.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—With reference to a paragraph occurring in your issue for January 2 concerning the Enemies of the Red Flag (p. 7), I would point out that the circular was primarily addressed to certain Nonconformist ministers who had criticised some leaflets issued by this Association.

From your critique of the circular it would appear that you wish it to be inferred that I am either "ignorant" or else "unscrupulous"—ignorant, if I do not know that there is a considerable body of gentlemen who call themselves "Christian Socialists"; unscrupulous, if I conceal the fact that I do know this.

I contend, however, that a true Christian cannot be a genuine Socialist, nor can a *bona fide* Socialist be a Christian, because so-called "Christian Socialists" accept only an emasculated edition of the Socialist creed, which, however, in its fulness implies the direct negation of Christianity.

It was in order to make this clear that the circular was published. I am a constant reader of your interesting publication, and now that you have called attention to the circular I shall be glad if you will inform me what you would charge to print it in full, making, say, half of one of your columns.

WILLIAM BULL.

[Sir William Bull does not notice our objection to his calling the *Freethinker* a "Socialist organ." As a "constant reader" of this journal he ought to know better. We will insert his advertisement in the ordinary way of business when he purges it of this wanton inaccuracy.—Editor.]

CONFESSIONS.

What is he buzzing in my ears?  
"Now that I come to die,  
Do I view the world as a vale of tears?"  
Ah, reverend sir, not I!

What I viewed there once, what I view again  
Where the physic bottles stand  
On the table's edge,—in a suburb lane,  
With a wall to my bedside hand.

The lane sloped, much as the bottles do,  
From a house you could descry  
O'er the garden-wall: is the curtain blue  
Or green to a healthy eye?

To mine it serves for the old June weather  
Blue above lane and wall;  
And the farthest bottle labelled "Ether"  
Is the house o'ertopping all.

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,  
There watched for me, one June,  
A girl: I know, sir, it's improper,  
My poor mind's out of tune.

Only, there was a way.....you crept  
Close by the side, to dodge  
Eyes in the house, two eyes except:  
They styled their house "The Lodge."

What right had a lounger up their lane?  
But, by creeping very close, [strain  
With the good wall's help, their eyes might  
And stretch themselves to Oes,

You never catch her and me together,  
As she left the attic there,  
By the rim of the bottle labelled "Ether"  
And stole from stair to stair,

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,  
We loved, sir—used to meet:  
How sad and bad and mad it was—  
But then, how it was sweet!

—Robert Browning.

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Mr. C. and M. McKelvie, 2s. 6d.; T. Lacey, 2s.; J. Lacey, 1s.; H. Crosbie, 2s.; Mr. Moonie, 2s.; Mr. Wainwright, 2s.; Mr. and Mrs. Bristow, 5s.; Mr. Palfreyman, 2s. 6d.; Mr. Short, 6d.; Miss Hayward, 2s.; D. Martin, 2s. 6d.; Mr. Owens, 1s.; Mr. Daws, 5s.; Mr. Johnson, £2; Mr. Woods, 2s.—John Rees, Treasurer, 13 Carlingford-street, Liverpool.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

### LONDON.

#### INDOOR.

ST. JAMES'S HALL (Great Portland-street, London, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Mr. Blatchford, the *Daily Mail*, and the Prince of Peace."

STRATFORD TOWN HALL: 7.30, C. Cohen, "Spain under the Crescent and the Cross: A Chapter in the History of Christianity."

### COUNTRY.

#### INDOOR.

EDINBURGH SECULAR SOCIETY (Club Rooms, 12 Hill-square): 6.30, Mr. Smithies, a Lecture.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 (noon), Miss Kerry, "The Scope of Eugenic"; 6.30, "Through Spain with a Camera." With lantern illustrations.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, Musical Evening—Stanley Concert Party.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): H. Percy Ward's farewell Lectures prior to his departure for America—3, "The Truth About God and Life"; 6.30, "My Thirteen Years' Experience as an Atheist Lecturer." Tea at 5.

NOTTINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Cobden Hall, Peachey-street): 7.30, J. Long, "The Garden of Eden and Fall of Man."

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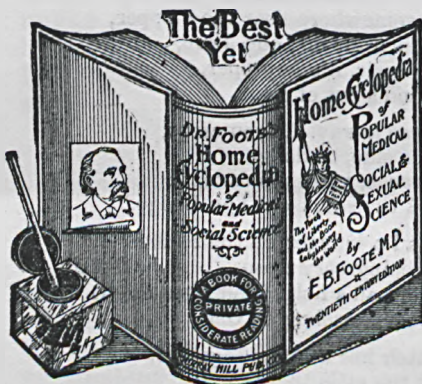
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**HOLLOWAY ETHICAL SOCIETY**, Grovedale Hall (late Thrift Hall), Grovedale-road, Upper Holloway, N. Sunday Evening Meetings at 7 p.m. Jan. 16, Mr. G. E. O'Dell, "The Problem of the Disappointed Soul."

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