

THE Freethinker

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I claim the right of free deliverance, free speech, free thought, and what I claim for myself, I claim for every human being.—ROBERT BUCHANAN.

Pious Conjuring.

THE Victoria Institute is a place where fossil religionists meet and keep each other in countenance. When they get together, and talk without fear of correction, it is astonishing what nonsense they give utterance to. We were not astonished, therefore, but very much tickled, by a newspaper report of Monday night's meeting at that august establishment, when Professor H. Langhorne Orchard read the Gunning Prize Essay for 1909 on "The Attitude of Science towards Miracles."

Professor Orchard made a striking statement—from the Victoria Institute point of view—very nearly at the outset. He said that science deals with the ordinary and common, but it should recognise the extraordinary and uncommon. Science aimed at explanation, and miracles might explain what nothing else could explain. This was doubtless quite sound, and extremely agreeable, to the gentlemen who regard theology as one of the sciences; but it must be a great absurdity to those who use the word "science" in a stricter fashion. Science does indeed aim at explanation, but its explanations are based upon knowledge, and end in the definite assignment of cause and effect; whereas the explanations of theology are based upon arbitrary speculation, and never do more than explain one mystery by another,—so that one is tempted to exclaim with Byron, "I wish he would explain his explanation."

The Victoria Institute people are basking in a fool's paradise if they fancy that the real men of science have any room in their philosophy for miracles, or any other hocus-pocus of supernaturalism. Science is the negation of supernaturalism, and supernaturalism is the negation of science. Natural forces always operate in the same way; supernatural will may operate in any way. Prevision is the final flower of science; prevision in the supernatural is an utter impossibility. Nobody can predict what the gods will do to-morrow; nobody knows whether any prayer will be answered or not. And if prayers are answered in this unforeseeable way, every religionist may possibly upset the laws of nature, paralyse the power of prevision, frustrate all calculated action, and render "science" a meaningless word.

When it is asserted by Professor Orchard that "science affirms the possibility of miracles," one is entitled to ask him for a definition of "possibility." Does he simply mean "conceivability"? If so, it must be pointed out that "conceivability" itself depends on circumstances. A person ignorant of physiology may conceive a centaur, because his intellect exercises no restraining influence over his imagination; but a physiologist could not conceive a creature half man and half horse, because he knows these two halves are biologically incompatible. In a certain way one may imagine a man jumping over the moon; that is, fancy might carry the idea of a human being through the idea of space, and take it

round the idea of the moon and back again. But an instructed person, knowing something of astronomy, physics, etc., could not imagine a man really doing the journey. Similarly, those who know nothing of the difference between water and wine except the color and taste—which are subjective, not objective phenomena—might easily "believe" the miracle of changing water into wine at Cana in Galilee; but those who know the chemical difference between the two fluids could not believe it, because they could not realise a miraculous chemical process in their minds. They might say that they "believed" it, but they would only be using a mere form of words, as meaningless as Abracadabra. This indeed is how miracles disappear. The conceivabilities of ignorance become the inconceivabilities of knowledge. The instructed mind refuses to entertain miraculous ideas in relation to the present or the future; and if it continues to entertain them in relation to the past, the reason is that the serum of inherited superstition overflows the scientific brain and causes obfuscation.

If "possibility" means anything but "conceivability" we invite Professor Orchard to explain what it *does* mean, or rather what *he means* by it. When ordinary people talk about anything as possible, they mean that it has happened, and may happen again. It may be expected to happen, not frequently, but quite naturally. It is possible, for instance, for a clergyman to talk sense in the pulpit; but no one expects it to occur often, and therefore it is not considered probable. Now is there any man of science, with a reputation to lose, who will declare that any casual or selected miracle of the Christian faith, or of the Christian scriptures, is possible now, in the sense of likely to happen at all? And if he will not declare it to be possible *now*, what is the use of declaring it was possible *long ago*? The universe has not changed since then; it is man's mind that has changed.

Professor Orchard seems to have had a glimpse of this truth, for he went backward for his miracles. After stating that science—yes, *science*—admitted that miraculous events had undoubtedly occurred, he declared that "Among these events were the creation of the world of matter, creation of living organisms, and the character of Jesus Christ." Now it is a sufficient reply to say that that "creation" is not to be found in the dictionary of science, and that the character of Christ is the most curious subject in the world for scientific treatment.

We agree with Professor Orchard to some extent about the Bible miracles. "The exodus of the Israelites," he said, "becomes unintelligible if the miracles said to have attended it did not really take place." The exodus is unintelligible. But then it never happened. There is no historical or archaeological evidence that the Jews ever were in Egypt; so it will always be unintelligible how they got out.

The Bible miracles are serious exhibitions of divine power to Professor Orchard. Even a talking jackass is a solemn phenomenon. But there are other people who regard the Bible miracles as mostly ridiculous, who agree with Thomas Paine that such performances degrade the Deity to the level of a travelling showman, and who think that a faith founded on conjuring tricks is unworthy of a civilised nation.

G. W. FOOTE.

A Christian Rule of Practice.

TURNING over some piles of old magazines, preparatory to a grand clearing out of accumulated literary lumber, I came across a marked passage in a copy of the *Athenæum*. The passage formed part of a review of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, and ran as follows:—

"We regret that our opinion of it is by no means favorable. A Bible dictionary, in this country at all events, is addressed in the first instance to religious people and to those who profess the Christian faith. Yet the Founder of Christianity in those articles in this encyclopædia, which deal with His life and death as a being in all respects like other men, whose birth and death took place in the ordinary course of nature, who never in His life made any assertion of His divinity, and who never rose from the dead. We are not concerned here with all the consequences of this proposition, but it is plain that, if it be accepted in its entirety, every Christian Church that has existed during the last nineteen centuries has been occupied with the propagation of error, and of error so tremendous that it is difficult to suppose that any countervailing benefits can have sprung from its teaching. If such be the view of those concerned in the production of this book they are perhaps justified in making it known; but in that case a dictionary professedly written by specialists, in which both the number of articles and their constant overlapping make the orderly discussion of so large a subject impossible, seems to us to be at once the most unfair and the most clumsy vehicle for its exposition possible."*

Now if this deliverance means anything at all, it means that a writer's first and most commanding duty is neither to himself nor to truth, but to those for whom he writes. And his duty to them is not that of instruction or correction, but flattery. He is to consider what their opinions are, and to be careful not to controvert them. Of course, in any other matter than that of religion the *Athenæum* would regard this as a monstrous teaching, and even in relation to religion, when it is put in plain language, would in all probability disown it. Yet if the strictures passed on the *Encyclopædia Biblica* do not mean this, one is quite at a loss to see what they do mean. A Bible dictionary, like any other dictionary, one would imagine, has as its first object to tell the truth about the subject with which it deals. And if there is one subject in this country about which the truth needs telling, it is the Bible. I do not know that it is even primarily or necessarily addressed to Christians; a Bible dictionary should be addressed to all who want information about the Bible. And the sole duty of the writers is to see that they give their readers the truth about it so far as they know it. The plea that a work written by a number of specialists is not the place to tell the truth is puerile. Smith's *Bible Dictionary*, Hasting's *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, and other works one might name, are all written by different writers who are, presumably, specialists in their department. Would the *Athenæum* say that the writers in these works are not telling the truth, or if they are, that their dictionaries are not the place in which the truth should be told? If not, in what respect do they differ from the *Encyclopædia Biblica*?

Presumably the difference in the two cases is due to the *Biblica* making farther and deeper inroads into the orthodox faith than do the other dictionaries. For these others—Smith's particularly—are addressed to Christians, and strive to keep the faith as intact as is possible. This suspicion concerning the *Athenæum* is confirmed by the ingenuous comment that if the writers believe certain things they are "perhaps" justified in making them known. Perhaps! As though there ought to be any doubt on the matter! Hasting's *Dictionary of the Bible* was praised in the same magazine because it preserved "the right sense of reverence"; by which one may gather that it kept back as much of the truth as was safe. That a work of reference should be con-

demned because its writers say frankly what they believe to be the truth, and condemned by one of our leading literary organs, reflects but poorly upon intellectual development in England.

Yet it must be confessed that the *Athenæum's* implied rule of writing is that practised by the vast majority of writers and public men in this country. For financial and other reasons they address themselves "in the first instance to religious people and to those who profess the Christian faith"—or, at all events, they always have them in their mind's eye—with the result that our whole life is honeycombed with insincerity and hypocrisy, and no man can ever be quite sure as to what others really do believe. We have scientific men who carefully exclude from their writings any reference as to the bearings of their work on current religious beliefs although it may be that this relation forms not its least important aspect. Anthropologists, for instance, who present the world with valuable studies in the origin and evolution of religious beliefs, stop short at modern religion, at the very point at which their work becomes of real value. They are writing with an eye on those who profess the Christian faith and must stultify themselves accordingly. And there are scores of men in other branches of science, with as little religion in them as the writer of this article, but afraid to say so because of the religious prejudice the *Athenæum* wishes to so carefully guard.

A great many of our writings on history are certainly produced on the plan for which the *Athenæum* contends. If concerned with the ancient world, pre-Christian history must have its dark shadows carefully blackened, and its brighter aspects ignored; while, on the other hand, the myth of a primitively "pure" Christianity must be sedulously fostered. Those who profess the Christian faith demand it, and their desires must be respected. If, with a later period, the respective delineations of Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity must be settled on the same plan. Protestant "reformers" must be held up as a band of noble, spiritual-minded men, and the claims of others ignored or deprecated. Above all, the fetish of the Bible must receive its due measure of obeisance. Its power and influence must be carefully kept before the people, and if discussed from a literary point of view, it must be implied, even when it is not explicitly stated, that its influence as literature is really due to its quality of supernaturalism. And, meanwhile, the influence of the Bible in fostering the belief in witchcraft, in demoniacal possession, in encouraging narrow and intolerant frames of mind, and the opposition to scientific development derived therefrom, is carefully ignored. Our treatment of history must all along be determined by due regard "to those who profess the Christian faith."

In public life generally, we find the same rule in operation. Politicians who are not Christians must carefully refrain from making their opinions on religion public. Their doing so might "perhaps" be justified, but, at any rate, it would be unwise. And if they are not known to be Freethinkers, it will be as well for them to appear occasionally in church or chapel or interlard their speeches with expressions of piety. Not because these express their opinions, but because, in this country, not merely dictionaries, but most other things must be addressed to "religious people and those who profess the Christian faith," and because mental sincerity and independence are not among the things they value most. If dealing with the growth of any movement, the part played by Freethinkers must not be mentioned. It must be assumed that all is the result of Christian activity. You may, in dealing with the education movement, for instance, mention the work of Lancaster, a Nonconformist, but beware of introducing Robert Owen, an Atheist. The rule is a very simple one, and much more widely practised than the *Athenæum* imagines.

The conclusion drawn by the *Athenæum* is really amusing in its inanity. If the writers of the

* Italics mine.

Encyclopædia Biblica are correct, then the Christian Church has been occupied with the propagation of error, and error so vast that it is difficult to conceive any countervailing benefits. Why, of course, the Churches have been engaged in the propagation of error. It is not only the writers of the *Biblica* who imply this, it is not alone we avowed Freethinkers—who do not put any “perhaps” to the necessity of speaking the truth—all educated Christians say so. Every attack made by Christians on hitherto revered doctrines is an assertion that the Churches have been propagating error. It passes comprehension how a journal like the *Athenæum* could come to any other conclusion than this, or how it could expect others not to draw a similar inference from the facts. What has been the teaching of the Churches concerning the history of the earth, the origin of man, the structure of the solar system, the nature of disease, the development of animal life, but an unrelieved mass of error? What sensible person is there who now denies that concerning such matters as the origin of the Bible, the nature of inspiration, miracles, prayer, even the divinity of Jesus, the Churches have always been engaged in teaching error? There is not a single subject the Churches have taught, and which could be tested by ascertained fact, on which their instruction is not rejected as fantastical and erroneous. To ignore this aspect of Church history, makes one wonder whether the *Athenæum*, too, “is addressed, in the first instance, to religious people and to those who profess the Christian faith.”

It is, indeed, difficult to see any benefits from the teachings of the Churches that can compensate for these centuries of error. For it is not that the Churches taught error, as we may all blunder on the road to truth, but they consecrated its error, and bitterly opposed all attempts at correction. The more clearly the falsity of their teachings was demonstrated, the harder they strove for their preservation. They forged, invented, lied, and in a thousand different ways corrupted the better aspects of mental and moral existence. By stake, by prison, and by ostracism people were taught the danger of correcting the errors that the Churches had elevated to the rank of unquestionable truths. And in this way the open punishments of the heroic few were reflected in the unconscious degradation of the many. That Christian opinions ought not to be controverted became an accepted canon with all but a few. And the result is seen in the falsification of history, in the suppression of news that militates against Christian belief, in the difficulty of getting men to put their opinions on religion into writing, and the almost impossibility of getting publishers of standing to sponsor their works should they do so. With the general result that while we are continuously told that religion is of all subjects the one most important to human welfare, it is the field in which insincerity, hypocrisy, belated ideas, and downright untruthfulness flourish most luxuriantly.

C. COHEN.

Jesus and the Old Testament.

THOUSANDS of Sunday-schools are to-day discussing “Some Laws of the Kingdom” as laid down in Matt. v. 17-26, 38-48, and it is but fitting that Freethinkers should join in the study. These passages occur in what is called the Sermon on the Mount, a sermon, by the way, which was never delivered at all, either on a mountain or on a plain. Nothing is more patent than the mythical character of the whole discourse. The very composition of it shows that it is not the work of an original thinker, or of a genuine reformer. It is merely a literary patch-work, devoid of a single new idea. Confining our attention to the passages indicated, we find that verse 18, for example, is completely irrelevant when set side by side with the qualifications and repudiations of verses 21-44. The former verse is a declaration that the Mosaic Law would never be abrogated,

while the latter verses assert that certain portions of it were already obsolete. Jesus is represented as at once proclaiming the absolute inviolability of Mosaism, and lopping off, or at least considerably revising, certain sections of it. No genuine reformer, delivering a set address, could have been guilty of such a palpable contradiction. This is frankly admitted by Professor James Moffat in his scholarly article on the Sermon in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. This is a point not likely to be introduced by the ordinary Sunday-school teacher. To him the whole discourse is the very word of God, which is of necessity consistent with itself. One commentator on the Lesson says: “The Master recognises the old law as the Word of God, and therefore as a word that can never be broken. God cannot deny himself. He begins with the elements of moral and religious instruction, but there will be no need ever to unlearn what he has taught.” And yet Jesus is represented as proceeding straight off to correct the Divine Teaching of the Old Testament on several points.

Let us now examine the three corrections embodied in the passages under consideration. The first relates to the sixth Commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.” “But I say unto you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the Council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire.” This is a thoroughly wholesome teaching; but the force of “But I say unto you” is broken when we learn that identical sentiments were to be found in several of the Talmuds. In one we read, “He that causeth his brother to blush in public shall have no part in the future life,” and in another, “It were better for a man to cast himself in a furnace than to cause his brother to blush in public.” Even in Lev. xix. 17 it is written, “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart.” The duty of reconciliation is emphasised in the Talmuds quite as strongly as by Jesus here. “The friends of God are, he who does not grow wroth, and he who gives the example of humility,” declares a Talmud, and in Ecclesiasticus x. 6 are words to the same effect: “Be not wroth with thy neighbor for every wrong, and do nothing by works of violence.” Professor James Stalker, of Aberdeen, says that “Jesus discerns in the commandment a principle which has a far wider application.” Granted; but Jesus was neither the first nor the second to discern it. He only repeated what had been said many times before.

The second qualification of the ancient law is explained in verses 38-42. The law was one of literal retaliation. If an eye was taken, an eye had to be sacrificed in punishment. “But I say unto you,” Jesus goes on, “Resist not evil.” Here, however, Jesus is not fair to the Old Testament. It is true that in Lev. xxiv. 19, 20, we find these words: “And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbor; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth”; but it is also true that in the very same book, xix. 18, we read thus: “Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” In other parts of the Old Testament there are texts to the same effect. In Lam. iii. 30, it is said, “Let him give his cheek to him that smiteth him,” and in Prov. xx. 22, “Say not thou, I will recompense evil.” The Talmuds also are crowded with expressions of similar import. Whether this teaching be true or false, the whole Bible is full of it. The commentators are agreed in pronouncing it true, but solemnly warn us against taking it literally. One reverend gentleman says that “resistance may be a social duty, something we owe to the community or to the evil-doer himself.” According to this interpreter, “it is the mind-condition which is really important,” not the outward act. But the precept of Jesus is, “Resist not evil,” or perhaps more correctly, “Resist not the evil one.” This evil one may have plucked out one of your eyes, smashed your head, broken your leg, or

killed your mother, but whatever he may have done, or is about to do, you are to leave him alone. Whatever you do, do not punish him. If he has smitten you on the right cheek, do not call in the police, but turn to him your other cheek also. Be universally tolerant and accommodating. If a soldier can compel you to be his burden-bearing convoy for a mile, throw him another mile into the bargain. Cheerfully give to all who ask for charity, and never turn away from would-be borrowers. Such is undoubtedly the teaching ascribed to Jesus; but there is absolutely nothing new in it. It is all in the Old Testament almost in the same words. The Psalmist says that the righteous man "dealeth graciously, and giveth; all the day long he dealeth graciously, and lendeth."

In the next instance, Jesus is equally unjust to the Old Testament. He is made to say, "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you." Now, where in the Old Testament is the injunction to hate the enemy? It is nowhere to be found. There were people whose peace and prosperity Israel were exhorted not to seek for ever, and some of the Psalmists declare that they hated with perfect hatred all those who hated Jehovah; but there is no commandment to hate the enemy. Indeed, there are passages not a few in which enemies are held up as objects to whom every consideration and kindness should be shown. "If thine enemy be hungry," says a proverb, "give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink." Having thus misrepresented the Old Testament, Jesus says: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you." This is a counsel of perfection which nobody ever dreams of heeding. Jesus himself came far short of obedience to it. There was no love lost between him and the Pharisees. With what terrific eloquence he cursed them. Read Matthew xxiii. and see with what implacable hatred he pursued them. Whenever he thought of them all tenderness vanished from his heart. As he beheld them he was filled with indignation, and thundered out, "Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?" "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." Love could not breathe in such an atmosphere. And yet the chief offence of which they were supposed to be guilty was that of refusing to take him at his own valuation; and at last he swore he would have nothing more to do with them until they totally changed their attitude towards himself, and were able to say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Well, what was true of him has been more or less true of his followers. They, too, have been gigantic haters, and as long as they had the power they never hesitated to clothe their hatred with deeds of blackest cruelty. Think of the awful doom that never failed to overtake the poor heretics. Heretics are enemies of the Cross of Christ, they used to say, and therefore our enemies, and no mercy shall they ever find at our hands.

It is the same tale that has to be told to-day. They who differ in opinion from the majority are instantly thrown to the lions, to be metaphorically harassed, tortured, and slain. How heartily the New Theologians are hated by the Old. What innumerable poisoned arrows have been furiously hurled at Mr. Campbell's heretical head by fellow Christians, some of whom would rejoice to see him burning at the stake. "Love your enemies," said Jesus, and both he and his disciples have demonstrated the sincerity of their love by vigorously anathematising them in heaven's name. Of course, no reference to this deplorable fact will be made at any of the Sunday-schools to-day. It falls to the lot

of Freethinkers to give it the unenviable prominence it so richly deserves, and they know by a long and bitter experience what strong haters Christians are, and to what ignoble depths of moral atrocity their hatred successfully decoys them.

Merely from the contents of to-day's International Sunday-school lesson no inference forces itself upon us more irresistibly than that the claim of Jesus to be regarded as an ideal teacher is the slenderest and feeblest conceivable. It is the vain boast of some deluded people that practical Christianity is rooted in the Sermon on the Mount; but the truth is that not one of the sayings under discussion to-day has ever exerted the slightest influence upon Christian life. And what is true of this small portion is equally true of the whole. Thus the most extravagantly eulogised sermon in the world is, at the same time, the most completely neglected in practice; and it is neglected because it cannot be translated into conduct. Evil is being stoutly resisted every day. No one ever dreams of turning the left cheek to the man who has just smashed the right. Begging is a crime against the law of the land; and indiscriminate giving would prove the royal road to ruin. To love active enemies is beyond the capacity of all of us. Very few can even be just to their enemies; and without justice there can be no love. Indeed, it is the lack of justice that lies at the root of all our social evils and their brood of miseries; and this is the point at which the reorganisation of society, to be genuine and permanent, must begin.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Narratives in Genesis.

THE LIFE OF ISAAC.

THE Bible history of Isaac furnishes us with a good illustration of the way in which the so-called "history" of the early patriarchs was written. When the Yahvist sat down to narrate the mythical history of Isaac, he discovered that the legendary materials at his disposal for the life of that patriarch were singularly barren of events. Such a state of affairs, he saw, would not do; events of some kind must be found, otherwise how could history be written? He had himself concocted two childish stories respecting the Birthright and the Blessing; but these belonged more properly to the lives of Isaac's sons, Esau and Jacob. Something, he saw, would have to be done; so he set to work to the best of his ability to do it. To supply the deficiency the best plan he could think of was to take some of the alleged events which another sacred writer, the Elohist, had narrated in the history of Abraham, and, after making some necessary alterations, to fit them into the life of Isaac. This plan he forthwith piously carried out, but not with complete success. The events which he borrowed from the life of Abraham were threefold: Abraham denying his wife at Gerar, Abimelech making a covenant with Abraham, and Abraham naming Beersheba. As the result of the Yahvist's labors we have as part of the life of Isaac: Isaac denying his wife at Gerar, Abimelech making a covenant with Isaac, and Isaac naming Beersheba. We have now to compare the foregoing three events which we find recorded in the lives of the two patriarchs named.

1. *Abraham's denial of his wife.* When Abraham "sojourned in Gerar," he "said of Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister': and Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But Elohim came to Abimelech in a dream by night," and warned him that Sarah was Abraham's wife, and commanded him to restore her. Next day Abimelech sent for Abraham, and reproved him for his lying and deceit, etc. (Gen. xxi. 1-17). This event took place before Isaac was born.

Isaac's denial of his wife. Isaac upon one occasion went to sojourn at Gerar, where Abimelech was king: "and the men of the place asked him of his wife, and he said 'She is my sister'; for he feared to say,

'My wife'.....because she was fair to look upon" (Gen. xxvi. 1-7). In this case Abimelech did not take Rebekah into his house, for he had discovered in time that she was Isaac's wife; but he sent for her husband, and rebuked him in the same way that he had formerly rebuked Abraham. This denial took place when Isaac was over ninety years of age, and when Rebekah had been a wife for over half a century; there could therefore have been no occasion for Isaac to fear that Abimelech or any of the men of Gerar might become enamored of his blushing young bride of nearly seventy. It must also be understood that though the time between the two denials was not much short of a century, it was the same "Abimelech king of Gerar" in each case.

2. This long-lived king Abimelech is represented as making the same covenant with Isaac as he had nearly a century before made with Abraham.

The Covenant with Abraham. "And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phicol the captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, Elohim is with thee in all that thou doest; now therefore swear unto me here by Elohim that thou wilt not deal falsely with me.....but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me.And Abraham said, I will swear" (Gen. xxi. 22-24). This covenant was made when Isaac was a baby, shortly after he had been "weaned."

The Covenant with Isaac. "Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath his friend, and Phicol the captain of his host.....And they said, We saw plainly that Yahveh was with thee.....Let there be now an oath betwixt us.....and let us make a covenant with thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good.....And he made a feast, and they did eat and drink. And they rose up betimes in the morning, and swore one to another" (Gen. xxvi. 26-31). Thus, in both accounts Abimelech king of Gerar came of his own accord to make a covenant with the patriarch, his reason for doing so being in both cases the same—"Elohim is with thee in all that thou doest"—"We saw plainly that Yahveh was with thee." Upon each occasion Abimelech was accompanied by the same men—"Ahuzzath his friend" and "Phicol the captain of his host"—probably as witnesses. In one of the accounts the name of "Ahuzzath" has fallen out of the narrative in the Hebrew; but it is found in both accounts in the Septuagint. Thus, the fact that in each case Abimelech took his friend Ahuzzath and his general Phicol with him shows beyond all doubt that it was the same king of Gerar in each story. Between the two covenants there was, it is true, an interval of over ninety years; but that is a mere detail.

3. *The naming of Beersheba.* This event, in both cases, is described as taking place on the day upon which Abimelech made a covenant with the two patriarchs. The name *Beer-sheba* means "the well of the oath"—*beer* signifying "well," and *shebah* "an oath."

In the case of Abraham, that patriarch, after taking an oath to keep the covenant agreed upon, "reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away" from his own herdmen—a circumstance unknown to Abimelech. Abraham then took "seven ewe lambs" from his flock, and said to Abimelech, "These seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me that I have digged this well. Wherefore he called that place *Beer-sheba*; because there they swore both of them" (Gen. xxi. 25-31).

In the case of Isaac, it is stated that after this patriarch had promised upon oath to keep the covenant with Abimelech, "it came to pass the same day that Isaac's servants came and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, We have found water. And he called it *shebah*: therefore the name of the city is *Beer-sheba* unto this day" (Gen. xxvi. 31-33).

Here Isaac is represented as calling a well (*beer*) and its vicinage "*shebah*," because he and Abimelech had made a covenant there, and "swore one to

another" to observe it, the place being thereafter known as Beersheba—"the well of the oath."

It will thus be seen that in one account Beersheba is said to have been named by Abraham upon the day on which he had made a covenant with Abimelech; in the other, the name is stated to have been given by Isaac upon the day on which he had made a covenant with Abimelech. In both cases the name originated in the digging of a well and the taking of an oath, and one of the parties, Abimelech, was the same in each, the latter on both occasions being accompanied by his general Phicol and his friend Ahuzzath. That Abimelech, Ahuzzath, and Phicol should all three be alive and well nearly a century after the making of a covenant with Abraham is truly astonishing, and scarcely less so is the story of a king of Gerar desiring to make a covenant with an itinerant cattle-owner who chanced to come into his domain.

In the days of the patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac, Beersheba was apparently an open place suitable for cattle; in the days of the Yahvist and Elohist it was a city. And here, I find, I must revise the first paragraph of this article and make an apology to the Yahvist. The last-named writer did not borrow from the Elohist narratives of Abraham; it was the Elohist who borrowed from the Yahvist. The reasons that lead me to this conclusion are threefold: (1) The Elohist is considered by critics to be later than the Yahvist; (2) To the Yahvist belongs the honor of concocting little stories and trifling incidents to account for names which occur in his narratives; (3) A portion of the Yahvist narrative (that which refers to the digging of wells by the servants of Isaac) explains Abraham's complaint to Abimelech of the forcible seizure by the latter's servants of wells which Abraham's herdsmen had digged—that is to say, the Yahvist paragraph (Gen. xxvi. 19-22) was known to the Elohist writer of Genesis xxi. 25, though the latter writer enters into no details relating to the matter. In the Septuagint the last-mentioned verse gives the reading "wells"; hence this verse in the Elohist's narrative is based upon the statements in the Yahvistic paragraph named.

ABRACADABRA.

Piety and Lynching.

LYNCHINGS are so common in America that the recent cases at Cairo, Illinois, a town on the Ohio, and separated by it from Kentucky, may not seem to call for special notice; but they had some peculiar features according to the account given in the *New York Literary Digest*. The first victim, a negro, was hung, shot, and burned, his head was paraded on a pole, and pieces of his heart were distributed to the crowd, which consisted of 10,000 persons. The second victim was a white man, Salzner. A third was saved by the authorities of the gaol. Of Salzner it is related: "A short religious service was held, after which he was strung up." The account continues:—

"A stranger stepped forward and said he believed Salzner was innocent, whereupon the mob fell upon him, kicked him, and knocked him down. He was made to beg for mercy, and announced in a loud voice that Salzner should be lynched."

For the most part, the Press of the country, both Northern and Southern, condemn the outrages. One Southern paper—not sorry, perhaps, to be able to point to such doings in the State of Abraham Lincoln—describes them as "the most sickening and alarming manifestation of barbarism and savagery that ever occurred in a civilised country." But the *Cairo Bulletin* defends the murders apparently because juries have of late been lax in convicting murderers. In several pulpits in Cairo on the next Sunday morning the lynchings were condoned, some ministers declaring it was likely to prove "a blessing in disguise." And the Americans of the United States talk about the degeneracy of the Latin Republics.—*Positivist Review*.

Passion is the sum-total of humanity. Without passion, religion, history, romance, art, would all be useless.—*Balzac*.

Acid Drops.

Rev. D. Clifford's speech at "the most remarkable demonstration ever known in North Devon" is reported verbatim in the local *Journal*. Most of the speech was political—against the House of Lords and in favor of the Budget. There were some ecclesiastical passages, however, which were sufficiently amusing. Dr. Clifford told his great audience of Free Churchmen what they must have been delighted to hear. "Liberty in this country," he said, "was a Free Church creation." Freethinkers like Richard Carlile, Robert Taylor, Charles Southwell, Henry Hetherington, James Watson, and George Jacob Holyoake, who all went to prison for it, of course did nothing. Byron and Shelley did nothing. Charles Bradlaugh did nothing. It was all done by Clifford and Co. Hallelujah! The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, and Dr. Clifford is his right-hand man.

May we suggest, even with bated breath and whispering humbleness, that Free Churchmen have a very imperfect appreciation of liberty where Freethinkers are concerned. Dr. Clifford and his friends take *our* rates and taxes to pay for *their* religious teaching in the State schools. They also do their share in upholding the Blasphemy Laws, which are intended to punish Freethinkers for criticising Christianity in a way that Christians do not relish. Yes, there seems room for improvement in the Free Church ideal of liberty.

Mr. J. Newman, the Unionist candidate for Enfield, being asked if he was in favor of repealing the Blasphemy Laws, turned to his chairman, apparently to find out what the Blasphemy Laws were. After consulting the oracle, he replied that "he would not vote for the repeal of those laws. He did not like blasphemy. If a man wanted to blaspheme, let him think it or write it, but not speak it." What wisdom on the part of a man aspiring to represent twenty thousand people in parliament!

Rev. Silvester Horne went to Ipswich in the name of religion and Liberalism and won a seat there. Much chortling has taken place over this "glorious victory," and the Nonconformists began to fancy themselves ruling the roost in the new Parliament. But they are singing smaller now. A number of their men have fallen in the fray. Mr. Fred Maddison, at Burnley; Mr. Donald Maclean, at Bath; Sir J. Williams Benn, at Devonport; Mr. A. A. Allen, at Christchurch; Mr. John Johnson, at Gatashead; Mr. J. T. MacPherson, at Preston; Mr. P. W. Williams, at South St. Pancras; Mr. James Stuart, at Sunderland; and Mr. Will Crooks, at Woolwich—these and more have lost their House of Commons tickets.

Mr. Horne says he is going to Parliament as "a representative of the great truth that it is possible in English life for religion and politics to go together." Well, but there is really nothing new in this discovery. We have always managed to make our worship of the almighty dollar square with teaching a contempt for this world's goods, just as we have found a preaching of peace no impediment to the waging of warfare and the careful cultivation of the war spirit. The Christian endorsement of the blessings of poverty does not interfere with the successful millionaire being held up as an ideal to young men, while the Christian injunction to turn one cheek when the other is smitten goes quite harmoniously with the encouragement of Boys' Brigades and the erecting of rifle ranges in church annexes. Reliance on the power of prayer does not prevent our sending people to prison who depend on its curing disease, and faith in the guardianship of Providence goes quite well with the multiplication of insurance schemes. Mr. Horne's own belief, as a Nonconformist, that the State has no right to interfere in matters of religion, is no obstacle to his supporting the State endowment of religion in schools, and we have no doubt that when it comes to proving that God is intimately interested in the doings of the British Parliament, Mr. Horne will make out as good a case as may be. Religion and politics generally do go together in this country—which may account for the stupidity of the one and the ineffectiveness of the other.

The *Methodist Times* thinks it would be in the last degree unfortunate if the Rev. Silvester Horne's election to Parliament were to encourage similar aspirations in other ministers of the Gospel. With this we cordially agree—although not perhaps for the same reasons.

Mr. Horatio Bottomley kept his South Hackney seat by a large majority. The local man of God, who stood against him in the name of Christ, in 1906, did not stand again.

The constituency gave him very little encouragement; and it hasn't been proved yet that Christ knew anything about him. Not that it would matter very much if he did.

Mr. Philip Snowden, M.P., professes himself a Christian, but he must know that it was Christians (not Freethinkers) who stuck up posters against him at Blackburn, declaring that "Socialism is Atheism" and exclaiming "Parents, defend the Faith of your Children." Mr. Snowden states, likewise, that the brewers distributed leaflets at the church doors in Blackburn "appealing to parents to defend their religion by voting for the Unionist candidate." It is a very old alliance, that between the Church and the "pub."

Mr. Will Crooks lost his seat at Woolwich. Probably his absence during all the election but the polling day had something to do with his misfortune. May be he had too many Nonconformist men of God talking for him. It looked as though they had secured the help of Omnipotence, but it turned out otherwise.

Considering that Mr. Will Crooks is as good a Christian as the next, it is rather rough upon him that the Rev. Lewis D. Thomas, vicar of St. John's Plumstead, should issue notices for a "Special thanksgiving service to Almighty God for the timely deliverance of Woolwich and Plumstead from the hands of the Socialists and Sabbath-breakers." Perhaps the reverend gentleman will explain why Almighty God has not extended the same blessing to some other constituencies. Why does Almighty God favor Woolwich and Plumstead? Is it out of special affection for the Rev. Lewis D. Thomas? One would like to know.

That thanksgiving service didn't come off after all. The Bishop of Woolwich intervened and the vicar abandoned his delectable project. We congratulate him on being saved from his own folly. A good many people would give it a harsher name.

It was prayer that settled Sir G. Doughty's hash at Grimsby. Mrs. Tom Wing, the wife of the successful candidate, says so—and she ought to know. The lady recommends her husband's supporters to "lift up their hearts in gratitude to their Father." But isn't that personage Sir G. Doughty's "Father" too? We advise Sir George to try the praying dodge himself next time. You never know your luck.

The State Church clergy of the district issued an address to the electors of Penarth, warning them against Disestablishment and Secular Education. It was a trade circular. From any other point of view it was beneath contempt. Moreover, it didn't produce any appreciable effect on the electorate.

The *British Weekly* prints "Messages from Progressive Leaders." Amongst them is one from the Rev. J. Morgan Gibbon. This gentleman says that "Harmsworth and Blatchford have joined hands." Well, that is true enough, but it is an absurd falsehood that "Atheism and the Yellow Press have kissed each other." Atheism has not kissed the Yellow Press—and is not likely to. To begin with, Atheism is not a political system; in the next place, Atheists have never given Mr. Blatchford any official right to speak for them; in the third place, Atheists, as a body, are friends of international peace and fraternity, and also of accuracy and veracity. The Rev. J. Morgan Gibbon is—well, a Christian.

It is proposed that the Rev. Frank Ballard, having disposed of unbelief in this country, should visit South Africa, to give a fillip to the spiritual life of that country. So there is some hope, in the future, for the demoralised forces of Freethought in this country. Unbelief may recuperate during the absence of its great enemy, who will be telling South Africans what a poor, weak thing English Freethought is. And when they take the measure of its destroyer, they will doubtless be inclined to believe it.

Two hundred and eighty Jewish families have been ordered to leave Kieff immediately. A request was made for a postponement of the expulsion, owing to the extreme severity of the weather, but was refused. They must leave and provide their own means of transportation. What a blessed thing it is to live under the control of a Christian government!

Dr. Ambrose Pope writes to the *Christian World* urging that ministers who take up with a new church should place their theological views fully and frankly before its members. It is good counsel, but what a commentary upon the moralis-

ing power of Christianity. Besides, if every preacher in the country placed before his congregation all he believed, and all he did not believe, what a fluttering of the dovescotes there would be! After all, preachers are only human; and so long as congregations are not sufficiently developed to respect—and expect—honesty of speech and independence of thought, there will continue to be hypocrisy in the pulpits. Equally true is it, that so long as the pulpit refuses to countenance the same qualities there will continue narrowness and intolerance in the pew. The position is something of a deadlock, and the moral is the mentally demoralising influence of Christianity.

Rev. J. H. Ritson points out that Christianity is not having it all its own way in the new Japan. Buddhism, he says, is very much alive, and very aggressive. He adds that "the present peril of the educated Japanese seems to be Agnosticism." We are not surprised. Buddhism may be at least the philosophy of a consistently intelligent human being. And as to the "peril" of Agnosticism, we do not doubt that "educated Japanese" will face this much more cheerfully than the peril of Christianity. Presumably, however, the "peril" refers to Christianity, not to the Japanese.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland is a whole hogger. Other religions have, during the election, either satisfied themselves with prayers of a general description, or have exhorted their followers to vote in a particular direction as being the wish of God that they should do so. The R. P. C. I. takes a more definite and a more Christian stand. It declares that both Liberals and Tories are godless. The very constitution of the country "ignores the will of Christ." The Liberals, too, have committed the crowning iniquity of admitting Atheists to power, and of fraternising with Socialists who seek to abolish all religion and all morality. Every man, says the R. P. C. I., who believes in Christ should demand scriptural qualifications in the case of every voter and every Member of Parliament; as for Roman Catholics, they should not be allowed to vote at all. What a glorious place the House of Commons would be if the R. P. C. I. had its way!

Mrs. Jessie Braithwaite, of Clarence-terrace, Regent's-park, London, attended Captain John Robert Donne, of Hans-crescent, Chelsea, in his last illness as "a healer." The lady, being a Christian Scientist, used nothing but prayer. For a guinea a week she prayed over him five times. The praying didn't do him much good, for he died under it; but we daresay she enjoyed the guineas. This Christian Science business seems a bit one-sided.

A great deal has been written lately in religious papers concerning the circulation of undesirable fiction, and an endorsement has been given to the proposed censorship of books by the circulating libraries. We are no advocates of either "indecent" or rubbishy writings, but on principle we distrust a censorship of books. We know how easily "indecent" becomes synonymous with "undesirable," and "undesirable" becomes in turn synonymous with something that a particular person or group of persons would rather not see circulated. Advanced opinions are bound to suffer by any such censorship, as they already suffer by the censorship of public libraries and circulating agencies. Moreover, such a censorship encourages every little bigot to set up one on his own account; and if there is a justification for the one it is hard to deny the propriety of the other. In our opinion, the only effective check to books of a really undesirable kind is the development of a better standard of taste and judgment among readers. And in this direction, if harm is done by books, much greater injury is inflicted on the public by the widespread laudation of worthless books, merely because they champion a particular opinion, than is done by books of an unmistakably objectionable character, which only attract people of a particular type of mind. Canon Raunsley told a correspondent the other day that he had before him a list of 119 objectionable novels, some of which had exceeded a million in circulation. Assuming the statement and the description to be true, we would suggest to Canon Raunsley that these books are written because there is a market for such stuff. And if a population nurtured upon Christian teaching, with the press generally subservient to Christian interests, and a large army of Christian ministers to look after both press and public, purchase an obscene novel by the million, while a book of real merit may only sell to the tune of a few thousand, the Christian religion cannot well escape responsibility for such a condition of things. This being so, it looks as though there were some need for Canon Raunsley to revise his opinions concerning the elevating qualities of the creed he champions.

A Tory handbill circulated at Uxbridge, headed "What Radicalism Means," and sub-headed "What will happen if the Liberals come into Power," ran as follows:—

"In five years there will be no Ireland, no Colonies, no Navy, no Church, no Public Houses, no Beer, no Money, no Work, no Hope—nothing but Chapels, Germans, Lemonade, and Lies."

"No Ireland" is good. We suppose the Green Island will sink in the Atlantic. But the great joke of this handbill is the three calamities succeeding each other in a climax—"No Church, no Public Houses, and no Beer." A glorious Trinity! We congratulate the Uxbridge Tories on their staunch orthodoxy. First the Church, then the "Pub," and then the Beer; three distinct things and yet not separate; three in one, and one in three.

England has been described as a paradise for the rich, a purgatory for the well-to-do, and a hell for the poor. Certainly the laws are mostly in favor of the wealthy. So is social opinion. Everybody is down on the poor man (when he is found out) who takes a bribe for his vote, but nobody blames the rich man who bribed him. The same thing is to be noted in other directions. A man named Strange, who was recently sentenced to three years' penal servitude for causing bodily harm to Police-constable Gregory, had been engaged to disturb Liberal meetings at Paddington. Nothing is said about the man who hired him to commit that indictable offence. But surely the hirer in such a case is far worse than the hired. We say without the slightest hesitation that any man who hires another to disturb a public meeting should be sent to prison without the option of a fine.

Lord Kitchener was not loved by the missionaries. He kept them out of the Soudan, and out of the Gordon College which he founded at Khartoum. But they found things easier when the Sirdar took up the command in India. In 1904 the foundation of a Khartoum Cathedral was laid by Princess Henry of Battenberg. It is still unfinished, and they are begging £12,000 to complete it. We daresay there are foolish people enough to find the desired amount.

A Huddersfield friend sends us a copy of the little Biography of Mr. Harry Snell which was circulated in that town during the recent election. Mr. Snell stood as a Labor candidate (for the Fabians, we understand) and polled well although the Liberal won the seat. The little Biography must have been indebted to the candidate, but not a word was said about Mr. Snell's connection with the Secular movement or his association with Bradlaugh. From a Fabian point of view, we suppose that would be the "sinful" part of Mr. Snell's career. At least this is the most charitable explanation. We may mention that Mr. Snell's connection with the Ethical movement is emphasised. That movement is described as setting "the practice of the Good above all earthly things." Which is so much like a religious expression that "Good" may be taken as "God" with too many o's. We note also the statement that Mr. Snell "founded the Secular Education League," which does not err on the side of moderation.

The little Biography of Mr. Harry Snell is signed by F. B. Kirkman, B.A. (Oxon). This is as it should be, for the Fabians are nothing if not academical. But the author might have been more fortunate in his title. *From Plough to Parliament* is an unfulfilled prophecy. We hope, however, it will not be always so. There is room for Mr. Snell in the House of Commons.

The annual religious service of the Birmingham University was held recently, and the sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. Forsyth, Principal of Hackney College. Judging from the newspaper reports, it was very little else than a mass of meaningless rhetoric. The only perfectly definite sentence was this: "What made a man was his religion." Quite so. Dr. Forsyth is in that line of business. All patent medicines are essential to health. See the advertisements.

Hints are being thrown out that provision is being made for a high council of the Salvation Army to check, and if necessary, control the General—when William Booth has "gone to God." This is all very interesting, but it is best to wait till we see—what we do see. After all the statements made for so many years about the Salvation Army in general, and its Social Scheme in particular, William Booth is hardly entitled to be believed upon his mere word. Besides, if we were in the prophetic line, we should predict, without much hesitation, that the Salvation Army is bound to break up (like the empire of Alexander) after his death. It could hardly exist except as an autocracy, and valid

autocrats do not come along in regular succession; especially within the limit of individual families—and it must be admitted that William is bent on founding a Booth dynasty.

The boast is often made that Great Britain is a Christian country, that Britishers are a Christian people. We have always regarded it as an utterly vain boast; and that we are justified in so characterising it is now proved, though unintentionally, by a distinguished Christian scholar. The Rev. Dr. Newton H. Marshall, in an article in the *British Weekly* for January 20, says that "we Christian people are to win our nation for Christ." There are Christians in Britain, but the British are not a Christian nation—not yet. They will be, of course—by-and-bye. The ministers are quite confident on that point, in spite of the incontrovertible fact that for the last fifty years the Churches have been steadily losing ground.

The other day a clergyman said: "Without faith it is impossible to endure trials without bitterness, or to rise superior to adversity." As this assertion is in constant use in pulpits and religious journals, we avail ourselves of the present opportunity to declare solemnly that it is an infamous calumny on human nature. We know that unbelievers can and do "endure trials without bitterness and rise superior to adversity." We happen to be familiar with the history and experiences of a young gentleman who has been bedridden for thirteen years. As the result of a terrible accident he has been physically helpless during that long period. But all who know him testify that he is wonderfully bright and cheerful, never falling into a bitter, whining mood. His brain being entirely unaffected, he derives never-failing delight from his companionship with such intellectual giants as John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Comte, Huxley, and other Agnostic philosophers. He is indeed "superior to adversity," and "endures trials without bitterness." And yet he has no faith, but is a convinced and consistent Atheist.

There is no end to the nonsense parsons talk about the Bible. The Rev. C. Ensor Walters, of Sheffield, delivered a lecture on the subject recently at Burton-on-Trent; and, judging by a report in the *Burton Evening Gazette*, we conclude that no discourse could be more closely packed with palpable absurdities. He mentioned four reasons for his belief in the Bible as God's infallible Word. As a fair sample of the lot, take the last reason. He believed in the Bible because it is indestructible. "Wonderful in its character, it reached all classes and every age and race, and united all races into one kinship." Mr. Walters must have known that he was telling Munchausen tales. Why, the Bible has never succeeded in knitting two Christian sects into "one kinship," much less all races. The one tendency of the Bible has been to divide, to create factions, to erect blocks and stakes, to redden the earth with innocent blood.

Mr. B. Putnam Weale, who thinks there will be 300,000,000 negroes in the world at the end of the present century, assigns a fresh reason for their conversion being carried on as rapidly as possible. The negro will make a splendid fighter, and, properly trained and organised, will be a serious danger to the whites; that is, to the gentlemen who want to oppress and exploit him. Mr. Putnam Weale therefore tells us that—"Africa is the one region where the spread of Christianity is to be heartily desired. If the negro, in measure as he is civilised, goes to Islamism, he must become a greater peril; if he is Christianised his destructive strength is stripped from him as was Samson's strength when his locks were cut." It would be well for the negroes if they were to lay that sentence to heart. They would then guard against Christianity becoming their Delilah.

We have already dealt with the legal proceedings started against French Catholic Archbishops and Bishops by the Teachers' Association in France. One of the charges against the Archbishop of Rheims, in a case which has just come before the court, is that he has accused the teachers of falsifying French history. This means that the text-books they use are, in the Archbishop's opinion, unfair to the Catholic Church. Well now, if the Archbishop may not say that—without making a personal attack on any individual teacher—we should like to know what he *may* say. Nothing ought to be more distasteful to Freethinkers than this claim of infallibility on the part of teachers, after it has been denied to priests. The difference between one infallibility and another is the difference between tweedledum and tweedledee. We like to see teachers taking a serious view of their profession, but when they give themselves pontifical airs they are to be laughed at like other pretenders.

The Archbishop is further charged with accusing the teachers of teaching Atheism and immorality. But the accusation is not directed against persons, but against a whole system. People who take opposite views of morality must, inferentially and theoretically, accuse each other of teaching immorality. This is true of Christian priests on one side and of Freethought advocates on the other. Our view is that both sides should have equal freedom. As for the accusation of Atheism, it seems to us perfectly farcical. We were not aware that Atheism was a crime in France.

The late King Leopold of Belgium died a true son of the Catholic Church, and the Catholic Church says a veil must be drawn over the sins of his life. But how is a veil to be drawn over the sins of such a beast? Mr. W. T. Stead, in the *Review of Reviews*, adds his testimony on this head:—

"His amours became the by-word of Europe. The year after I had visited him in Brussels all London rang with a scandal which accused him, rightly or wrongly, of retaining Madame Jeffries, a notorious procuress—reported by a police inspector of Scotland Yard as keeping a house in Chelsea 'for the aristocracy'—in order to supply him with English girls whose youth and innocence appealed to the depraved taste of the Tiberius of Laeken."

The true son of the Catholic Church!

Rev. A. J. Waldron, vicar of Brixton, unintentionally admits the progress of the Freethought against which he has always been railing. He allows that the old idea of frizzling in hell is dead. He also allows that the old idea of heaven is ridiculous.

"The old idea of heaven as a perfect place where we should sit and play harps for ever has gone. If we were to do nothing but sing for millions of years it would be too perfectly monotonous, and, really, some of us would not much want to go there."

Mr. Waldron has evidently profited by contact with Freethinkers in spite of himself. He has not changed *them*; they have changed *him*. It was ever thus. What is "blasphemy" when Freethinkers start it is genteel piety when Christian ministers accept it—as they must in time.

Northumberland and Durham miners are not church going people. According to the *Sunday at Home*, one typical pit community, numbering 25,000, showed an attendance of only 3,332 at all the churches, the Roman Catholic included; 1,949 of the number being adults and 1,373 children. In some areas the attendance is only 10 per cent. of the population, and it is only 5 per cent. in one large district. Yet the export trade in missionaries is as brisk as ever.

There was a rumpus at the Anti-Alcoholic Congress at St. Petersburg. A resolution mentioned the value of religious training in schools, but working-men members of the Congress objected to this, and the passage was omitted, whereupon the clerical members of the Congress retired. Two significant facts.

G. Parkinson-Cumine, in *The Country Side*, tries to justify the goodness of God in relation to the sufferings of the lower animals, and this is the light and airy way in which he does it. He argues that there can be no suffering without self-consciousness, that the lower animals have no self-consciousness, and that therefore no animal except man suffers. They only *seem* to suffer! Now this is not a novel absurdity. The theory of animal automatism is at least as old as Descartes. Nobody ever believed it, though, who kept and cared for a dog or a cat, or any other pet. If they don't suffer, not only physical but mental pain, then life's a dream, and all things are a dream, including G. Parkinson-Cumine—and his God.

Mr. Arnold White's eulogy of the Salvation Army, published in book form by the Army headquarters, does not win the praise of the *Manchester Guardian*, which refers to it as "in lieu, apparently, of an ordinary business-like annual report." In connection with the Hanbury-street Elevator, Mr. White says that "the charge of sweating brought against the Salvation Army belongs to the same category as the charge of not publishing a balance-sheet." Whereupon our contemporary observes that "If so, it must be a very serious charge indeed."

We know now why the Bulgarian atrocities occurred. The Lord arranged the massacres in order to turn Gladstone's attention from disestablishing the Church of Scotland. So says the Rev. James Robertson, D.D., Moderator of the General Assembly. Good Lord

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, January 30, The Town Hall, Stratford; at 7.30., "The Lord and the Lords."

February 6, Manchester; 13, St. James's Hall; 20, St. James's Hall; 27, Birmingham Town Hall.

March 6, St. James's Hall, London; 13, Liverpool; 20, Leicester; 27, St. James's Hall, London.

April 3, Glasgow.

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 30, St. James's Hall; February 6, St. James's Hall; 13, Glasgow.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 30, Birmingham. February 6, Failsworth; 13, St. Pancras Ethical Society; 20, Liverpool; 27, St. James's Hall.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: 1910.—Previously acknowledged, £131 15s. Received since:—E. B., £1 1s.; G. R. Harker, £1; M. Capon, 3s.; D. Whitty, 2s. 6d.; H. Silverstein, 10s.; X. Y. Z., 10s. 6d.; H. L. Fisher, 5s.; W. H. Jackson (Australia), 10s.; Mechanic, 1s.; (Mrs) S. Burgon, 10s.

E. B. forwards subscription to the President's Honorarium Fund "as a small token of admiration of his pluck in carrying on, single-handed, and without remuneration, the manifold duties of his office."

G. R. HARKER.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.

R. P.—The Secular Society, Limited, is an incorporation with a legal status. It is friendly to the N. S. S., but distinct from it. The National Secular Society is a voluntary, fluid body, with no definite legal status. We had no knowledge of the debate you refer to except from the advertisement in our commercial columns. It is not our custom to report such encounters unless they promise to be of exceptional interest.

THOMAS WRIGHT (New York).—Equal liberty for all is a great principle, and if we fight hard for that we are doing some good in the world. And this principle hasn't so many friends that it can spare one. When we say that we do not discuss politics in this paper, we use the word "politics" in its ordinary sense. Of course we are bound to discuss politics in relation to Secular Education, the Blasphemy Laws, etc. We will cheerfully concede, if you wish it, that no State could exist without some employment of force—if only to keep its lunatics from running amuck. But some employment of force is inevitable in all human affairs. A refractory child could not be kept out of the fire without it. We will go farther and say that riding one principle to death is fanaticism. Life is not conducted on one principle, but on many principles, and wisdom lies in adjusting their claims at the points of conflict.

W. S.—Thanks for cuttings, which are very useful; also for your interesting and encouraging letter.

F. SCHUTZ.—We have not seen the Sheet Almanack you refer to. It has not been sent to us; at least, it has not reached us. Glad you like the get-up as well as the contents of the *Freethinker*.

JOHN GREEN.—How on earth (even if it were a fact) could your Christian friend know that 75 per cent. of Atheists recant at death? It is not a fact. Atheists die as they live—just as other people do. You would find our *Infidel Deathbeds* useful. Glad you are helping the movement all you can.

D. WHITTY.—If all did what they could there would be no lack.

J. CROALL.—Your enclosure is what Carlyle would have called "clotted bosh." Haeckel's explanation was perfectly sound. Such scientific diagrams are not drawn from individual objects. They represent types. Why trouble over what the clergy say about Haeckel? It will die a natural death. Who cares now what they once said about Darwin?

M. CAPON.—Thanks for your cheery letter. We don't think, though, that the London "saints" are doing their best for the success of the St. James's Hall meetings. We shall see when the election fever is over.

W. B.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.

F. WOOD.—Thanks for cuttings.

W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always very welcome.

X. Y. Z. (Cardiff), subscribing to the President's Honorarium Fund, says: "I feel it is a loss not to have seen a copy of your paper till Mr. R— of Penarth showed me one last November. I do not know whether I admire your clearness of thought and your terse, vigorous way of expressing it, or your transparent honesty, the more. I am proud to see a Welshman (Gwirioned a Saif) sending you three guineas."

H. SILVERSTEIN.—If you have been under our "flag," as you express it, since 1891, and still find your respect and attachment increase with time, we may conclude that we are not quite as bad as enemies and detractors have painted us. Your letter is too flattering for much quotation, but it expresses warm, sincere feelings, and we value it accordingly.

A. LEWIS.—Will look through it as desired.

J. A. E. BATES.—Much obliged. See paragraph.

W. LEWIS.—See paragraphs. Thanks.

J. B. C. B.—We had already noted it. Thanks all the same. Glad to make the following extract from your letter:—"After

two years of your mental fare in the *Freethinker* I can truthfully say that the appetite is keener for it each week. And my copies are always passed on."

W. H. JACKSON (Australia) writes: "It is now two years since I made the acquaintance of the *Freethinker*, and every issue increases my debt of gratitude to your valuable paper." This correspondent had been an ardent church-worker, and had been urged to enter the ministry, but the *Freethinker* fell into his hands and "the work of emancipation began." After reading the best Freethought books, he says, "light poured in upon me, and all things became new."

"MECHANIC" says: "The *Freethinker* is my weekly treat. Under its guidance I turn, after the day's toil, to my books for mental recreation and rest."

W. P. KENNEDY, writing from Ireland, says: "The *Freethinker* seems to be improving with each issue. Freethought should be propagated in this country, the home of Catholic superstition. Ireland produces, in proportion to population, about four times as many priests as any other country. If your Irish readers got into touch with each other they might form an Association and help to rescue this country from religious slavery."

R. H. ROSETTI.—Glad there was a good audience at the debate in the Stratford Town Hall between Mr. Ramsey and the Rev. Mr. Allpress, though the latter disputant does not appear to have been a great catch.

J. BARBOUR.—A good idea, if it were feasible; but we have no one to carry it out at present.

E. S.—Who is responsible for the leaflet?

S. BURGON.—Thanks for personal good wishes.

C. J. ATKINSON.—Tuesday is too late; and it might have been sent a week ago.

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.

January has been a very unfavorable month for Free-thought meetings. The weather has been execrable, especially on Sundays, and the election fever has indisposed people to heed anything less exciting than political combat. Mr. Foote has been mainly holding the fort at St. James's Hall. The audiences he has had have, however, been better than might have been expected considering the meteorological as well as the political disadvantages. Very little advertising has been done; that would have been a waste of money in the circumstances; but a good deal will be done in February and March, and the result is sure to be seen in the improved audiences.

Mr. Cohen occupies the St. James's Hall platform this evening (Jan. 30). It is to be hoped that the election fever will have subsided enough to give him a reasonable chance of a decent audience. Perhaps the London "saints" will strain a point to make up for the unfavorable conditions.

The Stratford Town Hall meetings have suffered from the election fever, as we expected. Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd have delivered excellent lectures to naturally reduced audiences. There may be better conditions for a rally this evening (Jan. 30), when Mr. Foote lectures on "The Lord and the Lords." This lecture will concern itself a good deal with the pious humors of the elections and the political situation. In other respects, it will be a more important address than its title may have suggested.

Mr. Lloyd delivers two lectures to-day (Jan. 30) in the grand Birmingham Town Hall. It is a huge building and the excitement of the elections is likely to be detrimental to the meetings. To counteract this disadvantage, as far as possible, we beg all the local "saints" to do their utmost to secure good audiences. Admission to all seats is free, and it will therefore be all the easier to get people to come and hear Mr. Lloyd. Let every "saint" do his best on this occasion.

There are not many lady lecturers on our platform at present. We wish there were more. For this reason we invite the Liverpool "saints" to give an encouraging welcome to Miss Kathleen B. Kough, who lectures, afternoon and

evening, to-day (Jan. 30) for the Liverpool Branch in the Alexandra Hall, Islington-square. They will find it a satisfactory investment of their time.

A new subscriber to the *Freethinker* writes to us:—

"It may serve as some encouragement to you to know that my conversion to Freethought is due largely to the influence of my brother, who, a few years ago, was a local preacher of some note. With his change of views came strong opposition between us, but ultimately, through reading his copies of the *Freethinker* and Vivian's *Churches and Modern Thought*, also other booklets from your press, I obtained mental satisfaction such as I never possessed before. I have read the *Freethinker* for several months from cover to cover, and now intend being a regular subscriber.....I am pleased beyond measure with your manly paper."

This correspondent adds that his brother went up from Lancashire to London to hear Mr. Foote lecture at St. James's Hall on "The Religion of Shakespeare" and "was delighted."

We venture to remind our readers once more of the good work they may do, with very little trouble to themselves, in pushing along the circulation of the *Freethinker*. Just look at the following extract from a recent letter we have received: "It was an old friend of mine (Mr. G. C., of Southport) who brought your paper to my notice last October when I was up north. When I came down south again I began to get your paper, and so I found my way to St. James's Hall, and now I am a member of the N. S. S." That reader of ours (he happens to be a personal friend too) at Southport dropped a seed into good ground. It won't be good ground every time, but it will be now and then, and if our readers keep on sowing the seed they are bound to find some harvest resulting from their efforts. "Push the *Freethinker* along" should be the motto of the Freethought party during 1910. We hope they will act upon it strenuously.

Our paragraphs on Church and State in France, which appeared in "Acid Drops" a few weeks ago, are reprinted in the latest number of the New York *Truthseeker* to hand, under the heading of "Let There Be Freedom." In an editorial note Mr. Macdonald calls it "a noble plea for liberty and equality" and says it is "written by one who would stand up for the rights even of those who would hang him if they could"—"for the priests of England do not differ from those of Spain who sent Ferrer to the trench to be shot except in enjoying fewer privileges and smaller opportunities for destroying Freethinkers."

The *Blue Grass Blade*, of Lexington, Kentucky, resumes the old shape it had under the editorship of its founder, the late C. C. Moore, whom we met at Chicago in 1896. For nearly a year the *Blade* has been edited by Mr. Charlesworth, and smaller in shape, but with more pages; but that Freethought advocate is going to set up a paper of his own as the organ of a new Rationalist Society he has started. Mr. James E. Hughes, the proprietor of the *Blade*, published it in C. C. Moore's time, and is undoubtedly devoted to the paper. He says he will keep it going as long as he can, and we believe him; but the statement that "our very existence now depends upon the enthusiasm of our contributors." "We would be glad to pay for articles if we could," he says, "but remember how much greater is our work, and we do not get anything out of it either." Mr. Hughes states, nevertheless, that he paid Mr. Charlesworth twenty-four dollars a week (nearly £5) as editor, but he could do so no longer, and Mr. Charlesworth went out. How he is going to make another paper succeed better we fail to understand, but we wish him success. Our readers will see the bearing of this paragraph on Mr. Foote's recent "Words to Freethinkers."

Positivists, following Comte, have generally been unjust to Voltaire. They have flung at him that foolish word "negationist"—as if the pulling down of a rotten old house were not the indispensable preliminary to building a new one, at least on the same site—or as if anybody spent his time in pulling down the old house except in the interest of the new one. Voltaire was quite as true and brave a friend of Humanity as Comte was, though he never posed as an infallible oracle. And we are glad to see one Positivist doing a little justice to the author of the great cry of "Crush the Infamous." Mr. S. H. Swinay, in the *Positivist Review*, of which he is editor, has a good article on Voltaire. Towards the end of it he remarks that "When Voltaire came forward to protect the family of Calas, when he battled for years to get the process reversed—never smiling, scoffer as he was, during all that time—when all those who had been wronged turned to him as the natural refuge of the innocent, it was a sign that the moral conscience of mankind had passed from Christian keeping."

The Meaning of a Religious Mutilation.

THE curious custom of circumcision has long been familiar to the non-Semitic races of Europe. Through the influences exercised by racial antipathy, conjoined with the power exercised over the Christian peoples by the ancient Jewish Scriptures, the true believers were fully conversant with the fact that the test of circumcision was sure and certain proof of Hebrew religion and race.

The explanation usually offered and almost universally accepted until quite recent days concerning the utility and meaning of this mutilation, consisted in the statement that the rite as practised by the ancient Israelites possessed many hygienic advantages which commended it to a deeply pious and cleanly nation.

The almost ubiquitous practice of circumcision among Mohammedan races was apparently to be traced to the historical circumstance that the various Moslem peoples derived the greater part of their religious observance from the older Hebrew faith. But when modern evolutionary anthropology turned its attention to the rise and development of the cults of mankind, this specious interpretation of the meaning of circumcision was clearly perceived as utterly untenable.

Ethnologists and explorers of all races and climes soon discovered that the ceremony of circumcision is special to no restricted area of the globe. On the continent of Africa an overwhelming majority of the living native races are numbered among the circumcised. In America the rite carried religious significance with the semi-civilised Mexicans; it prevails among the Teamas and Mancoas, indigenous races of the Amazons. It is likewise prevalent in three separate races of the South Seas; it is practised by the great majority of the Australian savages, the evidence in this instance being of special interest, the operation being there performed with a stone knife after the manner of the Israelites of old; and the custom is almost equally widespread throughout the Malay Archipelago. It is observed by the natives of Papua, the New Caledonians, and the savages of the New Hebrides. Sanitary motives for the ceremony, as the learned Jewish anthropologist, Mr. Joseph Jacobs, concedes, "considering the primitive nature of the nations in which it is found, are out of the question."

Students are familiar with the extremely interesting descriptions of circumcision ceremonies in Lane's classical *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. This custom has evidently come down to us in the Land of the Nile from immemorial antiquity. Three thousand years before our era, the ancient Egyptians circumcised boys between the ages of six and fourteen. The rite seems to have extended to the entire male population, but apparently carried special grace with the priesthood and to those who were specially associated with the mysteries of the Egyptian religion. The ceremony is clearly portrayed on a temple at Karnak in a drawing executed by Ebers, who also informs us that most of the male mummies which have been examined carry the mark of circumcision.

When the religious rites and ceremonies of old Israel are stripped of the conventional glosses by which they have been carefully enshrouded by pious hands, we discern, as through a glass darkly, the dim outlines of the human sacrifices to the Semitic gods which were the once universal property of Aryan and Semite alike. It is extremely probable that the earliest recorded instance of the blood rite of circumcision among the Jews is not to be found in the story of Abram, narrated in Genesis, but is to be read in the curious and suggestive tradition of Moses and Zipporah, which is recorded in the Book of Exodus. In Genesis xvii. it is related that when Abram had reached the advanced age of 99 years he entered into a covenant with Yahweh his god on behalf of himself and his descendants. The sign and condition of this covenant assumed the form of a blood

sacrifice of human flesh, to be henceforth and forever offered to the divinity on the eighth day succeeding every male child's nativity. But in the more primitive account (Exodus iv. 24-26), Yahwè encounters Moses at an inn; and, being incensed at the Hebrew lawgiver's omission of the sacrificial rite in the case of his first-born son, therefore "sought to kill him"; when, to appease the divine wrath, Zipporah, the Midianite wife of Moses, "took a flint and cut off the foreskin of her son, and made it touch [A. V., 'cast it at'] his [Moses'] feet," saying, "a bridegroom of blood art thou to me." And in this manner was Moses ransomed by the blood of his only begotten son's circumcision. There is nothing in this legend to indicate that the practice was one of long standing. But Moses had obviously incurred Yahwè's anger, and rendered himself liable to the penalty of death because he was not "a bridegroom of blood"—i.e., he had neglected, prior to marriage, to submit himself to the mutilation.

Of greater importance from the evolutionary standpoint are the references to the rite contained in Genesis xxxiv., which unmistakably represent it as pre-Mosaic, while the use of sacrificial knives of flint also indicates a pre-historic antiquity. Unfortunately, the Old Testament traditions have been so artfully tampered with that anachronisms of the most startling nature constantly recur. The origin and meaning of Hebrew circumcision has obviously been purposely obscured. For example, one of the numerous views presented in the Old Testament would justify the opinion that the ceremony was introduced by Joshua, who, acting under divine command, circumcised the Israelites with knives of flint at the "Hill of Foreskins," and in this manner "rolled away" from the people the "reproach of Egypt," "wherefore the name of this place was called Gilgal unto this day." In company with other competent critics, Dr. Immanuel Benzinger, of Berlin, holds the opinion that verses 4-7 (Joshua v.) have been interpolated with the object of bringing the narrative into conformity with the view that circumcision had been merely lying in abeyance during the wanderings of the Hebrews in the wilderness. "The reproach of Egypt," he remarks, "unless we are to do violence to the narrative, can only be interpreted as meaning that in that country the children of Israel had been uncircumcised, and therefore objects of contempt and scorn. It is impossible, however, to regard the narrative as strictly historical; it belongs rather to the category of etymologising legend, being designed to explain the name and origin of the sanctuary of Gilgal." Nevertheless, as Yahwè is represented in this deeply interesting tradition as prohibiting the entrance of these uncircumcised Jews into the Promised Land—a privilege specially reserved for those whom Joshua had circumcised—this, then, lends countenance and color to the view that a primitive sacrificial rite or its substitute, thus restored by Joshua, fully atoned for many years' sacrificial neglect. It is worth noting that the uncircumcised Moses himself, although permitted to view afar off the glories and beauties of the land flowing with milk and honey, was not allowed to enter into possession of the country in which the Israelites were to be numbered as the sands of the sea.

Although it is highly probable that circumcision was primitively a humanisation among all races of still earlier human sacrifice, the evidence for this seems stronger in the Semitic races than it is among other and less civilised stocks which continue to practise the rite. The extant savage and barbarian peoples who circumcise their males usually perform the operation at the age of puberty, and the mutilation is preparatory to initiation into full tribal privileges and rights. But among the Hebrews, as previously mentioned, the age for performing the ceremony was fixed by the Law for the eighth day after birth (Lev. xii. 3); even on the Sabbath, an otherwise inviolable day, the sacred rite was compulsory. It seems a curious coincidence that the animals dedicated to Yahwè were offered up on the eighth

day. The original rule is thus recorded: "Seven days it shall be with its dam; on the eighth thou shalt give it to me" (Ex. xxii. 30). A very marked connection between the Passover, the Hebrew Spring Festival, and the Arab Rajab sacrifices is evidenced, inasmuch as both were primitively offerings of firstlings to the gods. The Pentateuchal laws which prescribe the dedication of firstlings occur in the closest relationship to the Ordinances for the Feast of Unleavened Bread or the Passover, and the slaying of the firstborn of the Egyptians has been very reasonably interpreted as a reprisal upon them for withholding from Yahwè, by their refusal to permit Israel to depart to the wilderness, the firstlings which were his due.

The view championed by Herbert Spencer traces the genesis of the gods to ghost-worship and propitiation. This theory has more facts to support it than any other yet propounded. The mythological guesses of Max Müller are, of course, hopelessly discredited. The contending schools that count may be typified by animists like Dr. E. B. Tylor and Professor J. G. Frazer on the one side, and humanists such as Spencer and Grant Allen on the other. In our judgment Dr. Tylor displays a tendency to underestimate the native powers of discrimination possessed by savages, and Dr. Frazer's painstaking endeavors to prove the priority of animal and plant worship to that of apotheosis, lack that conclusiveness which we have learned to associate with this renowned anthropologist's brilliant deductions, drawn from his unparalleled researches.

In his able and instructive Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, the late Professor Robertson Smith makes the astounding statement that—

"Savages, we know, are not only incapable of separating in thought between phenomenal and noumenal existence, but habitually ignore the distinctions, which to us seem obvious, between organic and inorganic nature, or within the former region between animals and plants. Arguing altogether from analogy, and concluding from the known to the unknown with the freedom of men who do not know the difference between the imagination and the reason, they ascribe to all material objects a life analogous to that which their own self-consciousness reveals to them. They see that men are liker to one another than beasts are to men, that men are liker to beasts than they are to plants, and to plants than they are to stones; but all things appear to them to live; and the more incomprehensible any form of life seems to them the more wonderful and worthy of reverence to they take it to be."*

That savages fail to realise distinctions plainly apparent to the intelligent lower animals seems a dark and doubtful saying. Our domestic animals, save in very abnormal circumstances, never confound the dead with the living or the living with the dead; and albeit an extremely youthful and unsophisticated kitten may be momentarily imposed upon, this seldom or never occurs with the adult sophisticated cat. No one acquainted with the psychological researches of Dr. and Mrs. Peckham, Lloyd Morgan, Büchner, Lauder-Lindsay, Spalding, Romanes, and Aveybury can for a moment question that animal intelligence very closely approximates to that much-vaunted reason and judgment which is sometimes so arrogantly claimed as the exclusive privilege and possession of civilised man.

Holding firmly to the truth of Schiller's sage saying that "Man paints himself in his gods," we are driven to conclude that when the Hebrew writers endowed their tribal divinity with human parts and passions, they simply reduced to writing the current religious beliefs which attributed to the gods feelings of goodwill to men in return for the sacrifices offered upon the divine altar. The greater the sacrifice the more certain the surrender of that which is priceless to the worshiper who makes it. The first-born of the family, the later firstlings of the flock, and the still later first-fruits of the fertile earth embody the sweetest and the best of all the land affords.

The researches of anthropologists furnish abundant illustrations of sacrificial amelioration. And in the

* Religion of the Semites, pp. 85, 86; 1907.

subject under review no candid and impartial inquirer can deny that Yahwè, the Jewish divinity, rejoiced exceedingly in sacrifices, and particularly insisted on his right to the first-born. The revolting conduct of his prophet Samuel towards Agag, whom he hewed to pieces before the ark, conjoined with the heartrending picture of the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter to Yahwè in acknowledgment of a victory, amply suffice to indicate the low cultural level of the writers who record them. In the legend of the intended sacrifice of Isaac, a sense of utilitarian ethics manifests itself in the substitution of a ram for the innocent boy, thus ensuring the perpetuation of the Jewish race. In the days of the early monarchy David is discovered striving to pacify the passion of Yahwè with the sacrifice of seven of the sons of his predecessor Saul. Even the prophet Micah asks "Shall I give my first-born for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" and such a question clearly indicates that so late as the period of Micah the offering up of the first-born child was a recognised observance of contemporary Yahwè worship. Again, the statement in 1 Kings xvi. 34, to the effect that when Hiel, in the reign of Ahab, rebuilt Jericho, he "laid its foundations with Abiram his first-born, and set up its gates with Segub his youngest son," does not admit of any other interpretation save that he offered them as foundation sacrifices to the national god.

The transition from human sacrifice to bodily mutilation or animal and vegetable substitution is less violent than a surface glance reveals. All evolving races have effected compromises with their gods. The ancient Hebrews arrived at an arrangement in which a devotee took the place of a victim. In various laws Yahwè claims the first-born of man and beast as his right, but subsequently confines his claim to the human male sex only. The sacred animals then occupied a more conspicuous position as burnt sacrifices to the deity; and the male children in later and less barbarous times, at least, were presented as Nazarites, or redeemed with an offering, or ransomed by a money payment to the priests. There therefore remains no reasonable or honest alternative to the conclusion that in the primitive periods of Jewish culture-history the first-born of the male sex, at least, were uniformly offered as sacrifices to the gods, and that the mutilation of the masculine organ of generation is a surviving testimony to the compromise effected in deference to that developed sense of humanity to which all progressive peoples have slowly and painfully evolved.

T. F. P.

Competition; or, Christians, Awake!

THESE are the days of fierce and relentless warfare. The spirit of competition has permeated the ranks of every little Bethel; freaks, novelties, musical entertainments, all of these transparent side-shows have been introduced into a decaying business with no real degree of success.

The Old Firm is fast becoming bankrupt. Customers are beginning to realise that they do not get value for money, and intending members will not give their brains to a concern whose goods are shoddy and worthless, but much prefer to seek more reasonable regions for their faculties.

Notwithstanding that, however, this ancient establishment is yet maintained with some show of respectability, and any attempts to expose its shady transactions or ridicule its goods are still punishable by imprisonment under a law specially protective for its own interests.

This company, said to be originally floated by a Jew with fishy ideas of finance (how incredible!), exports and imports in large quantities, besides doing a fair trade at home.

The exports generally go to India, China, and Japan, and it is rumored that the better-class article, being plump and well fed, is in great demand in the Cannibal Islands. The imports are derived from America and Central Africa, chiefly for exhibition purposes.

Unlike other firms of undoubted integrity, this concern chooses Sunday as the special day for its industry.

It has made frantic and strenuous efforts to preserve this particular day quite to itself, and any opposition is for-

bidden, curiously enough, as being wicked—whatever that may mean.

In latter years, as the Old Firm has fallen on evil days, many minor establishments have sprung up and commenced operations on the chosen day, much to the annoyance of the shareholders in the business, whose stock-in-trade up to the present has never been located.

To the impartial observer, the South Sea Bubble was sound finance compared with the promises of this posterous going concern, which owns extensive areas in "the realms above," "mansions in the skies," and unlimited space in a mysterious place named "Abraham's bosom."

The last attempt to compete with these Monopolists has met with a decided amount of encouragement.

Shrewd business men, who realised that the world is not so gullible as it used to be, have put their heads together and reasoned thus: modern invention has supplied us with the means to reproduce moving pictures on a screen; we will open on Sunday, have comfortable seats, and provide light music. We will remove the sanctimonious odor of the other firms' methods, and put up our prices in plain figures—another improvement on the Old Firm.

The venture has been amazingly successful. That strange crowd of rambling youth which promenaded the streets of nearly every provincial town on Sunday nights, for want of something better to do, has, in the well-known words of the advertisement, recognised "a long felt want."

Consequently, it gravitates towards this form of healthy and instructive amusement; hence the Old Firm, with its traditional dog in the manger policy, is waxing furious.

Later on we may hear of these forms of entertainment being described as dens of vice, or sinks of iniquity, as this distinguished concern has a choice stock of expletives and denunciatory phrases.

With its accustomed cunning, it intends to crush its modern rivals by means of a new Cinematograph Act, and, as I have said before, Christians, awake! and with all due reverence, for Christ's sake, have respect for logic.

This, I am afraid, is too much to hope; their somnolent state of piety has wrought havoc with their mental perspective, and at all costs the Sabbath must be kept holy, at least by the masses; the "upper ten," so long as their subscriptions are satisfactory, do not need the tender care and friendly guidance to those desirable places, for which see the Athanasian prospectus.

Freethinkers, who cannot take shares in the Old Firm, view with no alarm, but great satisfaction, this honest attempt at the secularisation of Sunday.

It is human nature to love light and to shun darkness; therefore it is no small wonder that a place interesting and instructive attracts, just as much as the dimly-lighted churches and chapels repel.

All things considered, it is a step in the right direction; we are not concerned with the intellectual value of the fare provided—the public will see to that.

As the Christians have nobbled the Socialist movement when they found it was too strong to exterminate, my one fear is that some learned, lofty-browed divine will discover that living pictures on the sheets had something to do with writing on the wall, and was foretold in the Scriptures. Here followeth chapter and verse, etc., etc.

A company with mysterious stock-in-trade in the Land of Nowhere could explain anything.

J. W. REPTON.

The Ways of Providence.

[An Extract from Mr. Eden Phillpotts new novel, *The Haven*.]

"'Tis said in a few words" [so spoke John Major the fisherman to his friend Nicholas Honeywill the farmer]; "and as you have had a son who turned from the life he was born to and looked elsewhere—you'll understand. My Ned be like your Tom—can't settle to what you might say was the calling planned by Providence. But if a lad won't grow into a sailor, despite all efforts to make him one, then we must agree Providence don't want him at sea, but have cut out his work for him ashore."

"That's all true," admitted Mr. Honeywill, who was an easy man with more common sense than religion. "Everybody's found it out but you, long ago."

"I was slow to do so, for, my wish and hope—my last hunger this side of heaven, you might say—was to see Majors carrying on the name. But so far as one can say at the moment, it isn't to be."

"Of course not; your lad's a born farmer."

"For the moment," repeated John Major, "it looks as if I wasn't to have my dearest will. And I am going to yield my point without more words. Mind you, I don't give up hope—never. None but God's self can say what's hidden in time, and I may yet live to sail with my own blood, and

live to give up the tiller to them of my own loins. The ways of the Lord be past understanding, Nicholas, but not past trusting."

"That's where we differ, Jack," answered the landsman. "If I've got a vartue, 'tis plain speech, and, without offence, I tell you, I never have, and never will trust the Lord a yard. And what's more, on the showing of life, and the things that happen, He's no right to ask it of us. Nought happens but the unexpected—that's common knowledge, and even got to be a proverb—then why trust the Lord more than anybody else? Why, there's a score of men—yourself included—I'd trust sooner. I've seen too much of His ways—afoat and ashore, Jack. A woman's trustworthy beside Him; the sea's trustworthy beside Him—aye, and spring weather and the promise of autumn. Let dogs trust—man's a fool to do so."

"I wish you'd hold off saying such things; but you'll know better soon or late, and your eyes will be opened. Too many farmers think as you think, though few would care to say it out as you do" (pp. 175-6)

"Mark your children with the sign of the Cross," snapped out Larkin, "and no other mark matters." He was a propagandist without self-consciousness, or tact. But Mr. Bolder could not be considered a religious man, and he put the interruption aside impatiently.

"I say 'tis all arrant nonsense, and I have no doubt that our next [child] will be as white as lather [the last child was born with a birthmark like a coffin lid on its left shoulder], but that's no use against the wife's dreams. I've got to bend, and in a word, we're off."

"She ought to trust more in her God," asserted Mr. Larkin, and Mr. Tribble agreed with him.

"I hate to hear of such things in our midst," said the latter. "A woman in the family-way should look above, and not fret herself because her dwelling-house happens to be in the shape of man's last-long house underground. 'Tis a challenge to God and vex Him."

"You know nothing about it, Jimmy," struck in Dick, who always argued against Mr. Tribble. "The barber's missis is quite right, and there's no call to drag in God at all. 'Tis a matter of science; and if breeding-women get a bee in their bonnets, a lot of harm may come out of it. We owe it to the unborn to give 'em every chance, and not handicap 'em by worrying their poor mothers afore they are hatched. The lasting surprise is that women with child keep their nerves so well as they do. The pluck they show is one of the wonders of the world."

"They show it because they mostly know where to trust," answered Larkin. "The Lord's on their side, and they do well to be trustful."

"So you say, but I say different. 'Tis a toss up with the strongest and best of 'em, and cruel often are they left in the lurch, as we all know. Nature's nature; and nature runs off the rails in childbirth very easy indeed; and God don't interfere, because He can't. He's started the machine, and the machine have to go its appointed way, for the machine be a lot stronger than its Maker, just as a runaway steam-roller be stronger than the man that started it."

"In a wiser and more religious world than ours, you'd be burnt to death for that," said Mr. Tribble. "But, nowadays, there's not enough believers left to get the whip-hand of you Atheists, and so we be forced to leave you to your outraged Maker. But though you dare to deny that God's all-powerful, we know where we stand, and what's the worth of your argument."

"That nobody can deny," declared Mr. Munday. "And now I'll ask you to change the subject, and hand me them empty glasses."

"I do deny it," answered Dick. "God can't do everything, and never pretended He could. 'Tis only silly men like Tribble that think He can. Here's my pint pot, Thomas—empty, as you say. Well, let your God put a quart in it, and I'll call back everything as I spoke against him, and go to church and live there. There's my score on the slate, I see—thirteen, is it? Well, let your God add it up and make it twelve, and I'll join the Rechabites" (pp. 215-16).

E. B.

Correspondence.

A BIOGRAPHY OF FERRER.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I have recently been reading Mr. McCabe's account of *The Martyrdom of Ferrer*, and I should be glad if you would grant me space for a few observations upon it. Mr. McCabe's book is, perhaps necessarily, a hurried work. It gives one the impression of being worked up for the occa-

sion, the result of a hasty, though one must confess fairly complete, inquiry into the whole affair whilst the market was hot for the work.

Moreover, it is written by a man who never met Ferrer. What Freethinkers are waiting for is a biography of Ferrer by one who was an intimate friend, one who was infused with the martyr's enthusiasm by personal intercourse. Ferrer is deserving of a biography worthy of a place among the classics of Freethought.

Perhaps Mr. Heaford will oblige one of these days.

A fact which will strike most of the advance guard of Freethought concerning Mr. McCabe's work is his ingenious indignation at the efforts of the Spanish priestcraft to attribute violent anarchism to Ferrer. I do not take exception to such indignation. On the contrary, I think it quite right and proper. But Mr. McCabe must remember that the men of God never fight fairly, not even in England. They will not play the game unless the dice are loaded in their favor. Mr. McCabe should have thought of this before he played the sorry part he did in the last blasphemy prosecution in this country, when efforts were made to obscure the real issue by accusations of indecent language. The position of moral superiority which he affected on that occasion was calculated to prejudice the position of the prisoner, and to justify the Christian journals in their advocacy of the retention of the Blasphemy Laws.

I admit that the two cases I have paralleled are not identical, but they have significant points of similarity which are typical of the guerilla tactics of the Black Army in their opposition to Freethought propaganda.

Perhaps it would be unkind to suggest that Mr. McCabe believes in freedom's cause "as far away as Paris is," but he certainly lays himself open to that suggestion.

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HOW ADAM FELL.

Two theologues once, as they wended their way
To chapel, engaged in colloquial fray—
An earnest logomachy, bitter as gall,
Concerning poor Adam and what made him fall.
" 'Twas Predestination," cried one—"for the Lord
Decreed he should fall of his own accord."
"Not so—'t was Free Will," the other maintained,
"Which led him to choose what the Lord had ordained."
So fierce and so fiery grew the debate
That nothing but bloodshed their dudgeon could sate;
So off flew their cassocks and caps to the ground
And, moved by the spirit, their hauds went round.
Ere either had proved his theology right
By winning, or even beginning, the fight,
A gray old professor of Latin came by,
A staff in his hand and a scowl in his eye,
And learning the cause of their quarrel (for still
As they clumsily sparred they disputed with skill
Of foreordinationnal freedom of will)
Cried: "Sirrabs! this reasonless warfare compose:
Atwixt ye's no difference worthy of blows.
The sects ye belong to—I'm ready to swear
Ye wrongly interpret the names that they bear.
You—Infralapsian son of a clown!
Should only contend that Adam slipped down;
While you—you Supralapsarian pup!
Should nothing aver but that Adam slipped up."
It's all the same whether up or down
You slip on a peel of banana brown;
And Adam analysed not his blunder
But thought he had slipped on a peal of thunder.

—Ambrose Bierce.

We must assist the Oriental rulers in their measures of defence against missionaries and smugglers, who, under pretext of Christianau, commercial, or humanitarian principles, poison, degrade, and oppress their peoples.—*Pierre Laffitte.*

The Freethinker takes nothing on trust, if he can help it; he dissects, analyses, and proves everything. Does this make him a barren sceptic? Not so. What he discards he knows to be worthless, and he also knows the value of what he prizes.—*G. W. Fouts, "Flowers of Freethought."*

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, C. Cohen, "Christianity and the Modern Mind."

STRATFORD TOWN HALL: 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The Lord and the Lords."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Town Hall): J. T. Lloyd, 3, "Buddha and Christ: a Striking Contrast"; 7, "The Glorious Gospel of Freethought." Tea at 4.45.

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

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 (noon), Class; 6.30, "Burns and Paine" Social.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): Miss K. B. Kough, 3, "The Bible and the Suffragette"; 7, "Does Christianity Uplift Women?"

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, J. R. Ferrey, Miscellaneous Dramatic Recital.

NOTTINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Cobden Hall, Peachey-street): 7.30, J. Long, "The Redemption."

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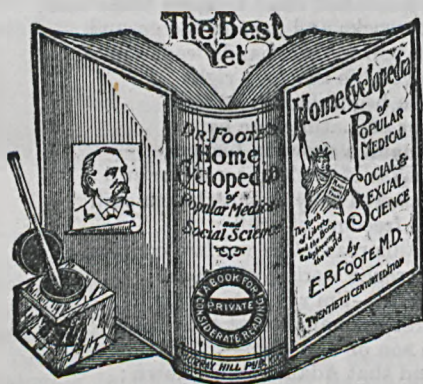
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