

THE Freethinker

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KORAN—A book which the Mohammedans foolishly believe to have been written by divine inspiration, but which Christians know to be a wicked imposture, contradictory to the Holy Scriptures.—AMBROSE BIERCE.

Balfour's Boomerang.

WE thought they would do it sooner or later. The hour was bound to strike for an attack to be made upon Mr. Balfour's supposed Agnosticism. The attack would naturally not come from the Conservatives. It was bound to come from the Liberals. They have lost a lot of seats in the recent elections, and they are in no very amiable frame of mind. They owe Mr. Balfour a good many grudges, and there is a pleasure to most people in "getting your own back." His misrepresentations and insults, all intended to catch votes, and alas succeeding, were galling even to the most patient saints. When he called them Socialists it was bad enough, but when he suggested that they were actually conspiring with Atheists to undermine and overthrow the holy religion of this country, they thought it was high time to bring out the rod that had long been in pickle for him. Were they friends of Atheism, forsooth? What then was he? Had he any religion at all? Wasn't he something very much like an Atheist on his own account? If he had a religion, what was it? Would he have the impudence to call himself a Christian? And when these questions were answered there were more behind.

The attack on Mr. Balfour is started by Mr. Harold Begbie in the *Daily Chronicle*. Mr. Begbie makes rather a roundabout indictment against Mr. Balfour to begin with. It does not appear, after all, that the right honorable gentleman has plainly charged the Liberals with being the close friends of Atheists; but he has allowed his party managers, up and down the country, to circulate leaflets suggesting as much; and the idea became extensively prevalent, so that myriads of good Christian people went and voted Tory out of mere apprehension as to the safety of their beloved faith. Now this is sad from every point of view to the poor traduced Liberals, and they are having it out with Mr. Balfour at last. When a duty, temper, and interest all agree, you have a threefold cord not easily broken; and with that cord the Liberals are now braced up to the sticking place.

Mr. Begbie admits that he should "never have challenged" Mr. Balfour under other circumstances. He writes as if he were the ex-premier's father confessor, or something of that sort; and as if he were forced to speak out in consequence of the Tory leader's disgusting tactics. Mr. Balfour may have gone on making out to be a Christian until the end of the chapter; there is a certain pleasurable about that to a Christian who doesn't want to see too many unbelievers out in the open; but he has incensed Mr. Begbie and his political friends, and this economy of the truth shall no longer be maintained. The public shall be told that Mr. Balfour is not a Christian. His mask shall be stripped off. They shall see him as he is—a hypocritical pretender to a religion that he despises; one who juggles with religion as he juggles with everything else. Mr. Begbie admits, with the most condescending benevolence,

that "It is perhaps possible for an agnostic, even for an atheist, to prove himself a fit and proper servant of the State." But when an agnostic, or even an atheist, works the clerical dodge against his Christian political opponents, and makes them out to be little better than goats—whereas they are very good sheep, while *he* is a rank old goat—the case is too disgusting for words. Such a man is worse than the worst open atheist in the kingdom; and the indignant Begbie calls for his head on a charger—or at least a soup-plate.

The mysterious coxsureness of Mr. Begbie's attack is calculated to produce the impression that he is very much "behind the scenes" with Mr. Balfour. "You may take it from me," is the Liberal journalist's air throughout. We conclude, however, that this is all bluff. We do not see that he once commits himself to a plain statement that Mr. Balfour is an Atheist or an Agnostic. He insinuates it. The reference to the Tory leader's old book on *Philosophic Doubt* is really a bad bit of Rip Van Winkleism. It is impossible to deduce from that book that Mr. Balfour is anything or nothing. It is a mere exercise in academic scepticism. In the *Foundations of Belief*, if he declares anything at all, he declares himself a friend of religion. But we shall have to recur to that "if" presently.

Mr. Begbie does not assert. He challenges:—

"I ask Mr. Balfour to assert in public that he believes in the Christian religion; I publicly ask him whether he holds a single dogma of all that dogmatic teaching which he declares with exceeding force alone stands between order and chaos?"

Further, I challenge Mr. Balfour to declare before a public audience that he believes in the following essential articles of faith which he insists upon being taught to the children of the country: (1) The Incarnation, (2) the Resurrection, (3) the Ascension, (4) the Divinity of Christ.

And I challenge him to assert in public that he believes in any God such as Christianity postulates."

While he was about it, Mr. Begbie might have told the listening world if he himself believed all these things. Perhaps he felt it doesn't do to be too confiding in controversy. In that case, he must be very sanguine to expect a reply to his challenge from the williest debater of our time. Iago was nothing if not critical, and Mr. Balfour is nothing if not slippery. We say this without the slightest reference to his politics. We refer to his dialectical methods. He can talk for hours without anybody being able to tell where he stands. Sometimes, perhaps, he doesn't know himself, but is blandly awaiting the development of necessity and self-interest. We could never ascertain from his books that he believed or disbelieved anything. Even the finely constructed pessimistic passage in the lecture on the Religion of Humanity only touches one's literary admiration. It leaves one's feelings unmoved. The lecturer did not mean it. He was not speaking from the soul. His head worked, but not his heart. There was no taste of the salt of tears in the lamentation; still less the taste of the salt of blood.

Mr. Begbie will try in vain to work the Balfour boomerang back upon the thrower. Mr. Balfour will smile and move away. He will not be there when it returns. It is precisely his subtlety, and utter absence of conviction, that makes him what he is.

G. W. FOOTE.

Christianity and Medical Science.

ALL things considered, the institution of Hospital Saturday and Hospital Sunday, reflects credit upon the sympathies of all who are concerned therein. It is true that a judicious financial starving of our hospitals would have the salutary effect of bringing them under State control and ensuring State maintenance; but the prospect of meanwhile denying relief to sufferers from providentially designed diseases is not one that people will easily face, and so we must trust to the necessary reconstruction being brought about by other methods. Meanwhile we shall continue to see many hundreds of men and women devoting their energies to the task of collecting voluntary offerings, and thus furnish the world with the not unusual spectacle of preventing, by their sympathetic readiness to help, the better organisation and maintenance of the institutions in which they are interested.

As Great Britain is, nominally at all events, a Christian country, it follows that a very large proportion of those engaged in collecting these voluntary offerings will be, nominally again, Christians. And it is in full accord with the normal psychology of the Christian character that these should talk of their work as a Christian work, and label the hospitals themselves as Christian institutions. And if non-Christians were as sectarian in their sympathies as Christians they would decline to subscribe, and leave to others the exclusive honor and inconvenience of hospital maintenance. But this, too, is neither likely nor desirable; and we shall continue to see institutions that are non-Christian in origin and method, supported by all sections of the community, described as Christian and as being the direct outcome of Christian teaching and influence.

An illustration of this has been furnished by a sermon recently preached in Kelvinside United Free Church, Glasgow, by the Rev. T. D. Thomson on Hospital Sunday, a report of which appears in the *Christian World Pulpit* for January 26. Mr. Thomson's thesis is that the healing art has a peculiarly strong claim upon Christians, because of the emphasis laid upon healing the sick by Jesus Christ, and the importance attached to the work during Christian history. To heal the sick, he says, was with Jesus Christ "a great and consuming passion," and if mere words, without any regard as to their original meaning and application, are to count, the statement may pass. So, too, it may be admitted that the Church—for reasons that will be noted—has always paid some regard to the care of the sick, although careful examination shows that its influence has been greatly more disastrous than beneficial. For neither the Jesus of the Gospels nor the historic Christian Church possessed even an approximately correct notion of the nature of disease; on the contrary, one laid down and the other endorsed a theory of disease that not only banished the knowledge already acquired, but for many centuries obstructed its re-acquisition and improvement.

The question of Christianity's influence on morality may be a matter for debate; that of its influence on positive scientific knowledge is almost wholly a question of fact. And the initial fact is that the ancient world gave to Christianity—had it possessed the inclination or the ability to appreciate it—a lead that was wholly in the right direction. Five hundred years before Mr. Thomson's "Divine Healer," Greek medicine definitely separated itself from magic and miracle by emphasising the natural character of all disease. Hippocrates did not deny that there might be a divine side to disease; he insisted there was *always* a natural one, and that in the study of the nature of man, his food, habitat, and occupation, was to be found a clue to the nature and cure of disease. His work and that of his disciples was continued by Aristotle in both anatomy and physiology, and by Galen, some of whose teaching concerning the functions of the nervous system are monumental testimony to his industry and sagacity. Nor, thanks to

Christian supremacy, was there any improvement—rather a retrogression—on Galen's teachings until the sixteenth century. In Egypt there is also evidence that the fetishistic theory of disease was being discarded. One department of the celebrated Alexandria museum was devoted to medicine, and the influence of Ptolemy was strong enough to secure that its anatomical teachings should be based upon observation instead of mere theory. And in addition to the knowledge of the structure and functions of the human body, and of the nature of disease that was being steadily acquired, the ancient world had its great adjunct to health—the bath. Plentiful as these were in both Egypt and Greece, they were more numerous still in Rome and the Italian towns and cities. They were within reach of all, and for those who could not afford even a moderate payment some of the larger ones were opened free during certain hours of the day. The first public bath in Christian England was opened during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Sickness is so common a phenomenon of human life, and the sympathy it evokes so general and indestructible, that one may safely put down the Christian claim to originate hospitals as either a falsehood, or if a truth, of no importance. If hospitals were unknown in pre-Christian times, or if they were less numerous than they afterwards became, one may safely put it that either disease was less widespread under Pagan than under Christian civilisation or there were other methods of dealing with it. The statement that hospitals owe their origin to Christianity is, like so many other Christian claims, simply false. There is no indication whatever that the civilised peoples of antiquity were less able to deal with general diseases than were the people of Christendom until very recent times. And there is plenty of evidence that all necessary provision was made for sheltering and caring for the indigent sick. Putting on one side hospital provisions made in pre-Christian Mexico, India, Persia, and elsewhere, it is enough to point out that all through the Roman and Greek world the temples of Æsculapius, Serapis, and Hygea served both the purposes of colleges for medical students and hospitals for the relief of the poor, as well as fulfilling a religious function. In addition, the municipal authorities engaged doctors to attend to the poor. It was the compulsory closing of the institutions referred to above that forced upon the Christian authorities the task of providing for the sick poor, although it may well be questioned whether the destruction of these ancient temples were compensated by the Christian institutions established in their place.

Now, the influence of Christianity upon both hygienic and medical science may be stated in a sentence—it was wholly and irredeemably evil. The primitive belief that all disease was due to magical influence or to the direct operations of evilly disposed spirits, was revived and reinforced. In all essentials the theories of the Bible, the New Testament, and the Christian Church, for many centuries, was upon an exact level with those that flourish among savages to-day. In one respect the Christian practice was the more dangerous of the two. Based upon written records claiming supernatural inspiration, enforced by the example of Jesus Christ, and championed at a later day by powerful and wealthy organisations, the Christian theory offered, for many hundreds of years, an invincible obstacle to the development of sound knowledge. Right through the Old Testament there is not a single hint that disease is ever anything more than a supernaturally caused thing demanding a supernatural cure. The New Testament follows on exactly the same line. Jesus healed the sick by laying on of hands, miraculously restored sight to the blind, and raised the dead from the grave. Peter's mother was cured by a touch, a servant cured of palsy by a word. When the High Priest's ear was cut off by Peter, it was picked up and miraculously stuck on again. Paul also cured fever by laying on of hands; while Peter raised Dorcas from the dead. That faith is

the cure for disease is the most explicit of New Testament teachings, and it is enforced by numerous examples.* It is true, as Mr. Thomson says, that Jesus told his disciples to "heal the sick," but it is illustrative of the chronic dishonesty of Christian advocacy that our preacher should remain silent as to the way it was to be done. They were to do it "In my name," by exactly the method of an African witch doctor. It is the method of the "Peculiar People," who are peculiar inasmuch as they, in a Christian country, carry out Christian teachings and are promptly imprisoned by other Christians for doing so. In the pharmacopœia given by Jesus to his disciples there was one ingredient—faith. The dose might be increased or diminished, its quality was unalterable. In a Christian hospital a dispensary would be useless. The patients would supply their own physic, leaving it for a crowd of parsons to take credit for indicating the remedy.

So, also, with mental diseases. Five hundred years before Christ, Hippocrates had taught that all madness was due to disease of the brain. Aretæus in the first century after Christ, and Galen in the second, developed this teaching. In the sixth century, one of the last of the medical teachers, Alexander of Tralles, taught his pupils how to deal, on scientific lines, with melancholia. In the ancient world the influence of colors and music in treating insanity had been noted and acted on. Here, again, there was the opportunity for development, and once more there was the same repressive and obstructive influence exerted by Christianity.* Nowhere is the low level of culture displayed in the New Testament or better illustrated than by its reversion to the savage theory of demoniacal possession. From the "Divine Healer" there is never a hint that lunatics are suffering from aught else than possession by devils. Casting out devils was one of the strongest features of Christ's ministry, as it was afterwards the power upon which Christians prided themselves most. Some devils left the bodies of people at request; others, of a less obliging disposition, required much prayer and fasting before they would evacuate. That these people were suffering from nervous disorders there is not now the slightest doubt, and it is a mere question, as Dean Trench says, if one of the apostles "were to enter a madhouse now, how many of the sufferers there he might recognise as 'possessed.'" One may safely say that he would place *all* under that category, and in support of his doing so he could cite what is to the Christian the highest authority—Jesus Christ. It was one of the powers conferred upon the apostles by Jesus; it is one of the powers with which the Church of England still credits its ministers. And those who reject possession, as do all Christians to-day, have to choose between crediting Jesus either with an ignorance on a level with that of the less-educated portion of the ancient world, or of a deliberate act of dishonesty towards his followers and posterity. And to Christianity, as a whole, must be given the responsibility for the brutal treatment of lunatics that obtained in Christian Europe until little more than a century ago. In no other parts of the world were mentally diseased people so tortured and ill-treated. Mr. Thomson points to hospitals as monuments of Christian philanthropy. With much greater truth he might point to the witch hunts, to the scourging, starving, and barbaric treatment of the insane as direct outcomes of Christian teaching. There is hardly a more deplorable chapter in the history of mankind than is furnished by the treatment of the insane in Christian countries, where ignorance abetted brutality, and brutality encouraged ignorance. And as a cause of both we may go back to the very fountain-head of the Christian religion.

C. COHEN.

(To be continued.)

"Christ the Teacher."

IN last week's article emphasis was laid on the indubitable fact that the ethical teaching ascribed to Jesus is in no sense unique, and does not entitle him to occupy the pre-eminent position assigned to him by his followers. Since then a remarkable sermon by the Rev. Dr. H. Scott Holland, Canon of St. Paul's, has appeared in the *Christian World Pulpit*, with the heading at the top of this essay. The Canon's addresses are famous chiefly for their gorgeous rhetoric. They are florid declamations, replete with long, mellifluous sentences, abounding in word-pictures of flashing beauty, but more impressive for flights of oratory than for the weight and profundity of their thoughts. In the present discourse all those characteristics are in full evidence. Our attention is first arrested by the prancing orator, who, hurrying along at full speed, seems regardless of almost everything except the fascinating appearance of the web of words he is so skilfully weaving. His subject is the resemblances and contrasts between Socrates and Jesus as public teachers. The resemblances, the Canon informs us, run deep. Both teachers appeared at most interesting and important junctures in the history of their respective countries. "It is interesting to see," he says, "why in both cases the stress and strain of an historical situation had forced into peculiar prominence the responsibility of the teacher." He then supplies us with a rapid sketch of how "a new world had opened out upon that little group of Hellenic states which had hitherto lived a life shut up to themselves." When the Greeks began to travel and mix among strange people in strange cities they were confronted by unique moral problems which could only be solved by the teachers. Then there came a succession of eminent teachers named Sophists. "And amid them, but not of them, undertaking a like task, recognising the same need, meeting the same demand, outstepped that curious, ugly, yet most fascinating figure, the figure of the greatest teacher ever born of man—Socrates."

Dr. Scott Holland maintains that Jesus "outstepped" at a similar crisis in the history of the Jews. For many generations Jehovah's chosen people had lived in strict seclusion, never having any dealings whatever with the uncircumcised. The time came when this racial exclusiveness broke down, and "the people were scattered, loose and detached over the cities of a Gentile Empire, compelled to mingle with Gentile swarms, almost lost, it might seem, in the enormous populations that jostled each other in the crowded slums of Babylon, or Corinth, or Rome, or Alexandria." The Old Testament was at hand, but it offered no explanation, no solution. What was to be done?

"The Book could not explain; and, moreover, there were thoughts and needs and experiences set going by these new conditions which the Book had not included in its pages. They were compelled, by force of facts, by pressure of disaster, to transfigure the old hopes and to fling their thoughts out towards new ideals of resurrection and judgment to come and apocalyptic vision. Who could help to sustain the old hope? Who could help to express it to new conditions? There was only one answer, the Teacher, the Scribe, the Rabbi—He, and He alone."

Here again there was a succession of teachers who managed to keep the "ancient faith of Israel and the Messianic hope for the future alive and at work until our Lord arrived to meet them." Thus both Socrates and Jesus arose in the nick of time and saved the situation. For both of them "teaching had this unique emphasis. On it they specially relied." They were alike in yet another respect: neither of them committed a single sentence to writing. They were both purely oral teachers, and had it not been for the loyalty of disciples the teaching of both would have utterly perished. Socrates was immortalised by Plato, and Jesus by John.

Up to this point the preacher has committed himself to nothing. He has only dealt in vague gene-

* "The ancient Egyptians and Greeks," says Dr. Maudesley, used humane and rational methods of treatment; it was only after the Christian doctrine of possession by devils had taken hold of the minds of men that the worst sort of treatment, of which history gives account, came into force" (*Pathology of Mind*, p. 523).

ralities. The resemblances between Socrates and Jesus are more imaginary than real. At any rate, they are extremely far-fetched. Now we come to the contrasts. The first contrast noted is that Socrates's method differed radically from that adopted by Jesus. Socrates cherished a strong contempt for precepts, maxims, commandments, and thoroughly enjoyed the task of convincing his hearers how completely they broke down in ever so many conceivable cases. Then, having successfully confuted the rules laid down by former teachers, he proceeded to show that life should be guided by great principles which never break down, and not by petty formulæ. Jesus, on the contrary, loved to frame rules of conduct, and never even remotely hinted that numerous cases might and would arise in which they would fail to apply. On this point, Canon Scott Holland disagrees with the majority of theologians. Again and again are we warned against treating "these sayings" of Jesus as if they were rigid commandments to be literally obeyed. They are nothing of the kind, it is earnestly contended. "The habit of isolating them and treating them as absolute rules," says the Rev. Dr. Forrest, "has done much to misrepresent the real character of Christ's authority in the sphere of conduct." Dr. Scott Holland, however, is right in affirming that Jesus "adopts for his characteristic method of teaching just those maxims, those proverbs, which Socrates discarded." Then he cites several striking sayings, and observes:—

"There are dozens of such flashing phrases. They risk all the bewilderment against which Socrates was warring. For, taken as prescribing definite action, they obviously break down at once. There must be crowds of occasions when it would be most certainly wrong to offer your cloak to the man who had fleeced you of your coat, or when it would be perfectly right to do as our Lord did again and again, and 'give what is holy to dogs.' What was his whole mission but that? Nor again, can the instances be supposed to absorb the whole meaning of the prescribed moral duty, as if you could only be righteous by fulfilling these particular commands, and doing these identical things."

It is beyond all doubt that several of the commandments of Jesus obviously break down when brought into contact with real life; but the question is, Why did Jesus utter them unless he intended them to be literally kept? What on earth did he mean by *doing* "these words of mine," and by calling the man who did them wise, and the man who did them not foolish? Dr. Scott Holland is surely juggling with words at this stage. Rather than admit that some of these maxims are absurd, and incapable of translation into conduct, the reverend gentleman falls back on the assertion that "our Lord is delivering a moral law to us, just as much as Socrates was—a law which depends for all its value, not on the particular form of its outward expression, but on the inward intention which is independent of all external form." When Jesus said, "Give to him that asketh thee," he simply meant, "Cherish a benevolent inward intention towards him." A nice, kindly inward intention or feeling is "independent of all external form." And yet, strangely enough, the Canon's next sentence is, "Goodness consists in good works, and in nothing else at all." Pray, are not good works the external form of good feeling? Has inward intention any value at all if it does not express itself in some external form? Can anything be more preposterous than the statement that "the inward will alone counts," and that "nothing external matters"? A man is judged, not according to his feelings, but according to his conduct, and conduct is, of necessity, external.

Another contrast between Socrates and Jesus, according to Dr. Scott Holland, consists in the fact that the former identifies goodness with knowledge while the latter identifies it with goodwill. Here the reverend gentleman is just neither to Socrates nor to Jesus. The former exalted knowledge, it is true, almost to the extent of regarding it as the sole condition of virtuous conduct; but it should not be forgotten that by knowledge, in this connection, Socrates understood practical wisdom, and not

merely technical information. Knowledge, in the philosophical sense, he pronounced unattainable. It was in the practical sense that he identified virtue with knowledge. The Canon confidently exclaims, "Virtue is not knowledge." But he is entirely mistaken. Virtue and knowledge are inseparable. Truly to know the right is to do it. No one knowingly prefers what is wrong. It is the fool, never the wise man, who wallows in moral filth and commits acts of social injustice. The man of practical wisdom naturally loves virtue, and pursues it. "Know it, and you have it," was the Socratic dictum. "That seemed to him (Socrates) as far as you need go," comments the Canon. Well, how much farther need anyone go who knows, and has, goodness? "The man who knew the good and did not do it, was a fool"—that is, he did not truly know it. "Reason is always sovereign. Enthroned it, and it must rule. So the rational Hellene confidently believed." And was not Socrates, according to the testimony of all who understood him, one of the best men that ever lived? His sole ambition was to do good to his fellow-beings. He was a man in whose presence ordinary people were awed by the majesty of his character. "No one would think that I had any shame in me," said Alcibiades, "but I am ashamed in the presence of Socrates."

The knowledge which Socrates declared to be the prime condition of well-doing was knowledge of self. The Socratic motto was, "Know thyself." The root out of which all evil grows is ignorance—ignorance of Nature and the laws of life. Jesus also says that virtue is knowledge, only with him it is knowledge of God, and of himself as God's only begotten Son. And at last Canon Scott Holland finds himself in full agreement with his Lord and Master in the exhortation, "Know God, and you will have eternal life." Jesus taught that until we know God we cannot know ourselves. Then we shall never know ourselves, and never be able to live the moral life. God is not an object of knowledge, but a creation of the fancy; and to constitute the knowledge of such a being into the sole condition of becoming morally good and noble is a gross insult to human nature. What we need is to know ourselves in our varied relations with, and duties towards, our fellow-beings; and it is the acquiring, and the putting into practice, of this wholly natural knowledge that clothe life with distinction, beauty, and joy.

J. T. LLOYD.

Father and Son.

THERE are no grimmer tragedies in the intellectual history of mankind than those which are caused by the clashing of temperament in parent and in offspring. The tragedy which usually is the result of a conflict between an individual and the community is poignant enough, even when the individual happens to be a Doctor Stockmann, blessed with a sense of humor that makes bearable the most unbearable moments of his life. Yet *The Enemy of the People* sinks almost into insignificance if it is contrasted with the tragedy which saddened the lives of not only great men and women such as Shelley, George Eliot, Burns, and Bradlaugh, but of thousands of men and women whose names are forgotten or unknown. For in Ibsen's drama the conflict of opinions is between the individual and Society alone, and merely upon some fleeting topic, so that even during the bitterest struggle the deep, warm comfort of those he loves is at hand to cheer and sustain the man who is fighting for a principle against a vast majority; while the difference of opinions which is the cause of the other and greater tragedy concerns religious beliefs, and in the majority of cases it is not only a conflict between the individual and his fellow-men. It is a far deeper conflict: a conflict so deep that it tears hearts asunder, for in it—to quote the New Testament—"a man's foes are they of his own household." And the result is the estrange-

ment of father and son, mother and daughter, and husband and wife, and the alienation of closest friends. It is a conflict which embitters the sweetest hearts, and sets its tragic seal upon the careers of men, altering the whole course of their lives and actions. For religion can be a terrible thing, and religious history is rich in tragedy. Christianity alone has shed more tears and broken more hearts than any secular institution in the history of Europe. In his preface to Dr. Arno Neumann's *Jesus* (A. and C. Black), Professor Schmiedel puts forward the claim that there are nine Gospel texts which must have been invented by Jesus, because they implicitly negate his Godhead, and no believer would have put them into his mouth. To those nine sayings I would add another. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth," said Jesus—in a passage strangely ignored or unblushingly explained away by his latter-day apostles, especially at Christmastide—"I came not to send peace, but a sword." The truth of that saying has been proved more conclusively than its inventor ever dreamed of. If any man were endeavoring to prove to me, by Professor Schmiedel's method, the existence of Christianity's founder, that text would be the most convincing argument of all.

The sword of the Christian superstition is among us still, blighting noble lives and piercing brave hearts. Two years ago there was published by the firm of Heinemann an anonymous book entitled *Father and Son: a Study of Two Temperaments*, which made so deep and painful an impression upon the thoughtful section of the reading public, and aroused such antagonism in certain religious circles, that the pious Sir William Robertson Nicoll considered it his duty to counteract its effect by writing a eulogy of his own father, the Presbyterian minister of a village congregation somewhere away in the highlands of Scotland. But Dr. Nicoll's attempt, praiseworthy though it may have been, completely failed. Though he produced a volume of more beauty and literary grace than are contained in the whole of his other work, its publication was almost unnoticed, and the book itself is already dead; while the work that inspired it has passed into five editions, the latest having recently been published in a neat little volume (two shillings net) which places it within reach of those men and women who will appreciate it most. This edition bears on its title-page the name of the author, Mr. Edmund Gosse, a writer who is familiar to Freethinkers as the translator of Ibsen's works into English, and as the biographer of the great Norwegian dramatist, of Gray, and of Sir Thomas Browne. He is also a writer of charming and delicate verse, an esteemed literary critic, and—dare I say it?—the librarian to the House of Lords. His father was Philip Henry Gosse, a naturalist of deservedly high repute in a generation that has passed away.

Father and Son is the history of one of Christianity's countless tragedies. It is the autobiography of Mr. Gosse's childhood and youth, the narrative of a struggle between two temperaments, Puritan and Pagan; and in a short preface he describes it as "a record of educational and religious conditions which, having passed away, will never return." That passage possesses a deeper significance for Freethinkers than it can possibly do for the casual reader. Though the religious condition of the present day is the cause of tragedies just as keen and far-reaching as that which is described in the book before me, the decay of the narrow, soul-destroying Puritanic Christianity of the last century is rapidly nearing a climax, and its death will see the completion of perhaps the greatest triumph of militant Freethought. When Mr. Gosse was a child, Puritanism had for centuries cast its blackest shadow over the land, and it was not until he reached his ninth year that the *Origin of Species* fanned Truth's smouldering fires into a blaze so mighty that its sparks reached even the tiny village on the Devonshire coast where the lonely boy and his grim father dwelt. The Christianity of this father and his wife was that of the sect which is known as "The Plymouth Brethren." Its members

are extreme Calvinists, with no priest, no ritual, no festivals, and no ornaments of any kind: nothing but the Lord's Supper and the exposition of Holy Scriptures draws these austere spirits into any sort of fellowship. Philip Gosse's personality was so powerful that he had quickly become one of the leaders of the sect, and his son tells us that "his work-day labors were rewarded by the praise of the learned world, to which he was indifferent, but by very little money, which he needed more."

"He was for ever in his study writing, drawing, dissecting; sitting, no doubt, as I grew afterwards accustomed to see him, absolutely motionless, with his eye glued to the microscope for twenty minutes at a time. So the greater part of every weekday was spent, and on Sunday he usually preached one, and sometimes two, extempore sermons."

His wife was as fanatical in religious matters as Philip Gosse himself. Whenever she travelled in the omnibus or train she would courageously grapple with her fellow-travellers concerning their souls, and once noted, "with deep humility and joy, that she had reason to judge the sound conversion to God of three young persons within a few weeks, by the instrumentality of her conversations with them." She also wrote many tracts, and, as her biographer has said, "those testimonies to the Blood of Christ, the fruits of her pen, began to spread very widely, even to the most distant parts of the globe." For over three years after their marriage the husband and wife never left London for a single day, not being able to afford to travel. They received scarcely any visitors, never ate a meal away from home, and never spent an evening in social intercourse abroad. At night they discussed theology and Christian evidences, read aloud to one another, or translated scientific brochures from French and German. Their domestic life was one of cold, hard simplicity, partly from necessity and partly from conviction. But a natural cheerfulness of spirit could not always be subdued, and their contentment, says Mr. Gosse, was complete and unfeigned.

Into such an atmosphere was Mr. Gosse born. He was reared in an environment devoid of anything artistic or poetic—an environment which lacked even the companionship of children of his own age, for it was not until he reached his eighth year that he exchanged two words with any child. It is difficult for us to imagine the domestic life of a Puritan family in the last century. "If we were suddenly transplanted into the world of only fifty years ago," writes Mr. Gosse, "we should be startled, and even horror-stricken, by the wretchedness to which the step backwards would reintroduce us"; but we can at least understand how totally foreign and desolate such surroundings must have been to a child who was to become the author of *The Autumn Garden* and *In Russet and Brown*, two volumes of Pagan verse that are scholarly examples of their art. His education was strict, and religion dominated every department of it; and though the child possessed an imagination that required nutriment, all fiction was sternly excluded from the nursery—fairy-tales, adventure stories, and historical romance alike. In this the father bowed to the mother's will; for, strong as his character was, her's was the stronger. Strangely enough, she herself possessed a passion for making up stories, but had sternly repressed the instinct since her ninth year, when her Calvinist governess had discovered that she amused herself and her brothers with inventing stories, and "lectured her severely, and told her it was wicked." As a result, the temptation had to be fought against all her life, and even at the age of thirty, "though watched, prayed, and striven against, that was still the sin that most easily beset me," she wrote. Her life ended when Mr. Gosse was only eight years old, and despite the ugliness of the Christianity that ruled her life, his memories of her reveal a woman whose character was very beautiful and very sweet. But how much more beautiful and sweet it might have been! Without the love of life, without that breadth and sanity of outlook which causes a man to

hunger after the beautiful things in Nature and in Art as the parched throat of a traveller in the desert thirsts after cool waters, the beauty of a soul is like the icy sweetness of a snowdrop when compared with the luxurious loveliness of an early summer rose.

THOMAS MOULT.

(To be continued.)

Brock's Fireworks.

SHELLEY was an Atheist, and because of his Atheism has had mountains of calumny heaped upon his memory. Even now, when his genius is appreciated at its true value, and when the star of his genius has wheeled so long and so equably in the firmament of fame, the note of disparagement is by no means silent. It has simply taken a new and more insidious form.

In the old days, Shelley was regarded as a monster, pure and simple. Then, in the process of time, he was considered an ineffectual angel, and the final stage of misdirected criticism seems to be that he was a misguided lunatic. Professor Henry Morley and other writers even went so far as to waggishly suggest that poor Shelley was a Christian for many years without knowing it. This is only part of an infamous religious tradition, which may be traced back through the centuries as far as the time of Lucretius. The fortunes of a really great writer like Shelley have been very much influenced by this frigid and calculated misconception. Shelley's known Atheism incurred the hatred of the orthodox, and no enmity is more unscrupulous, more relentless, or more venomous. The mere abuse which was supposed to have killed Keats was the quintessence of politeness itself to the assault and battery made upon Shelley by journalists who turned Christian for half an hour to earn a few ill-gotten shillings. If Byron awoke one morning to find himself famous, Shelley awoke many mornings to find himself infamous. The garbage was thrown at Shelley of set purpose. It was meant to discredit the writings of a man who looked scornfully at the Christian superstition, and who sang of the regeneration of Humanity and the triumph of Liberty.

In consequence of this the Shelleyan literature is of enormous extent, and embraces within its limits the writings of notable authors like Browning, Matthew Arnold, and James Thomson, and the ephemeral and verminous publications of religious propaganda. Despite the large number of accounts of the life of Shelley, his biography yet remains to be written. And it is becoming increasingly plain that it will have to be written by a Freethinker.

These thoughts have been suggested by the publication of *Shelley, the Man and the Poet*, by A. Clutton Brock (Methuen). Doubtless the author meant well, but the publication is entirely superfluous. A large portion of the book is devoted to mere literary criticism, and at this time of day it is as unnecessary to praise Shelley's best work as it is to eulogise the masterpieces of the Louvre or the precious marbles of old Greece. The balance of Mr. Brock's volume seems to be devoted to offering unsolicited posthumous advice to Shelley and his friends on the error of their ways. This seems to us to be a most absurd proceeding. Mr. Brock's own ideas on the subject of marriage and irregular unions may be of interest to himself; but he is as unconvincing in his rôle of judge as Robert Blatchford is in his posture as a political Jeremiah. Mr. Brock not only upbraids Shelley, but shakes his finger at Claire Claremont. It is quite clear that Mr. Brock has never yet realised that Shelley's greatest error was his marriage with Harriet, while his least mistake was his union with Mary, which was at first irregular. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Mr. Brock's philosophy. The psychology of genius is a big subject, and not to be measured by the canons of respectability. If Mr. Brock will reflect

he will find that the life of Nelson is a ghastly failure if judged by the rigid ethics of Upper Tooting. "Pity 'tis, 'tis true." Instead of grumbling because our geniuses wear so curious and unusual an aspect, the best is to be for ever thankful that we have them at all.

C. E. S.

APPEALING TO THE EMOTIONS.

A number of well-meaning writers—the larger part of them clerical—are daily endeavoring to combat religious doubt by fervent appeals to the emotional elements in their readers, as though the decay of faith, which these writers deplore, had its primary source in some deadening of religious emotion generally. This procedure indicates a complete misconception of the nature and origin of the malady it is designed to cure. There is no evidence to show that within the last sixty or seventy years—the period which has witnessed the decay of faith in question—men and women have been born more selfish and sensual, more easily satisfied with the world, and less capable of religious emotion, than were men and women born during less sceptical ages. The change has originated not in a decline of the emotion, but in a decay of the beliefs which allowed the emotion to assert itself. To appeal to a man's emotions, without attempting to justify them, is like trying to enrich him by appealing to his taste for expenditure, when his difficulty lies in his conviction that he has no money to spend. If the religious malady is to be cured, the only way to cure it is by applying a remedy to the actual part affected—by applying it, in other words, not to the feelings, but to the reason.—*W. H. Mallock.*

A CONCEPTION OF GOD.

How glibly, how greasily man says "God,"
Yet the wisest servant is the merest clod
Whose mind cannot compass this handful of sod
From his own little earth. Here it is, newly grassed;
Every grain of its sand is molecular-massed;
Every blade is an epic, serene, unsurpassed;
Every cell of its life holds a secret so vast
That the mind staggers back at the riddle aghast.
As a grain of this sand to its planet, so, too,
Is our earth to the tangle of suns in our view.
And beyond? And beyond! Man must ever despond
To pronounce any words save another "Beyond!"
Aye, we scan and we search, we dispute and discuss,
But Infinity still is Beyond, with a Plus!
Our star, in the streak of the sky, merely floats
As a speck in the sunbeam, a mote among motes.
Swarming round on this mote is the infinitesimal
Insect too small to express by a decimal,
Myriad-ciphered. Its place in the plan
We can only conjecture; we call it a man.
Yet this germ of humanity crinkles its knees
And with rotund voice and a nominal "Please,"
He cajoles the Omnipotent, salving his views
With some second-hand praise and some gossipy
And flattered Infinity then is requested [news,
To alter his plan thus and so, as suggested!
If the Infinite Microscope sees him the while,
Let us hope that Infinity knows how to smile.

—Edmund Vance Cooke.

JAH AND JESUS.

Rome is all Christian; mighty Rome hath sunk
Upon this dwarf and futile fantasy,
To make a problem for my questioning shade.
What was it won her heart to such a myth?
What backward turning tide left this god-man
From the drowned rack of gods and goddesses
For Rome to find and take into her breast?
Oh, look upon the people, read their eyes!
The poison runs its course; they faint and fail,
And this old god, with his sad, slaughtered son,
Got out of wedlock on a Jewish maid—
They, too, have nearly reached their destined span
And bulk as shadows, grey and pitiful,
Among the golden shades that still persist
In marble from Pentelicus.

—Eden Phillpotts, "From the Shades."

INDIGESTION.—A disease which the patient and his friends frequently mistake for deep religious conviction and concern for the salvation of mankind. As the simple Red Man of the western wild put it, with, it must be confessed, a certain force: "Plenty well, no pray; big bellyache, heap God."—*Ambrose Bierce.*

Acid Drops.

Three hundred years ago, in the month of January, the Catholic Church, through its great and glorious (and cruel and bloody) Inquisition, pulled Galileo up smartly for teaching that the earth went round the sun. The Catholic Church settled that question once for all. "The doctrine of Copernicus," it declared, "that the earth moves round the sun, and that the sun is stationary and does not move from east to west, is contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and therefore cannot be defended or held." Galileo was compelled to recant his teaching. He was forced on his knees and made to confess that the sun went round the earth, and that the earth was a fixture. As he got up from his knees, history or legend says, he muttered "And yet it does move!" Yes, the earth does move—and all the popes and priests in the world cannot stop it—or themselves from moving with it.

That unspeakable creature, the Bishop of London, talked after his kind at the annual meeting of the London United Temperance Council held at the Memorial Hall on Saturday. Despite the fact that Temperance was originally opposed by all the Churches, and was only patronised by them when it became powerful—and spoiled in the patronising—his lordship said "he would not support secular temperance work—it was a religious work." There you are. His lordship cannot even throw a veil over the interested game he is pursuing. He hasn't even brains enough for that. He helps the Temperance cause for religious reasons. If people won't be religious, let them be drunk. Dr. Ingram has no other interest in them. Not as they are men and women, but simply as they are Christians, does he care a rush about them. It is only as Christians that he can put them to any profit.

We may as well tell the Bishop of London a bit of plain truth. Nearly all the drunkenness in England is done by his co-religionists—Protestant and Catholic. Amongst the Jews there is very little teetotalism and just as little drunkenness. It will also be found that Freethinkers are extremely temperate. They don't boast and brag about it, and call the universe to witness their surprising virtues; it is merely a matter of prudence with them. It is the Christians who do the boasting and bragging—and the drinking too.

It is curious how calamities teach nations humanity. We believe that if Berlin itself was visited with a flood a good many fire-eaters would forget all about the German invasion scare and get up a subscription in aid of the sufferers. For the present, it is good to note the telegram from the President of the Paris Municipal Council to the Lord Mayor of London: "The Municipal Council of Paris, greatly touched by the manifestation of sympathy with the distressed on the part of the City of London, thanks the City with all its heart, and assures it of its lasting sentiments of fraternal regard." That's what we like to hear. It is better than fifty thousand editions of Blatchford's pamphlet.

The sincerity of the good Christians who keep up the Blasphemy Laws in order, as they say, to prevent "infidels" from using offensive language, may be estimated by the performances of a good many of them during the recent elections. No "infidel" ever equalled, or ever thought of equalling, the language of some of the godlier Tories in the late struggle. How these good Christians behave themselves, and how they insist on "infidels" "behaving," form together a first-rate object lesson in Christian hypocrisy.

One incident in the history of the Boulter case was the refusal of certain spokesmen of the Rationalist Press Association to recognise that he should be defended in any way against the prosecution. They chose to forget that the real point at issue was whether the Blasphemy Laws should be revived without a protest; and, of course, the only protest of any value was an active one—an effort to render the prosecution abortive; for the expression of pious opinions is as likely to disarm bigotry as a verse of a hymn is to divert a hungry tiger from a dinner. They chose to consider that the real point at issue was the elegance or inelegance of Mr. Boulter's language. Why the defendant consulted them at all passed, and still passes, our comprehension; neither could we understand, except on one obvious hypothesis, why he accepted their advice to cry *peccavi* and shirk the consequences of his deliberate and ostentatious defiance of those who repeatedly threatened him with prosecution. Of course, it was treason to Freethought to listen for a single moment to any criticism of a Freethought speaker's language in face of a prosecution under the Blasphemy Laws. We said so

then, and we repeat it now. We also said then, and we repeat now, that the real motive of those men's action was not the one which they alleged. Their special interest in "elegant" language was assumed for the occasion.

Some people have need of good memories. We always thought the people we refer to would give themselves away in time. And they have done it. In an annual publication of theirs we see there is a poem by Mr. Eden Phillpotts entitled "From the Shades." It is a Pagan impeachment of what Christianity made of Rome. It is not as fine, of course, as Swinburne's great *Hymn to Proserpine*, but it is certainly not lacking in vigor, and it is most refreshingly outspoken. We are not going to find fault with Mr. Phillpotts on that score. But why the people who shuddered at Boulter's language rejoice at Mr. Phillpotts' is rather a mystery. Boulter's was satirical and Mr. Phillpotts' is sufficiently serious, but that is not in itself a moral distinction. When it comes to "wounding Christian feelings," we fail to see how anything in Boulter's indictment is more "offensive" than several passages in "From the Shades." This, for instance:—

"Christ, they have prostituted thee and raped
Thy virgin message till at last it stands
No more than handmaid to their infamy."

There are twenty passages as "offensive" as this—if not more so. Are we to understand, then, that language loses its offensiveness in view of its solemnity? This would be unconscious humor on the part of people who don't appear able to muster a laugh between them.

We must warn our readers against supposing that the foregoing paragraphs reflect in the least degree on Mr. Eden Phillpotts. His poem could not be too outspoken for us. He wields a powerful pen, and we cheerfully concede that he is a man of genius. But the best writers, like the best men, may occasionally get into queer company.

Mr. Edward Clodd, writing in the same periodical on "The Religion of George Meredith," once more calls attention to the poet's "disbelief in a personal God and a future life," but then proceeds to talk as if he had a God of some kind, if only a sort of a something:—

"To such a spirit, touched to fine issues, the denial of a spiritual power working throughout the universe was repellent. Meredith's poetry, wherein is to be found his philosophy of life, is charged with revolt against a materialistic explanation of things: to him 'the spiritual is the palpable illumed.'"

How that poor word "materialism" is abused. One would think it was something very terrible. But the terror is only in the sound. In all that makes the word really terrible to the orthodox religionists Meredith was at one with Haeckel, for he disbelieved in God and a future life. We have Mr. Clodd's own word for it, besides the evidence of our own intelligence in reading Meredith's poetry. What was it then that he was in "revolt" against? Not the Monism of Haeckel, for the "palpably illumed" is a poet's statement of the essence of Haeckel's philosophy. Moreover, it is on record, in his own writings, that Meredith accepted the view that man's loftiest faculties evolved out of his lower nature just as naturally, and by the same unbroken continuity, that a lovely rose is evolved through stem and bole from the rude roots embedded in the gross soil; which is really all that any "materialist" could ever have meant. Not that Meredith used the words "materialism" and "materialist." Neither do we, in our humbler way. The words are too much clogged with objectionable side meanings. Even at the very best, the words "materialism" and "idealism" are equally faulty, for they simply express opposite sides of one and the same thing. The roots are not the rose, but the rose is nothing without them.

We venture to suggest that Mr. Clodd's mission in life is not to explain, and still less to explain away, Meredith's philosophy. It will be apparent to those who read him with adequate intelligence. As for the rest, they may be left to gain what they can, and lose the remainder—as is inevitable.

Mr. Clodd does well, however, to repeat Meredith's contemptuous dismissal of "the Christian fable" with its clumsy thaumaturgic stories. "That these should still command credence among the intelligent laity," Mr. Clodd says, "he could only explain by atrophy of the faculties or lazy acquiescence; as for the official 'defenders of the faith,' their position as men holding a brief rendered their testimony of little worth." How this sounds like something from our own columns, put in the tersest Meredithese! No wonder the last public act of Meredith's life was sending a cheque (with his name) in support of the *Freethinker*. It almost

looks as if he had suddenly made up his mind, after Swinburne's death and disgraceful burial, to put himself beyond all possible reach of misunderstanding. Words might be explained away by the artful dodgers of Christian apologetics, but cash stands like Gibraltar. Even the Christian's book says: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Christian liberality is discussed by various clericals in the *Sunday Magazine*. One says a fifth of a man's income should be given, others say a tenth. Rev. F. B. Meyer says that a man with £500 ought to give £20 a year, and a man with £1,000 not less than £50 or £75 a year. Even a man with 35s. a week ought to give 1s. 6d. The reverend gentleman's opinion in the last case shows he has never lived, with a family, on 35s. a week. We might suggest, too, that he should state his own full income, and also the amount he gives away. For the rest, as the Christian liberality would mostly go to the clergy, the gentlemen who take part in the discussion are strongly interested parties. They appear determined to take all they can get. And 'twas ever thus.

Mr. John Cory, the Cardiff coal-king, is said to have given away £40,000 a year to religious agencies, or philanthropic agencies conducted by religious people for religious interests. We saw him once and perceived that he was one of the well-known, half-educated, Nonconformist millionaire type. Making money was his business, religion was his hobby, and as much real brains and taste went to the one as to the other. We understand that he kept the Rev. W. T. Lee as John McNeil was kept by the late Lord Overton. It is whispered that Mr. Lee will benefit under Mr. Cory's will, and we should not mind hearing it is true, for Mr. Lee is by no means the worst of the Christian Evidence champions.

Russia is now the most Christian country in Europe, and naturally it is cursed with the most diabolical tyranny. There is nothing at all like it in the records of Pagan antiquity. The worst state of Rome under the worst of the bad emperors was mild in comparison. The Russian despotism is all the worse, too, for being hypocritical. It is carried on under the forms of civilisation. Take the case of M. Gillerson, a barrister, who has just lost his appeal against a sentence of twelve months' imprisonment. In his professional capacity as a barrister, he had to make a speech at a trial arising out of one of the Bielostok pogroms, and in the course of it he denounced the artificial excitement of religious hatred among the Christian population against the Jews. The clergy construed this as an attack on Christianity, and he was prosecuted accordingly. In vain he pleaded privilege for an advocate's utterances in a court of law. Law goes for nothing in Russia when Church and State demand a victim. The humane advocate, who denounced religious bigotry and hatred, was found guilty and duly sentenced to what he is now obliged to undergo. And the Czar is a good Christian—and the Russian Senate are good Christians too. And the Lord Jesus Christ has something to be proud of in the land of the knout.

A Mohammedan mullah said something "insulting" to some Persians performing religious ceremonies at Bukhara. Now religion is the great sustaining power of morality, and the natural consequences ensued. Five hundred people were killed, and a large uncounted number wounded. That is how they love one another.

Christian Endeavorers are to have a great eight-day Conference at Edinburgh in June. We see that three things are to be sought for—"prayer, lives, and money." Money is the third person in this Trinity—like the Holy Ghost, who makes the work of the Father and the Son "effective"—as Matthew Arnold used to say.

Why is so much money spent on advertising remedies against corpulence in Christian papers? You wouldn't expect it if all you knew of Christians were the New Testament. A corpulent Christian is not a flat contradiction, but he is a round one.

Dr. P. S. Cote died at Montreal and had a civil funeral. Father Auclair offered him "the last succors of religion," but, while he did not refuse them, he said he would see the Father later on, and he died a few minutes after the priest left. The civil funeral was attended by a good many Catholics, who are surprised at Father Charrier's warning that they must not attend such funerals. They may go to Protestant funerals, which are "at any rate religious," but not to funerals at which all religion is treated contemptuously. We presume the faithful who went to Dr. Cote's funeral will never do such a thing again.

Is kleptomania really a fact? It looks so. According to the *Montreal Gazette*, the books most stolen from English libraries are fiction. The next are religious books. That *must* be kleptomania.

A San Jose minister lately referred to Jack London, the novelist, as "an atheist, a scientist, a philosopher, and a thinker, questing the universe in a mad search for God." We suggest to the reverend gentleman that *all* search for God is mad.

"All right, skipper; God's just," said Robert Beech, of the Hull trawler *Gothic*, as Skipper Nicholson fastened a lifebuoy line to his waist as the boat was foundering. He was hauled on board the Grimsby trawler *Oldham*. They lifted him on the deck—dead! "God's just."

Bishop Welldon, of Manchester, has been denouncing Sunday golf. He has our sympathy. It must be hard to see churches deserted by those who ought to be their mainstay. But when the apprehensive man of God darkly hints at the break-up of the Empire if the good old Sabbath isn't recovered, we can only smile at his professional zeal. So many people have a way of thinking themselves indispensable.

Oh, the blessings of religion! At Grosseto, in Tuscany, a peasant woman woke up her husband during the night and told him that the Virgin Mary had ordered her to destroy the furniture. He helped her to do it. She next told him that the Virgin Mary had ordered her to pluck out his eyes, and he was superstitious fool enough to let her operate on them, first with a fork and then with a knife. The cries of the four children brought the neighbors and the police. The mad religionist threatened them with a hatchet, but she was secured and taken to an asylum. The husband was taken to the hospital in a dying condition.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier says that they "bow heart and knee to King Edward, God bless him!" over in Canada, but all the rights he has over them are those allowed by their own parliament. Quite so. And they treat their God as they treat their King. The farce of suzerainty and the farce of religion are very much alike.

Rev. G. W. Rawlings, a sanguine missionary, admits that Agnosticism is spreading rapidly in Japan. He says that the old beliefs are rapidly dying. And he is glad of it—for this means the early victory of Christianity. Well, we shall see. Meanwhile, the best way to answer a prophet is to prophesy the opposite.

The *Saturday Review* has an article on "M. Briand's Anti-Christian Crusade" in which it charges him and the French government with "forcing the children of Christian parents into the convents of atheism"—which is the most ridiculous rubbish. But supposing it be true, is our pious contemporary ready to practise in England the principles it appeals to in France? The children of Freethinkers are forced into English schools where Christian teaching goes on at the public expense. Is that right in England? If so, what makes it right? Nothing but the will of the majority. Then why is the will of the majority wrong on the other side of the Channel? The fact is, our contemporary has no principle whatever. We have. Our principle is justice and fairplay everywhere.

"The only happy man," says Parson Waldron, "is the complete man, and the only complete man is the Christian." Something like A. J. W.

In the same speech Parson Waldron gave God credit for a sense of humor. We hope God is much obliged.

Our old friend Mr. W. P. Ball, whose health does not allow him to write for this journal as he used to (we wish it did), informs us that a Christian friend of his has hit upon the brilliant idea that the floods in France are a "visitation" on account of the "Sunday amusements" in which the French people indulge. Of course the "visitation" must be from God, for Old Nick has very little water in stock. He deals chiefly, if not exclusively, in fire; and every drop of water that reaches his establishment has to be sent from the other one. (See the story of Dives and Lazarus.) Besides, we read in the Bible that God used to send floods of old. Consequently the French know whom to thank for their recent mercies. We hope they won't forget it,

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, February 6, Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints, Manchester; at 3, "Robert Blatchford, the *Daily Mail*, and the Prince of Peace"; at 6.30, "The Lord and the Lords."

February 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.—February 6, St. James's Hall; 13, Glasgow.

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

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: 1910.—Previously acknowledged, £136 8s. Received since:—A. Harvey, 10s.; R. H. Rosetti, 2s.; John Grange, £2 2s.; C. H. Wren, 5s.; Dr. E. B. Foote (New York), £8 19s.; Sydney A. Gimson, £2 2s.; C. T. Hall, £1; W. Bean, 5s.; T. M. Brown, 5s.

IRVING WILKINSON.—Runciman is just a Nonconformist politician. We are not surprised at his evading your questions concerning the Blasphemy Laws. It is a curious thing that every revival of the Blasphemy Laws takes place when a Liberal Government is in Downing-street.

T. S. EALER.—We wrote on the matter last week. You know what "scientific" addresses at a place like the Victoria Institute are worth.

C. H. WREN (a Cornish subscriber) writes: "I hope the Honorarium Fund will exceed the proposed amount of £300 this year. We all think you richly deserve it for your untiring efforts in the cause of Freethought."

W. LEWIS (Montreal).—Order and remittance passed on to business manager. Glad you think that "two dollars and a half invested for 52 copies of the *Freethinker* is as good an investment as any man or woman can make." Thanks for the cuttings.

SYDNEY A. GIMSON, subscribing to the President's Fund, says: "I hope you will be careful of your strength, so that for many years you may continue your brave and uncompromising attack on the absurdities, the intolerance, and the cruelties of the Christian Religion." An admirable statement of our work, if we may say so.

R. ANCOCK.—Glad to hear that Mr. Hodgkinson, the Liberal candidate for the Blackpool Division, was in favor both of Secular Education and of the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws; and not surprised that the Conservative candidate was against both.

F. WOOD.—Thanks for cuttings.

JOHN ROSS.—Of course the Liverpool birthday gift to the President was much appreciated. You say you wish it were more valuable. We don't. The best part of all such gifts is the spirit that prompts them. What were all Hamlet's gifts to poor Ophelia when the change came? "Rich gifts wax poor when lovers prove unkind." There is nothing in all the wealth in the world to weigh against one breath of friendship or affection.

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

F. W. SANDERSON.—You will see we have dealt with it.

CELSUS.—Glad you think the *Freethinker* "keeps up to concert pitch" and that, after reading it for twenty years, you still find it "a regular treat."

F. COX.—We could not insert such a notice without the consent of the person most concerned. It might conceivably do him more harm than good.

G. ROLEFFS.—Pleased to hear that Miss Kough's lectures for the Liverpool Branch were very good and well attended, and that you all hope to hear her again.

W. GALLACHER (Paisley).—We presume it was the Rev. W. T. Lee. We should be sorry to think that he really approved the exclusion of the *Freethinker* (by Christians, of course) from the Public Free Libraries. We don't mind his saying there is "deadly poison" in this journal. Probably there is from his point of view. But as the poison doesn't kill—at any rate, in any world that Mr. Lee knows anything about—he ought to have the decency to give our "poison" the same chance as his own.

FRANK SMITH.—Much obliged. Our friends do us, the paper, and the movement a real service in sending us cuttings and other printed matter, and references to interesting things in periodicals and other current literature. One man can't see everything. We were almost stunned to notice a few days ago that some 120,000 books were added to the Congress Library at Washington last year. The Paris flood is nothing to it.

H. T. HILL.—Glad you were so edified by Mr. Lloyd's lectures. We cannot tell you what was the chairman's announcement. Thanks for enclosures and good wishes.

T. M. BROWN.—Your application and sub. handed over to Miss Vance. We find your adventures with slippery parliamentary candidates amusing. Of course the object of the Blasphemy Laws was, and is, to keep the people ignorant by gagging their intellectual leaders.

J. KNOX.—We must agree to differ on that point. You may not be the only one who thinks he could edit this paper better than we do, and run it into a magnificent circulation. We propose to go on editing it ourselves in our own way, though we are as open as ever to useful hints.

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.

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

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote visits Manchester to-day (Feb. 6) and lectures twice, afternoon and evening, in the Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints. His subjects are both special for this occasion. The first—"Mr. Robert Blatchford, the *Daily Mail*, and the Prince of Peace"; the second—"The Lord and the Lords." Those who want comfortable seats should be in good time. Mr. Foote will read Shelley's "Men of England" at the evening lecture.

There was a decided rally at Stratford Town Hall on Sunday evening, although the audience was not quite up to Mr. Foote's usual high level in point of numbers. It was a capital meeting though, and a live meeting from beginning to end, the laughter and applause being like a rapid running fire throughout, and the reading of Shelley's "The Men of England" fairly bringing down the house. A good many questions were asked and answered afterwards. Mr. Ramsey acted as chairman. Messrs. Neate and Rosetti were carefully looking after the business arrangements, Miss Vance being, of course, engaged at St. James's Hall.

Mr. Cohen gave an excellent lecture at St. James's Hall on Sunday evening. That ended the January program. No doubt the audiences will return to more normal proportions now the elections are over. Mr. Cohen should, and doubtless will, have an improved meeting this evening (Feb. 6). His subject, "Morality without Religion," should prove attractive.

Mr. Foote returns to St. James's Hall next Sunday (Feb. 13). He will deliver two special new lectures on Shakespeare, particulars of which will appear in our next issue.

Mr. Lloyd's audiences at the Birmingham Town Hall on Sunday were naturally affected by the election fever and the weather, but they were good audiences all the same, and the lectures were much enjoyed and warmly applauded. Questions were asked after each. The chair on both occasions was occupied by Mr. Horace Parsons.

Mr. M. M. Mangasarian, Lecturer for the Independent Religious Society, Chicago, is issuing a little monthly *Rationalist Bulletin*, chiefly devoted to his own and the Society's work. The January number contains further particulars about the rabid Catholic objectors to a poster advertising Mr. Mangasarian's lecture on Joan of Arc. That they would mutilate the lecturer quite as readily as his poster is only too apparent. Fortunately they do not frighten Mr. Mangasarian; he goes on with his work as if they were not barking and howling around him. It appears that Catholic priests are sailing on a well-known old tack. They want to know what are the charities of the Independent Religious Society. Mr. Mangasarian's reply is a knock-out. "The Independent Religious Society," he says, "sent two hundred and fifty dollars to Catholic Messina just after the earthquake. Has the Catholic Church ever contributed two cents to any suffering body of Rationalists?"

The *Rationalist Bulletin* is interspersed with short extracts from Shakespeare, Zola, Tolstoy, Buckle, Franklin, etc. It honors Mr. Foote by including an extract from his writings.

Dr. E. B. Foote, of New York, the worthy son and successor of the Dr. E. B. Foote whose fine hospitality we enjoyed when we visited America thirteen years ago, responded to the appeal on behalf of the President's Honorarium Fund by getting together all the English

postal orders he had by him and sending them on to us in a registered envelope. That explains the odd sum £8 19s. Dr. Foote very generously adds, "I think I may make up more for you before the year is out." But we should not like to be a burden to him. We know how many claims he has upon him for all sorts of advanced causes in his own country.

Dr. Foote is in the thick of the fight for free speech in America—a much harder one than people over here generally think. He would be very happy to send over here, to any of our readers who will send their addresses for the purpose, gratuitous and post-free pamphlets relating to the work of the Free Speech League—120 Lexington-avenue, New York City, U.S.A. The receipt of a number of such addresses would gratify Dr. Foote as showing that we really care over here for the fight for freedom over there. The cause is one, and the battle is one, everywhere.

Dr. Foote refers to the copies of Balzac's *Droll Stories* confiscated and destroyed by order of a London magistrate the other day. Dr. Foote says that the offence was that the book was sold too cheaply. The police never interfere with the freedom of the rich. It is always the common folk whose morals are so carefully looked after. Yet the Bible is still allowed to circulate freely, although it is the most brutally spoken book that proceeds from anything like a respectable press. We agree with Dr. Foote that rich and poor should have just the same right in this matter, as in all others.

Mr. H. Percy Ward sailed from Liverpool on board the *Mauretania* for America on Saturday (Jan. 29). On the previous Thursday he was entertained by the Liverpool Branch to a hot-pot supper at the Alexandra Hall, about fifty being present. The sum of £23 2s. 3d. was handed to him by Mr. John Ross, treasurer of the Ward Testimonial Fund which has been acknowledged in our columns. We wish Mr. Ward all success on the other side of the Atlantic.

One subscriber to the President's Honorarium makes us both glad and sorry. We are glad that he does subscribe, and sorry that he is able to subscribe. Now this is on the face of it an odd saying, and we must therefore explain. The subscriber is Mr. John Grange, of Bradford, and when we say that we are sorry that he is able to subscribe we mean that we regret, as we have always regretted, that he did not devote his life to the Freethought movement. He had it in him to have done the movement great service, both on the platform and in the press. But on medical advice, we understand, he decided to keep out of the excitement of public advocacy; so perforce, as it seemed, he devoted himself to business, and his talents were bound to lead to success. Mr. Grange, who is an N. S. S. vice-president, takes a keen interest in Freethought affairs, and does us the honor to entertain a constant high opinion of our own services to the cause. The *Freethinker* occupies a very high place in his regard. We venture to give our readers the benefit of Mr. Grange's latest letter in full. Here it is:—

"It gives me real pleasure to enclose my mite towards the 'Fund.' No object merits better recognition and assistance. Your life's dedication to Freethought in all its phases is a fact that will stand out in splendid isolation when the history of our movement comes to be written. I agree with all the praise bestowed on the *Freethinker*. Its high standard of intellectual virility never wanes in the least. Its literary style is a literal study. Its profound thoughts are expressed in language that makes easy reading—a very difficult thing to achieve. Its front page is always a lesson to the student of English syntax and composition. I know no journal to equal it in this respect."

This praise is calculated to make us blush, but the crimson isn't visible through printer's ink, so the editorial face is like the flower in Gray's famous Elegy that was "born to blush unseen." Mr. Grange's eulogy is certainly sincere, and for that reason it may be allowed to counterbalance some of the opposite treatment which we have freely received.

The one course of Gifford Lectures best worth publishing has not yet been published. We refer to Dr. E. B. Tylor's. Dr. Tylor, who is called "The Father of Anthropology," and is the author of that magnificent work, *Primitive Culture*, is resigning from the Chair of Anthropology in the University of Oxford. He is nearly eighty years of age, so he is entitled to a little rest. But the habit of work is not easily broken, and it is reported that Dr. Tylor is going to devote some of his leisure to preparing his Gifford Lectures for the press. Students of philosophy generally, and his admirers in particular, will look forward to this publication with the deepest interest.

Christian Wiseacres.

ACCORDING to Webster, a "wiseacre" is "one who makes pretensions to great wisdom." A "Christian wiseacre," therefore, may be defined as being one who claims to possess not only an accurate acquaintance with the Bible, but a special ability to interpret it.

I purpose, putting aside all collaterals, to consider the Christian wiseacre solely in this character. The mistakes he has made, and the mistakes he is still making, will serve to show how necessary it is that Truth should be sought for herself alone; for a religion that is true must, of course, be founded solely upon truth. It is for this reason, and for this reason only, that Freethinkers are simply Truthseekers, denying nothing that cannot be disproved, but affirming nothing that cannot be demonstrated.

The grand old parliamentary hand, in his book intitled *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*, has made a most remarkable admission—remarkable, that is, for him; for in controversial matters he rarely committed himself to a statement so precise and definite as to leave himself no room for a change of front—no loophole for escape from a position that might hereafter prove to be untenable. Here is the statement in question:—

"I embrace, in what I think a substantial sense, one of the great canons of modern criticism, which teaches us that the scriptures are to be treated like any other book in the trial of their title.....The many and different utterances it contains proceed from the mouth or pen of men; and the question, whether and in what degree, through supernatural guidance, they were, for this purpose, more than men, is to be determined, like other disputable questions, by the evidence" (p. 5, par. 1).

I adopt this statement, and, in accordance with it, shall treat the Bible as I would any other book.

Now, except in works of fiction, the author is always understood to say what he means, and to mean what he says—that is, he is expected to tell what he believes to be the truth. Therefore, that which purports to be fact and not fiction is taken to be fact and not fiction—in other words, the author is credited with the intention of telling the truth, even though he may unconsciously give utterance to that which is not truth. And this is how, until modern times, the Bible has been always read and interpreted. Of that there cannot be the slightest doubt, for all history supports the statement. Moreover,—and this is a fact which no student of the Bible can dispute,—Jesus Christ himself so read and interpreted the Old Testament, which are the "scriptures" to which he alluded. Did he not? Well, here are literal quotations from the Bible in proof of my assertion.

Said Christ, "Search the scriptures; they are they which testify of me" (John v. 39); a statement that he most certainly would not have made had he not believed in their literal truth. But not only did he make this general statement, he also gave particulars as to his belief in the literal truth of the scriptures. To wit.

Christ believed literally in the Bible statements respecting Moses, for did he not say "Had ye believed Moses ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me" (John v. 46; Deut. xviii. 15).

Christ believed in the literal statements of the Bible regarding Noah and the Flood. "For," said he, "as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the Ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all" (Luke xvii. 26, 27).

Christ believed in the actual destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by God with fire and brimstone, and in the actual turning of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt (Gen. xix. 24-26). Here are his very words according to St. Luke: "The same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from

heaven, and destroyed them all. Remember Lot's wife" (Luke xvii. 29-32).

Christ believed that Jonah did live inside a large fish for three days and three nights, for in what other than a literal sense can his statement be taken? "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. xii. 40).

Christ's followers, therefore, have been, and still are, justified in so reading and interpreting the scriptures. As to whether such interpretation is correct or not, does not in anywise affect the question, which is simply this: "Have Christian wiseacres in the past invariably interpreted the scriptures literally, or have they not? And do some of them still so interpret the scriptures, or do they not?" If they have interpreted them literally, and the interpretation be false, it only goes to prove that the statements themselves are not true, and that these wiseacres have simply erred in ignorance—that the statements belong to the region of fiction and not to the domain of fact, and therefore that they are of no value. And to show that this is so is the object I have in view—to show that Christian wiseacres have grievously erred in taking for facts what in reality are mere fictions.

Christianity was cradled in superstition, and gained political power simply by amalgamating itself with Paganism. No wonder, therefore, that the Fathers of the Church, and their saintly successors, carefully inculcated a belief in the supernatural, and piously taught that the Bible is the actual Word of God and is to be interpreted literally; that it contains the sum and end of all knowledge, and that the criterion of truth was in the Church.

For 1,200 years, at least, Christian priestcraft held undisputed sway over not only the minds, but also the bodies of men; and inasmuch as sacerdotalists did nothing for either the mental or physical wants of the people, but simply taught them to reverence the Holy Church and tamely to submit to the powers that were, the splendid civilisations of ancient Rome and Greece were gradually subverted and mankind at length became literally mere "hewers of wood and drawers of water"—became reduced, indeed, to the same state of wretchedness as were the Hivites by the command of Joshua (Josh. ix. 21).

Nothing, I say, was done for either the mental or physical wants of the people; but, in this respect, the priests simply followed literally the injunction of their master, who said: "Take no thought, saying What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or Wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matt. vi. 81-82). Schools were unknown, and, with the exception of the priests, but few persons could even read and write, as is evidenced by the fact that of the nobles who wrung Magna Charta from King John, many had to "make their marks" in lieu of proper signatures.

As for the common people, they were looked upon as mere chattels belonging to the land on which they were located. Of their condition, Æneas Sylvius—afterwards Pope Pius II., who journeyed through these islands in or about the year 1430—gives a graphic account. He describes the walls of their huts as being of stones and mud, the roofs of turf, while stiffened bull hides served for doors. Fires were made of peat and wood, and the smoke escaped through a small hole in the roof. Clothing was of the scantiest description, and was supplemented by wisps of straw twisted round the limbs. As for food, it consisted of vegetable products, and even of the bark of trees. At all times, therefore, starvation was chronic, and deaths from it and exposure were numberless.

In 1080, human flesh was cooked for food; and in 1258, fifteen thousand persons died of hunger in London alone. What a bitter satire are these facts upon the oracular words: "Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth

them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matt. vi. 26). "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God. But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke xii. 6-7).

The Church believed, as the people who are now called "peculiar" believe, that there was no need for physicians and surgeons, but that, when any were sick, they were to follow the advice of St. James, who wrote: "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (Jas. v. 14).

The Church claimed that Jesus Christ had delegated to its ministers the power which he possessed to "cast out devils; to speak with new tongues; to take up serpents; to drink any deadly thing without hurt to them; and to lay hands upon the sick, who should thereupon recover" (Mark 16, 17, 18). Accordingly, for hundreds of years, throughout the whole of Christendom, priests pretended to cure diseases by the "laying on of hands"; and by means of what are known as "shrine cures," robbed the faithful of enormous sums of money. These "shrine cures" depended upon the supernatural power of special relics, some of which were of the most extraordinary kind. For example, there were several abbeys which claimed to possess the veritable crown of thorns with which, we are told, Christ was decorated. There were no less than eleven churches which claimed to possess the lance with which Christ's side was pierced when he hung upon the cross. Bottles of milk which had been taken from the breasts of the blessed Virgin Mary were to be seen in various religious establishments; and in a monastery in Jerusalem was preserved—holy Moses!—one of the fingers of the Holy Ghost!

Even in the century before last, in a church in Brabant, the priests showed several cannon balls which they averred had been caught by the Virgin Mary in her muslin apron—by the way, were muslin aprons in vogue at the time of Christ?—as they came roaring out of the cannon's mouth, and that so she prevented them from injuring the soldiers of her favorite army. It seems incredible that reasoning creatures should ever have believed such unmitigated trash. It goes without saying, therefore, that priests were bitterly opposed to the disciples of Æsculapius; owing to which circumstance, throughout Christendom during the Dark Ages, surgical skill and medical knowledge were practically unknown.

It was far different in Mohammedan countries. Draper tells us that the Saracen Empire, which far exceeded the Roman Empire in geographical extent, was dotted all over with colleges. In these colleges thousands of boys, sons of mechanics as well as sons of nobles, were instructed in learning of all kinds; and amongst them were medical colleges, whose students had to pass a rigid examination before they were permitted to practise their profession. The first medical college established in Europe was that which was founded by the Saracens at Salerno, in Italy.

The position which medical science held here in England during the fourteenth century may be inferred from an anecdote which is related by Sir Walter Scott in his *Tales of a Grandfather* (chap. xiv.).

Describing a tournament, Sir Walter says:—

"William Ramsay was borne through the helmet with a lance, the splinter of the broken spear remaining in his skull, and nailing his helmet to his head. As he was expected to die on the spot a priest was sent for, who heard him confess his sins without the helmet being removed.

'Ah! it's a goodly sight,' quoth the good Earl of Derby, much edified by this spectacle, 'to see a knight make his shrift [that is, confession of his sins] in his helmet. God send me such an ending.'

But when the shrift was over, Sir Alexander Ramsay, to whom the wounded knight was brother or kinsman, made him lie down at full length, and,

with surgery as rough as their pastime, held his friend's head down with his foot, while, by main strength, he pulled the fragment of the spear out of the helmet, and out of the wound. Then William Ramsay started up, and said "that he should do well enough."

"Lo, what stout hearts men may bear!" said the Earl of Derby, as much admiring the surgical treatment as he had done the religious. But whether he lived or died does not appear.

From the very earliest period Christians distrusted medical men. Tertullian, who flourished at the commencement of the second century, in his *Treatise upon the Soul*, stigmatises the surgeon Herophilus as a "butcher; not for his incompetency, but on account of his skill in his profession." St. Augustine, in his *Treatise on the City of God*, speaks with bitterness of "medical men who are called anatomists," and says that, "with a cruel zeal for science, they have dissected the bodies of the dead, and sometimes of sick persons who have died under their knives, and have inhumanly pried into the secrets of the human body to learn the nature of disease, and how it might be cured."

In the thirteenth century, as the dawn of the scientific day was beginning to break, Pope Innocent III. forbade surgical operations by priests, deacons, or sub-deacons. Pope Honorius, later on, forbade medicine to be practised by archdeacons, priests, or deacons. In 1243 the Dominican authorities banished books of medicine from their monasteries; and somewhat later, Pope Boniface VIII. interdicted dissection as being sacrilege. At the close of the century Arnold de Villa Nova, the great physician and chemist of the day, was charged with sorcery and with having dealings with the Devil. He was excommunicated by the Archbishop of Tarragona and driven from Spain. He retreated to France, but he was driven from Paris, and also from Montpellier, and finally became an outcast.

Chemists and physicians were dubbed "Infidels" and "Atheists," even as astronomers were, until at length the charge ripened into a proverb, "*Ubi sunt tres medici, ibi sunt duo Athei*" (Where are three medical men there are two Atheists). Andreas Vesalius, the founder of the modern science of anatomy and physician to Charles V. of Spain, was charged with dissecting living persons, and hunted to death by priests, who supposed he was injuring their religion.

In more recent times the unco guid have displayed the same spirit of religious hatred and intolerance. In 1722 the Rev. Edward Massey preached a sermon against "the dangerous and sinful practice of inoculation." In this sermon he declared that Job's distemper was probably confluent smallpox, and that doubtlessly Job had been inoculated by the Devil; that diseases were sent by Providence for the punishment of sin, and that the proposed attempt to prevent them was "a diabolical operation." In 1753 the rector of Canterbury denounced inoculation from his pulpit in somewhat similar terms. Jenner's discovery of vaccination was opposed and denounced in the same way. In 1798 an anti-vaccination society, formed by clergymen, called on the people of England to suppress vaccination as "bidding defiance to heaven itself, even to the will of God," and declaring that "the law of God prohibits the practice." In 1803 the Rev. Dr. Ramsden thundered against it in a sermon before the University of Cambridge, mingling texts of Scripture with calumnies against Jenner.

Two such conflicts have occurred in my own memory. In 1847 James Young Simpson, the eminent surgeon, advocated the use of anæsthetics in obstetrical cases, and at once a storm arose. From pulpit after pulpit such a use of chloroform was denounced as impious. It was declared to be contrary to Holy Writ; the ordinary declaration being that, to use chloroform, was "to avoid one part of the primeval curse on women." Simpson wrote pamphlet after pamphlet to defend the blessing which he had brought into use, but opposition was not killed until he called attention to the fact that,

before God took the rib from Adam, he hypnotised Adam by causing him to fall into a "deep sleep" (Gen. ii. 2). Even then religious fanatics contended that the "deep sleep took place before the introduction of pain into the world," and therefore, as it happened while our first parents were in a state of innocence, it did not apply.

I well remember the howl of superstition which went up during the premiership of Lord Palmerston, when the Government was asked to appoint a day of national humiliation for the purpose of averting the cholera epidemic that was then prevailing. The noble lord answered that the spread of the disease was owing to natural but partially known causes, and could be prevented much better by sanitary measures than by public or private prayers. For having given this sensible answer the clergy denounced Lord Palmerston as being an Atheist, and blasphemously said that it was a sin of the deepest dye not to believe that the Almighty could at any moment set aside the laws of nature as he pleased.

"But what gave rise
To no little surprise

Was—nobody seemed one penny the worse."

Had Lord Palmerston, however, lived in the seventeenth instead of the nineteenth century, it would have been a widely different matter. But since then, happily, thanks to scientists and Freethinkers, the fangs of the man-eating Christian tiger have been drawn, and the once all-powerful and cruel brute, by a process of "involution" if not of "evolution," is now represented only by yapping curs which cannot bark, much less bite.

J. W. DE CAUX.

(To be concluded.)

The Power of the Priest.

It must always be a pleasure to any propagandist to find admissions of power and usefulness in the records of his opponents.

The just published Annual Report of the Registrar General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, gives us a new assurance of the growth of our power and the steady decrease of the power of the priest.

It is a small note and will not be weighed up by many who will read it:—

"As regards the mode of solemnisation the decline in the marriages in the Church of England is a marked feature.

In 1851-55 as many as 842 out of every 1,000 marriages were solemnised in the Established Church; in 1908 the number had fallen to 616 per 1,000. In the same time the marriages in the Nonconformist churches had risen from 62 to 132 per 1,000 of the total marriages, while the number of civil marriages increased from 45 to 204 per 1,000."

Stated in other form, it can be more strikingly shown* how great has been the growth of the civil feeling as against the sacrosanct, and very often sham, sentiment.

Most of the Freethinkers of the last three generations have had very clear and very heterodox opinions as to the question of birth limitation; we all to-day have vivid recollections of the great Bradlaugh-Besant fight over the Population Question and the far-reaching and somewhat unexpected results.

The latest report again proves how effective the Free-thought organisation can be when it really makes up its mind to move.

"How seriously the birth rate has fallen is shown by the fact that in 1876 it was as high as 36.3 per 1,000 living, and with a few exceptions a decline has taken place year by year since, and there is no present indication of any real check in the decline. The provisional returns for the first three quarters of the year 1909 show a decrease in each quarter, while the heavy fall in the marriage rate which took place in 1900 will probably tend to repress the birth rate further."

While it is not intended to claim that all progress is due to Freethinkers, we are fully justified in saying that item after item of the latest official report shows how Freethinkers lead the way, and how, in almost every case, the parson is the constant enemy of progress.

Twenty-five years ago illegitimate births numbered 47 per 1,000; for 1908 the figures were 39.9.

* Church of England, fall from 84.2 per cent. to 61.6 per cent.; Nonconformist, rise from 6.2 per cent. to 13.2 per cent.—i.e., double; while Civil rises from 4.6 per cent. to 20.4—i.e., over four times.

In 1870 the only provision for children of the workers in England and Wales was just over 8 000 schools, with accommodation for 1,800,000 children; the accommodation and the standard of teaching in many cases being a downright scandal to those responsible. To-day there are over 20,000 elementary schools, with over 7,000,000 places, besides many higher and special schools, the standard and the *personnel* such as to command admiration.

Our leaders, our men and women, have led the way to this. Robert Owen, Hetherington, Cleave, Watson, Lovett, and scores more have forced the pace and paid the price in their fortunes and their lives, fighting bishop and parson for the right to be taught.

There is to-day no more shameful cant than that of the clergy to be "friends of education, of women, and of marriage." The Registrar in this report notes that not only is the birth rate and the death rate falling, but the marriage rate also.

From every point of view this is a much more serious matter.

In England and Wales in 1908 the marriage rate was 14.9 per 1,000 of the whole population.

This, though it was 0.9 below the rate for 1907, may convey but little to the ordinary reader, but it must convey a somewhat serious view of the matter to realise that, for the whole of England and Wales, the marriage rate was only 45.6 of the *marriageable* population.

A steady fall in the marriage rate, and a steady rise in the age of marriage, until we arrive at the appalling fact that men are practically prohibited marriage until just thirty years of age, and women until just twenty-eight.

For this the clergy are very largely responsible; not the State parsons only, but the Nonconformists also; but the State-paid are the worst, because their opportunities for evil are greater.

All over the kingdom there has been made a steady, persistent boycott of marriage by almost every description of official and semi-official body, such as Boards of Guardians, School Boards, Asylum Boards, and the like. On all these Boards the parson, next to the squire, is the most important person; often the parson is more important. On all these Boards every year the demands of official discipline, joined to a very paltry spirit of economy, have demanded that the staffs shall be single. The advertisements issued by some of these bodies are, in some instances, very near the absolutely indecent; they are evil always, as, for example, Alton (Hants) Board of Guardians.

Application made by Labor Master to marry the Assistant Matron. Applicants told "they can get married if they like, but they cannot retain their posts if they do."

This is the answer of the Rev. Canon Theobald, a dignitary of the Church of England, assisted by three other reverends and one woman.

Later on these same men had the gross impertinence to talk of the holy state of matrimony; and in some cases, like the mouthing Bishop of London, order men and women on the brink of starvation to have large families, he himself remaining celibate on ten thousand a year; screaming always for more soldiers while the old soldiers are left to starve to death.

One of the most shameful cants of the day is the general attitude of the parsons in relation to every detail of marriage, divorce, and sex questions.

The multiplication of Purity Societies, White Ribbon Societies, and the ever recurring attempts at a more stringent censorship, is merely new evidence that the old and ever evil hatred is still alive, that Origenes still exist, and that the Valesians, as a tribe, still have great power.

Of the everlasting inconsistency of the Puritan Prudes' attitude in every detail of this question it is almost impossible to speak seriously; they form the drollest set of cranks ever known, for we have men like Sir John McDougall making a fierce fight against the right of a medical officer to marry; we have the master of a workhouse denied the right to house his own children; we have the Archbishop of Canterbury in a great state of mind at the dearth of curates, and we have curates in scores out of a job because they are married and have children; while all the time there is an ever growing wail about the falling birthrate, and ever more bitter words for the Freethinker and Malthusian who preaches a sane, scientific, and reasonable birth limitation; again and again the Church is the enemy. Wipe it out!

T. SHORR.

NOT AS HE INTENDED TO SAY IT.

A Maryland preacher, wishing to speak of the beauty of a child's upturned face, said:—
"Ah! my friends, what is more beautiful than the face of an upturned child."

Correspondence.

RELIGIOUS MUTILATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The able article of "T. F. P." on circumcision perhaps needs no strengthening, but it may be interesting to point out another strong confirmation of his thesis that this rite was a survival of the human sacrifices which the slowly awakening conscience of man revolted against. At this present time, among the Masai and other tribes in Ponticle East Africa, the analogous rite of clitoridectomy is performed upon girls who reach the age of puberty. There can be no pretence of hygienic reasons in the case, and its existence shows that female as well as male victims were once sacrificed to the avenging gods. Your readers will find in the *Lancet* of April 12, 1905, a letter from C. Marsh Beadnell, Fleet Surgeon, R.N., describing this practice. This gentleman, who appears to be a very acute member of the medical profession, says:—

"It is highly probable that the ultimate origin of circumcision and clitoridectomy rites, as practised by these African tribes, was sacrifice to the local god or gods.....As the value of human life came to be better recognised, and the rights of the individual became asserted, and simultaneously the ferocity of the primitive god decreased, a part, instead of the whole, of the individual would be sacrificed. In this way arose, I think, the custom of ablating certain portions of the male and female anatomy. The excised nymphæ, clitoris, and preputium were humble propitiatory offerings of primitive man to a terror-striking anthropomorphic deity."

Fleet-Surgeon Beadnell adds that an officer who accompanied the Brass River expedition on the West Coast of Africa (thousands of miles away from the Masai territory) informed him that he had seen outside a native village a tree from which were suspended numerous recently amputated foreskins. Obviously there is the offering to the local god in its simplest form.

R. S. P.

MR. WARD'S GOOD-BYE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Kindly permit me, through your columns, to tender my best thanks to those friends who have been so good as to contribute towards the Testimonial the Committee of the Liverpool Branch generously initiated on my behalf. I also tender to you my best thanks for giving publicity to the Testimonial.

H. PERCY WARD.

R.M.S. *Mauretania*, Jan. 29, 1910.

The Ward Testimonial Fund.

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And Nature cannot hear us moan;
She smiles in sunshine, raves in rain—
The music breathed by Love alone
Can ease the world's immortal pain.

—Alexander Smith.

Obituary.

Mr. William Kaye, a veteran Freethinker, of Bradford, has passed away. He was a native of Huddersfield, and a life-long Secularist; he used frequently to act as Chairman for the late Mr. Bradlaugh on his visits to Bradford. He attended the great International Freethought Congress at Paris; was much respected by all who knew him; a kind-hearted man, a good father, and a worthy citizen. He left word that he should have a Secular Burial, which took place at Undercliffe Cemetery. The Rev. R. Roberts, of the Ethical Society, conducted the service, and paid a high tribute to our late brother. There was a large company of relatives and friends. Mr. S. Crowther attended and represented the Freethinkers' who attend Laycock's Temperance Hotel, where our late comrade used to take part in the debates.—C. J. ATKINSON.

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, "Morality Without Religion."

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Church-street, Upper-street, N.): 7.30, R. H. Rosetti, "Christianity Before Christ."

OUTDOOR.

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Highbury Corner): 12 (noon) Walter Bradford and Sidney Cook.

COUNTRY.**INDOOR.**

FAIRSWORTH (Secular School, Pole-lane): 6.30, J. T. Lloyd, "Knowledge versus Faith."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 (noon), Class; 6.30, John Glen, "The Science and Art of Rambling."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, J. Hammond, Lantern Lecture, "The Worlds of Space."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): G. W. Foote, 3, "Robert Blatchford, the *Daily Mail*, and the Prince of Peace"; 6.30, "The Lord and the Lords." Tea at 5.

NEWCASTLE RATIONALIST DEBATING SOCIETY (Vegetarian Café, Nelson-street): 7.30, R. Mitchell, "Tariff Reform."

NOTTINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Cobden Hall, Peachey-street): 7.30, Discussion, "Spiritualism," F. R. Chasty and F. Huntback.

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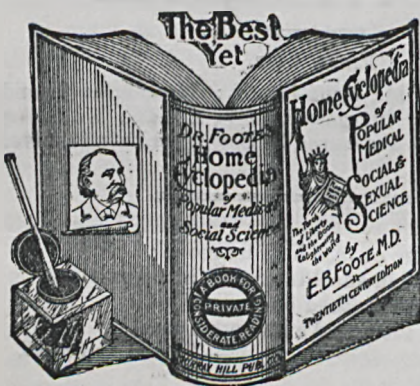
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