

# THE Freethinker

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*Forgiveness is better than revenge, for whilst the former is the sign of a gentle nature, revenge is that of a savage one.*—PLUTARCH.

## Strangling Thought.

WHEN I was staying for twelve months at the Royal Holloway Hotel—alias Holloway Castle, alias Holloway Prison—having been pressingly invited there by the late Queen Victoria, as a reward for my efforts to spread a true knowledge of the Holy Bible and the Christian Religion amongst my fellow men, I naturally wanted something to read besides the Bible with which the guests' rooms in the establishment were all supplied. But I found the choice of literature was extremely limited. The library was selected by the chaplain, who appeared to have two principal objects in view; first, to spare his clients' brains; second, to supply them with "edifying" reading calculated to cherish and develop their Christian principles. Literature, in any proper sense of the word, was utterly neglected. Even a copy of Macaulay's *Essays* was only there by accident. Nearly all the other books were of the Sunday-school order. Before I found this out, I innocently asked the librarian—who was also the schoolmaster, as well as parson's clerk and organist—to let me have a copy of Shakespeare. He gave me a ghastly stare, and told me they "didn't keep such profane books as that." I thought I might get a copy of Milton, who was wicked enough to be a poet, but pious enough to be a Christian; yet *Paradise Lost* was no more obtainable than *Hamlet*. So I was obliged to read the Bible again, although I was there for knowing it too well. I remember when I first entered my "little chamber," as the chaplain used to call it, I saw the "sacred volume" lying open on the table. One couldn't help seeing it, for when the Bible was open there was very little table left. "Hullo," I said *sotto voce*, "you here! I'm here for knowing you too well already; and they're locking me up with you so that we may be better acquainted!" Well, it was Hobson's Choice,—the Bible or nothing; and I tucked into the only literary food before me. I read the Bible right through again *twice*, from the first mistake in Genesis to the last curse in Revelation, without anything to distract my attention. No morning newspapers, no letters, no visitors. It was the Bible in the morning, the Bible in the afternoon, and the Bible in the evening. Few journalists have had my opportunity of studying the Christian Scriptures. And when I got through the big book twice—yes, twice—in that most favorable manner, I wondered more than before how people could ever have believed it, until I reflected that their minds were abused in childhood by their parents and religious teachers.

Perhaps I ought to explain at once how I escaped the softening of the brain which a twelve-months' exclusive association with the Bible would probably have produced. My third trial for "blasphemy"—the third in two months—took place before Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, who was astonished and disgusted to learn that I was imprisoned like a common thief under Mr. Justice North's sentence. Lord Coleridge's strong words stirred up the Home Office

and the Prison Commissioners, two of whom visited me, and, after some demur, permitted me to have books in to read from my own library. Thus the brains (such as they are) with which nature endowed me, were kept available for all the twenty-six years' hard work I have done with them since.

Children's reading is severely censored by their elders, and the same treatment is extended as far as possible to adults. Prisoners, being helpless, have to submit to it absolutely. But the same submission is too often practised by people who *can* help themselves. Some eight years afterwards, lecturing at Belfast, and staying at a certain hotel there, I examined the contents of a small bookcase in the commercial room. They were the property of the Commercial Travellers' Christian Association, although they had been paid for by unclassified commercials, who, in the course of years, or ages, had contributed the sum of ten pounds, in instalments through the slit in a collection-box, for their purchase. The only respect in which they differed from the Holloway Hotel books was that they were clean. They were mostly pious, and ultramarine Protestant at that. There were a few novels, but they were the Rev. Charles Kingsley's; there were two poets, Hood and Tom Moore—the latter *not* including the verses of little Mr. Little; there was a book of Darwin's, but it was the innocent *Voyage of the Beagle*; nearly all the other books were sheer namby-pamby—as, of course, they were meant to be.

The censorship of people's reading is worse than the prosecution of books and the persecution of writers. It is more general, more insidious, and more deadly. It starves or effeminates the mind instead of challenging it to a contest and thus perhaps developing its powers. No wonder that both clerical and lay defenders of Christianity are so fond of this method. They hate strong, bracing literature; the books they favor are fit "for little people and for fools." Men of God, and their leading supporters in church or chapel, get upon library and book-club committees in order to keep out the strong mental food and let in the mental infants' food and pious pap. Christianity has always hated, loathed, or dreaded intellect, always been alarmed at strong men's thoughts, always found peace and comfort in the society of babes and sucklings.

The censorship does not become more difficult under democracy. It becomes easier. What right have cranks and freaks to quarrel with the people's representatives acting for the people's good? Must not the rule of the majority prevail? And if Town and County Councils undertake functions to which they were never elected, and usurp authority to decide practically what people shall hear and read—by refusing the use of halls to advanced propagandists, and shutting out advanced books and papers from municipal libraries and reading-rooms—the public utter no complaint, for this policy fairly reflects their own prejudices and timidities. The result is that a censorship is developing against new ideas in every direction. Government by the mob, or its agents, is extending over the whole field of intellectual and moral activity; and the friends of liberty and progress will have to make a desperate effort to free themselves if they wish to escape being smothered to death.

G. W. FOOTE.

### Christianity and Medical Science.—III.

(Continued from p. 99.)

BIGOTRY united with cupidity in urging the Church to offer every possible opposition to the growth of medical and surgical science. Occasionally a friend to research was found among the secular rulers, as was the case with the freethinking Emperor Frederick II., who granted permission to certain people to dissect human bodies, but the overwhelming majority followed the course marked out by their spiritual advisers. But in the sixteenth century Paracelsus, Servetus, Vesalius, Fallopius, and Eastachius, with others, succeeded in bringing back medical science to the methods of the defunct Alexandrian school, and thus inaugurated the history of modern research. Needless to say, all were more or less tinctured with heresy; some were actually charged with it, while Servetus learned, at the cost of his life, that with John Calvin New Presbyter was indeed old priest writ large.

Among these none bore a greater name than Andreas Vesalius, the founder of modern anatomy, born at Brussels in 1514. The ignorance against which Vesalius had to fight may be gauged from the fact that, until his time, it was generally held that women had one rib less than men. The difference it was explained, was due to God having taken a rib from the side of Adam wherewith to create Eve, and living in pre-Weismannian days, the mutilation was duly transmitted. Vesalius not only had to fight against ignorance, there was the power of the clergy, the interdiction of surgery by the Pope, and the possibility of being charged with sacrilege if he persevered in his studies. He braved all. Some specimens he secured from the gallows, others he obtained from charnel houses, and risked infection from the plague in order to obtain knowledge. At the surprising age of twenty-eight, he laid the foundations of modern anatomy by the publication of a work, based on actual dissection of the human body, and which is said to have been, by its researches, a triumph of science, and by its illustrations, a triumph of art. His book was dedicated to the Emperor, Charles V., whose physician he became, and thus obtained some measure of protection.

Only while Charles V. lived, however. Under his successor, theologians had it so much their own way that Vesalius complained of being unable to get, in the whole of Spain, a human skull for investigation. Difficulties began to gather round this heroic investigator. He had destroyed many religious superstitions; among them was one of considerable importance to theologians. It was believed that there existed in man a single indestructible bone that would form the nucleus of the resurrection body. Vesalius committed the unpardonable sin of not finding it. Had he been religious he would have seen it; had he been a modern "reverent" critic of religion he would have found half, or at least some traces of it. Being what he was, he said he left the question to theologians. In the end, his enemies gained sufficient strength to bring a charge of sacrilege against him. Driven from Spain, he was sent on a penal pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and died from shipwreck during the journey. The selfish martyrdom of the religionist is but a poor, showy, theatrical spectacle at the side of the intelligently deliberate heroism of men like Andreas Vesalius.

Although in Spain theologians were strong enough to prevent the teaching of the circulation of the blood for a century and a half after its discovery, the work of Vesalius marked the end of the official opposition to medical science. Henceforth the fight was to be against general religious ignorance, and the absurd views of so-called professional men that had been created and perpetuated by the theological atmosphere. And this contest exhibits the constant appeal to religion on behalf of ignorance and obstruction. Thus, when inoculation was proposed as a

preventative of smallpox, it was opposed on purely religious grounds. The French theologians condemned it, while in England many religious preachers objected to it on the ground that disease is sent by God for the sins of the people, and to "avert it is but to provoke him more." Inoculation was also said to be an "encroachment on the prerogatives of Jehovah, whose right it is to wound and smite."

Probably the last direct opposition was that offered sixty years ago to Sir James Young Simpson's advocacy of the use of chloroform in obstetrical cases. Simpson was denounced from numerous pulpits for his impious attempt to "avoid one part of the primæval curse on woman." That the opposition was not confined to a few, or to unimportant preachers, may be judged from the fact that Simpson wrote a number of pamphlets defending himself from the religious attack. One of his pamphlets bore the title, *Answers to the Religious Objections Advanced against the Employment of Anæsthetic Agents in Midwifery and Surgery*. One of his retorts to the pulpit was that Genesis contains "the record of the first surgical operation ever performed, and that text proves that the maker of the universe, before he took a rib from the side of Adam for the creation of Eve, caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam." His opponents could only reply that the sleep of Adam took place "before the introduction of pain in the world."

The case against Christianity is not nearly exhausted by an account of its neglect of, and opposition to, positive medical knowledge. Its teaching and practice was such as actually to encourage the prevalence of disease. I have already mentioned what an important part was played by the bath and by sanitation in the Roman Empire. Even in their ruins the baths of Rome appeal to the imagination, and enable one to form some idea of what they must have been in their prime. The baths of Caracalla are said to have contained over sixteen hundred seats, those of Diocletian over three thousand. Nor were these baths, with their rare marbles, statuary, and mosaics, confined to the service of a select class. They were open to all; and, as Gibbon says, "The meanest Roman could purchase with a small copper coin\* the daily enjoyment of a scene of pomp and luxury which might excite the envy of the kings of Asia." Wherever the Roman gained supremacy the use of the bath formed part of the life of the people. Alike in the early days of Rome and in its decline its use testifies to the cleanliness of the populace; and one may safely attribute the health of the people to be in no small degree due to its use.

Nothing seems more remarkable in the history of Europe than that the elaborate arrangements made by the Romans to maintain supplies of fresh water, adequate sanitation, and plentiful opportunities for personal cleanliness should have sunk into disuse. The loss of an art, the decay of a special industry, the destruction of forms of government, one can readily appreciate, for none of these are vital to a people. But one would imagine the provisions touched on come under an entirely different category, and that a people once having enjoyed their benefits would be little inclined to let them go. But whatever one's expectations may be, the disuse of the bath became so complete in Christendom that on its reintroduction it actually brought a new name—the Turkish bath—with it. And while sanitation is a subject that defies complete neglect, yet under Christian influence both the theory and practice of it became of a most elementary character. It seemed, indeed, as though Christianity, not content with its opposition to positive medical knowledge, was striving to promote the spread of disease by neglecting all possible sanitary and hygienic precautions.

There were two causes that contributed to this result. First, there was the intense hatred shown by the early Christians to everything upon which the Pagan world placed value. Pagan art, Pagan literature, Pagan science, all came under a single sweeping

\* A Quadrans, worth about half a farthing.

condemnation. Christians who were educated men before their conversion found it necessary, by penance, to atone for the time spent in reading Greek and Latin authors. Those who were ignorant before conversion had no encouragement to acquire learning afterwards. The duty of a monk, said St. Jerome, "is not to teach, but to weep."

The second cause was the Christian division between things of the flesh and things of the spirit, helped by the conviction of the approaching end of the world. The world was given over to the Devil, and all its pleasures and attractions were but so many snares to capture the Christian's soul. From the earliest times the practice of mortifying the flesh—which meant in practice exaggerating to evil things that in moderation would have been wholly beneficial—ranked high among the Christian characteristics of excellence. To approach as near the beast as was possible was the Christian method of proving oneself superior to normal human nature. Asceticism, imported into Rome from the East, gained ground in exact proportion to the progress of the welter of Eastern superstitions that were afterwards consolidated as the Christian religion. And the truest indication of its congeniality with the essential spirit of Christianity is afforded by its rapid growth. We read of communities of 20,000 and 30,000 people all given up to ascetic practices, but with the curious non-result of not materially affecting the growth of population. The greatest of Christian leaders were busy in advocating the maceration of the body and preaching the sanctity of dirt. The lives of the various saints are filled with accounts of the disgusting practices resorted to as an indication of their spiritual excellence. Some disdained all clothing, others lived on roots or herbs, or on the smallest possible quantity of bread and water. St. Antony is said to have never been guilty of the crime of washing his feet. One famous convent made it a rule that none of its inhabitants should wash any part of their body except the fingers. Others never changed their clothes, but wore them until they fell to pieces. St. Mary of Egypt won a reputation for her filthy habits. St. Simon Stylites lived in such a state of filth that even Christian visitors found the "odor of sanctity" too much for their less spiritually developed senses. Bathing among the monastic orders was forbidden, or only allowed under grave restrictions. For seven hundred years there was not a public bath in Christian Europe. Meanwhile the Mohammedan city of Cordova possessed nine hundred. Linen, then in common use among the Mohammedans, was also prohibited among the monastic orders. One never reads of a clean saint. To be a saint and to be clean was a self-evident contradiction. How long this ideal of filth was maintained will be seen by the fact that in the twelfth century, after his murder in Canterbury Cathedral, Thomas à Becket was found to be wearing a hair shirt literally swarming with vermin.

In Paris and London, as late as the sixteenth century, the ordinary house was of wood thatched with straw. Straw was also littered on the earthen floor; and, when that became too offensively dirty, a little more was thrown on the top. Personal cleanliness was but little known, and the habit of carrying pouncet-boxes was chiefly due to the offensiveness of smells from filthy clothing and filthy houses. The streets were unpaved, and without sewers. People wore a leather dress which, with its ever-accumulating load of dirt, might last for years. All sorts of garbage and sewage were thrown into the streets, as was the case in the larger part of Scotland until the beginning of the nineteenth century, and those who were unfortunate enough to be out after nightfall stood not a bad chance of finding themselves drenched with filth thrown out from an upper window. Augustus found Rome brick and left it marble. Christians found all that Rome bequeathed and buried it beneath superstition, filth, ignorance, and disease.

C. COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

## Reckless Prophesying.

THE Rev. Dr. Horton is the man who, a few years ago, wickedly maligned Professor Haeckel, characterising him, in the well-known Christian style of the pulpit, as "a rude, ill-mannered, ignorant child," "an atrophied soul, a being that is blind on the spiritual side," an "utterly unsatisfactory and essentially ignorant guide," an "unthinking mind," who, with his "obvious weakness and ignorance and childish credulity," was gulling "the ignorance of the public," and whose sole aim seemed to be to "sweep us back into barbarism under the name of progress." Those eminently Christian epithets fell from this evangelical preacher's lips only seven years ago; and they were justified on the ground that the pulpit labored "in the interest of souls and truth." Dr. Horton could afford to be rude and ill-mannered because he was a God-sent messenger and possessed the truth, while Professor Haeckel had nothing but ignorance wherewith to bless himself. Whether the reverend gentlemen's manners have improved or not since then it is difficult to tell; but his sense of superiority to mere men of science remains as strong as ever. His last Monthly Lecture, published in the *Christian World Pulpit* for February 9, is devoted to a consideration of the happy reconciliation between religion and science which he declares to be in sight. In this remarkable discourse, he compares human life to a vast wheel standing on the earth with "the great segment of its upper rim lost in the clouds." It is a silly comparison, and lands its author in the following absurd position:—

"It seemed to me that that segment must be there although invisible, that it was in a sense traced by the rim itself so far as it was seen and by the great spokes of the wheel. But there were many who said that it was not there. Because it was hidden they denied its existence; they insisted on treating the wheel simply as what they saw. The wheel, however, excluding the unseen segment, would not go; it was not a wheel at all; it was only a broken and shapeless and apparently meaningless thing, no more a circle than the moon in its third quarter. And it seemed to me that our life was such a wheel as that."

No segment of a working wheel can be invisible for any length of time, all the segments demonstrating their existence in orderly succession. If life were a wheel it could be seen by anybody who cared to watch its revolutions. But life is not a wheel, nor does it bear the slightest resemblance to a wheel. What Dr. Horton really means is that human life consists of two departments, the one always visible and the other always invisible. With the visible department science deals; with the invisible, religion; and Dr. Horton predicts that, in the near future, the scientific and the religious interpretations of life will be seen to be in full harmony.

The reverend gentleman admits that during the greater part of the nineteenth century religion and science were at war. In the great poets—Shelley and Byron, Clough and Matthew Arnold, Swinburne and Morris—echoes of the conflict are distinctly heard; "and their poems are the most poignant outlook of the modern mind which is conscious of the rift between the mind and the soul." At last, the nineteenth century "crystalised itself in what was called the synthetic philosophy of Herbert Spencer, and the Universe was reconstructed on the basis of a final separation between mind and soul, between thought and faith." "Thus the twentieth century opened with this great rift between the mind and the soul as the most striking fact of its thought and of its life, a rift which brings, and must ever bring, sorrow and degeneration." But already a marvellous change has taken place in the attitude of science to religion, and of religion to science. We are confidently assured that the day draws near, "the day which we hitherto have not known since we were born, when the thinker and the man of science will no longer regard religion with suspicion and hostility, but will look upon it as the necessary complement of their own science and thought; will realise

that unless that completion is given by the faculty that is distinctively religious, their own science and thought remain ineffectual and unsatisfied. And in that day religion will no longer regard philosophy and the exact sciences with dread, as if they could possibly be its enemies, but it will thrill them through with its own mighty spirit, giving them a new meaning as the part of the great progressive thought of God manifested to men for their guidance and completion."

Such is Dr. Horton's prophecy, which, he maintains, is on the eve of fulfilment. He points out "the promise of this dawn, the bright rays shooting up above the horizon from the sun which is still below." One is astonished at the confession that the sun is still out of sight, and hastens to examine "the bright rays shooting up above the horizon." Can such a sight be really seen in the eastern sky? Are religion and science about to be reconciled? Dr. Horton pretends to adduce what he considers to be two clear evidences of "the approaching reconciliation." The first is "that men no longer think that they can complete the wheel without the invisible segment; they no longer imagine that either science or philosophy can supply the truth which only religion can supply." Ignoring the clumsy and illogical wording, we ask for the evidence itself, which is not produced in this sermon. What Dr. Horton furnishes is assertion, not evidence. Does he think that intelligent men and women will be convinced by mere dogmatism? To assert that "the whole attitude of thought has changed" during the last ten years, and that "you cannot point to a first-rate thinker in Europe to-day who has not reached the conclusion" that religion supplies the truth which science cannot supply, proves nothing. What is needed is evidence that "the whole attitude of thought has changed," and that all the first-rate thinkers in Europe are at last on the side of religion. Will Dr. Horton be good enough to submit the name of one front-rank scientist whose whole attitude to religion has changed since the opening of our century, and also the book and page in which he has recorded the change? Nothing less can be regarded as worthy of the name of "clear evidence" on the point. What we find in the discourse under review is the repetition of assertions which are indubitably false. The overwhelming majority of present-day scientists are, from Dr. Horton's point of view, non-religious, and multitudes of them anti-religious. What authority is there for the statement that "the truth dawns upon the scientific mind to-day—a truth which once was merely a dogma but is now a proved fact—that religion is as integral a part of the spirit of man as any other thing which is essential to his constitution"? Absolutely none; but there is abundant authority for believing that religion, in Dr. Horton's sense of the word, so far from being an integral part of the human constitution, is entirely foreign to it. Dr. Horton's own profession is an uncompromising witness against his creed. He has dedicated his life to the task of keeping religion alive. His never-ceasing fight is against the general tendency to forget and neglect the so-called claims of God and eternity. There would have been absolutely no need of the millions of clergymen and churches in Christendom had religion been an integral part of our nature. What is the secret of the fierce opposition to the idea of Secular Education if not the unacknowledged consciousness that if religion ceased to be taught in the schools it would inevitably die out? Herbert Spencer cites many instances of people utterly devoid of religious ideas and emotions, and there are not a few thousands in our own land who are without a single atom of religion because it was not instilled into their minds when they were young. Dr. Horton is simply talking nonsense, therefore, when he avers that it is becoming "plain that there can be no humanity at all without religion," or that the exclusion of religion is "absolutely impossible," the incontrovertible fact being that people do exclude it in increasing numbers every year.

Dr. Horton's second "clear evidence," that religion and science are about to embrace each other, turns out to be as imaginary as the first. He contends that there is a growingly "acknowledged need of a religious or spiritual interpretation of life," and that "the conclusion that is reached is briefly this: that what we may call the Christian interpretation of the position is not only the best, but the only one that meets the case." Here, again, we have nothing but blind dogmatism. Not one attempt to supply proof is made. Instead of that, we are treated to a long rigmarole about the essential difference between *real* and *organised* Christianity, or between Christianity *itself* and its multitudinous forms. The Christianity of authority and orthodoxy, of creeds and councils, has admittedly failed, and it never provided a true interpretation of the world. Dr. Horton waxes irresistibly eloquent in denunciation of "the exploded authorities and irrational orthodoxies of centuries ago," but he cannot tell us what the Christian faith itself is, as distinguished from them. As a matter of fact, organised Christianity is the only Christianity in existence. However, the point that requires substantiation is that science is being converted to the Christian view of the world, and of this there is positively no evidence advanced. But there is ample proof at our disposal that Christians themselves are losing confidence in their own religion, and withdrawing from Christian fellowship. Instead of scientists turning Christians, we see Christians becoming Freethinkers.

Dr. Horton says: "You cannot point to a first-rate thinker in Europe to-day who has not reached my conclusion." The answer is, "Yes, we can point to hundreds of the foremost thinkers of the age who do not believe in the supernatural, and here are the names of two of them—Professor Haeckel and Dr. Metchnikoff." He is a reckless prophet who ignores the facts, and he injures rather than helps his cause. Only a few years ago Dr. Horton himself publicly deplored the fact that there was practically no real Christianity in all Christendom. If he was right then, he is wrong now; and even in this very sermon there is a virtual admission that his argument is unsound.

J. T. LLOYD.

### Wonder Workers.

THE alleged "wonder workers" of the world form a strange and varied army of knaves and fools. Some of them, it is safe to affirm, were self-deceived; but the majority merely practised their arts to delude and enslave their ignorant and credulous followers. A clever man may easily deceive an ignorant mob, but he cannot so easily deceive himself. He may play upon their credulity by an appeal to their passion for the wonderful and the inexplicable, but all the time he is conscious of the deception he is imposing upon their untrained minds. Some of the "miracle workers" of the Bible were in the position of being either very great knaves or motley fools of a decidedly despicable character. For instance, neither Moses nor Aaron could have imagined, for a single moment, that they could have wrought any of the great plagues they are alleged to have brought about by the flinging down, even in the most ostentatious or theatrical fashion, of a simple rod. They must have known that nature did not work in that way. The moment, therefore, either of them threw down the rod, they would have been undeceived. Nor can we imagine Joshua believing that the sun stood still at his command; although it is quite easy to understand how his ignorant and foolish followers could have been easily persuaded that their leader had accomplished this feat, because they were ignorant alike of astronomy and physics. But in the case of these early wonder workers it is safe to say that the writers of the Pentateuch were the real culprits. Out of their vivid and fertile imaginations these writers conceived and executed the whole story; and generation after generation of supersti-

tious people have had these fairy tales imposed upon them as necessary articles of their belief. If, on the other hand, we assume that the miracles alleged to have been wrought by the "holy men" of the past had any foundation in fact, we have to conceive of a time in which all the ordinary processes of nature were set aside by the Jewish God, for no better purpose than to frustrate the desires of an unbelieving Egyptian king, or to flatter the vanity of the Children of Israel.

Let us, however, examine some of the miracles said to have been performed by these "holy prestidigitators" of the past and see how far it was possible to believe that such persons honestly thought themselves capable of performing such wonders, or whether they were persons who were conscious all the time that they were deceiving the people who were simple minded enough to be taken in by their pretensions. Even to-day, when we boast of our civilisation and our enlightenment, a great showman like "Dr." Bodie could get vast multitudes of people to believe that he was capable of curing cripples by merely rubbing a little oil on the affected parts, and flourishing a "magic wand"; and that then they would be able to throw away their crutches, and walk off the stage, and go straight home entirely cured of their disease; and if such performances as these could get believers in the twentieth century, how much easier would it be for a man, surrounded by the halo of a religious prophet, to be able to command the belief of a credulous crowd more than two thousand years ago. Take, then, the miracle said to have been wrought by Elisha the prophet. A poor Shunammite woman has a child, and when the child has grown into a promising youth, he goes, like a good and industrious lad, to assist his father in the fields. The lad has not been at work long before he complains to his father of "his head." At his father's request he is conveyed home to his mother, upon whose knees he sits till noon, and then dies. In her grief at the loss of her child, the mother seeks Elisha and bids him restore her darling boy to life. Elisha does so. Closing the door after him, the "holy man" steps into the bedchamber, stretches himself upon the body of the dead boy, places his lips against those of the child, breathes between them the warm breath of life, and lo! presently the lad sneezes seven times, regains vitality, and rises from his death-bed in the full vigor of healthful life. In ages of faith, no doubt, such a story would seem credible enough, but to-day, when even most Christians believe in "universal causation," such a story is simply preposterous. Indeed, it cannot be admitted for a single instance that a human body, once smitten with the cold stroke of death, every function ceasing entirely to work, can, by any possible process, be restored to life; for to suppose otherwise would be to acknowledge that all our experience of nature is foolishness, and that supernatural phenomena have, can, and do happen in the world—a supposition which few, if any, real men of science would take for granted to-day. If the child were not really dead, but merely in a trance, then either the writer of the book of Kings or Elisha, or both, were deceived, and through them thousands of orthodox believers have been ignorantly duped. Perhaps the most natural assumption is that Elisha was the real offender. He lived in an age of ignorance and credulity when most people believed in the reality of miraculous occurrences; and being a "holy" man he probably thought it no crime to trade upon the weaknesses of his followers. It would be too great an assumption to suppose that Elisha believed himself capable of restoring the dead to life, for even if he believed he possessed such a capability, his utter incapacity to perform such a miracle would have soon undeceived him. The natural conclusion, therefore, is, that either the occurrence is altogether fictitious or that the child was not dead, and that Elisha merely restored the lad from a state of unconsciousness by a process purely natural and susceptible of a perfectly rational explanation.

A similar miracle is alleged to have been wrought by the Apostle Paul; in this case, however, a young man named Eutychus fell out of an upper chamber window, having fallen into a gentle sleep, after listening to an eloquent discourse by St. Paul, we are told that as he fell from the "third loft" he was taken up dead.

Standing in the presence of the multitude he had just addressed, Paul ran forward, and grasping the lifeless body of the young man, fell upon it, and then turning to the crowd exclaimed: "Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him."

Now, in this case, the language of St. Paul distinctly implies that though the multitude thought the young man "quite dead," the vital spark had not quite left him, and that when St. Paul embraced him he merely fanned the vital spark into a flame again. If this be so, it does away at once with the idea of the performance of a miracle. And yet the Christian divines who were responsible for summarising the contents of Acts xx. declare this chapter to contain an account of the "raising to life" of the dead body of Eutychus by the Apostle Paul, and in this, therefore, they are responsible for representing that St. Paul did in reality perform a miracle.

The alleged miracles of Jesus were not recorded, of course, as every student of history knows, until hundreds of years after the alleged events were supposed to have happened.

If Jesus had ever opened the eyes of the blind, made the deaf to hear, or the lame to walk, he would have assuredly gained a larger following than the Gospels represent him to have had, even up to the time of his arrest for sedition or blasphemy, or both. If, in addition to these wonders, he had been able to feed thousands of hungry people on a few small loaves and fishes, and on occasion to raise the dead to life, his disciples would never have forsaken him and fled; they would rather have stood steadfastly by him in the hour of trouble, for they would have known that he had the power within him of overcoming all his enemies. It is, therefore, more than probable that these stories of miracles were invented by people long after the death of Jesus, and they are recorded by the writers of the Gospels as though they are events which were believed to have happened, but of which they themselves were not eye-witnesses.

Of all alleged wonder workers, ancient and modern, it may be safely said that they were either self-deceived, ignorant fanatics, or cunning, pretentious knaves who imposed upon weak-minded, credulous, and superstitious people for their own profit and aggrandisement; and this conclusion is no less true, whether it applies to so-called religious wonder workers or more modern wonder workers, who make a profession of their public performances.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

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Once upon a time, before things had been made, God was a very clever artisan. Day and night he kept on working, and talked very little. But he was always inventing something new, suns, comets, and so on. He was once told:—

"You really ought to write a book and perpetuate these magnificent results."

"No," replied God, "nothing is as yet as perfect as I should like. Just let me complete my discoveries, and we'll see."

But one fine day God died, quite suddenly—perhaps of heart disease. His son, who was being brought up by the Jesuits, was at once called in. He was a gentle and zealous youth, without an inkling of practical mechanics. He was conducted into his father's workshop.

"Start away," they told him, "and govern the world."

The poor boy was in a quandary and asked:

"But how did my father do it?"

"Oh, he used to turn this wheel, and make this or that out of it."

The son is turning the wheel—and the engines are reversed.—*Stendhal*.

## Acid Drops.

Holy Russia lives under the most infamous despotism on earth. From her Christian Czar down to her Christian Cossacks, her terrorisers and tormentors are such a gang of devils that one searches history in vain for any parallel to them. No pagan nation of antiquity, of whom we have any record, would have put up with them for a month. We see that Nicholas Tchaykovsky, who was liberated on bail (provided by Englishmen) more than a year ago, and kept under surveillance ever since, is to be brought to trial next month. No doubt it is all properly arranged by this time that he shall be found guilty and duly sentenced. The better to secure this end they are going to bring him up with Katherine Breshkovsky, one of the grandest of the noble women who shine like stars in the black night of Russian tyranny. She has been kept in solitary confinement for two years in the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul (holy names!) and no doubt her fate is considered certain. By associating Tchaykovsky with her, on a charge of belonging to the Social Revolutionary Party, the authorities regard his doom as sealed.

Katherine Breshkovsky gave up a wealthy and fashionable life ever so many years ago to spread enlightenment and the love of freedom amongst the people. It maddens one to read the story of her sufferings in consequence. Take this sample: eight men escaped from the prison at Kara, and those who were left were all punished for it:—

"Cossacks entered our cells, seized us, tore off our clothes, and dressed us in convict suits alive with vermin. Taken to an old prison, we were thrown into the 'black holes.' Each of us had a stall 6ft. by 5ft. For three years we did not breathe the outside air. We struggled constantly against the outrages inflicted on us. After one outrage we lay like a row of dead women for nine days without touching food, until certain promises were finally exacted from the warder. The hunger strike was used repeatedly. To thwart it we were often bound hand and foot while Cossacks tried to force food down our throats."

One woman, who struck an official, after an intolerable insult, was lashed to death! These infamies go on year after year. Why? Is pity dead? Is resentment asleep? Is vengeance palsied? What has happened to the world that hundreds of millions of men and women eat and drink and sleep and enjoy themselves while knowing that these hellish outrages are perpetrated? This has happened. Christianity has effeminated the European world. Greeks and Romans would have hurled themselves at such devilry until they had overwhelmed it. Englishmen, Germans, Frenchmen, Italians, Spaniards, Dutchmen—yes, and Americans—just say "Poor devils!" and go to the theatre or the music-hall. It is the final triumph of Christianity over the healthiest instincts of mankind.

Notwithstanding the death of the infamous King Leopold, and the accession to the Belgian throne of a younger and "better" man, Mr. E. D. Morel has to draw Sir Edward Grey's attention to the fact that no improvement has taken place in the awful treatment of the Congo natives. "The enslavement and destruction of one of the finest races in Central Africa," he says, "has proceeded uninterrupted for the benefit of Belgian capitalists, with the complicity of the Belgian Government." All of them Christians! And the Catholic Church dignitaries refuse to say a word in condemnation of the crimes of Catholic scoundrels. Which is just like the priests of the vilest religion on earth.

Mr. William O'Brien, M.P., who is leading what is called the "All For Ireland Movement" in opposition to Mr. John Redmond's "Nationalist Movement," is kicking already against ecclesiasticism in politics. Addressing a big meeting at Cork, which is his stronghold, Mr. O'Brien referred to the action of the priests during the recent elections as "so foul and unnatural that Irish Catholics might well shrink from thinking of them, much less from discussing them in public." Later on he said that "if half a dozen ecclesiastics he could name had taken a month's holiday abroad after the dissolution of Parliament" not 1,000 votes would have been polled altogether in Cork City and Cork County in favor of the Redmond candidates. It was not political or social motives that actuated those who obeyed the behests of the clergy. Mr. O'Brien, in saying that, hits the nail right upon the head.

We agree with one of the speakers at a Birmingham rural-diaconal conference, that to offer a young man a game of billiards when your real object is to get him to church or to a Bible class is rather despicable. The remark was *apropos* of the relation of the Church to entertainments, a question of apparently great importance to the clergy. The difficulty

of the situation is that there is a growing disinclination to attend either church or Bible class as such. In spite of all the talk of man's ineradicable craving for religion and his deep-rooted necessity for worship, he seems to be getting rid of the ineradicable and to wear superficially the deep-rooted. At any rate, if men are to be brought to church they must be enticed there under false pretences. The Institutional Church is one of these pretences; billiard-rooms, clubs, discussions on social subjects, smoking conferences, are others. These are all so many baits held out to get people to attend church. They are never resorted to until the church attendance falls off, and with unconscious candor clergymen tell each other how effective they are for their purpose. And naturally the position galls clergymen of a sensitive and more straightforward nature. They would like to be honest and cannot. So they have to bear the, to them, humiliating spectacle of the "glorious Gospel" of Jesus playing a bad second to a discussion on main drainage or a game of billiards.

Father Bernard Vaughan has a keen eye for business. "If the working man in the incoming tide of democracy," he says, "is to sweep away all the barriers that have been raised against him, let the tide come in, but let God be on the crest of the wave." Which meaneth let the priests keep their jobs.

The Catholic Bishop of Salford refers to Mr. Bottomley's description of the John Bull League as "a religious body without a creed." He doesn't appear to understand it. Neither do we. Mr. Bottomley says of the League that—"Instead of thinking so much about the next life, its members will make the most of this. We quite understand that. It is Secularism "with a dash."

"Providence" should devote a little attention to the Rev. Lord William Cecil, rector of Hatfield. This innocent apostle of the only true faith had to speak at a Bible Society meeting in Coventry. Starting from Euston Station he got into the wrong train, and found himself stranded at Nuneaton. Procuring a motor-car, he had only proceeded a few miles when the vehicle was smashed up, and his lordship was landed in the hedge. Still alive, though shaken, his lordship took a tramcar to Coventry, but when he arrived there he could not find the hall in which he was to speak. Eventually he arrived at the place of duty at nine o'clock, and bravely spoke on "Christianity in the East." His subject ought to have been "Christianity on the Pole." North or South wouldn't matter.

The *Christian World* advises Mr. Silvester Horno to promote a private Members' Bill providing for the nominal rating of all places of worship. The reason for this is that some ratepayers are beginning to protest against Nonconformist chapels claiming relief from taxation on the ground of their being places of worship, and yet being utilised as places for political and other meetings. The Nonconformist Conscience is a most elastic instrument. Protesting against the State endowment of religion, it yet takes many thousands of pounds from the State in the shape of relief from taxation; and, having got this relief, in virtue of a principle in which it professes not to believe, violates even this arrangement by using chapels for other than religious purposes. And in this connection the advocacy of a "nominal" rate has a peculiarly mean look. Either dissenting places of worship ought or ought not to be rated. If they ought not, dissenters should refuse to pay *anything*. And if they ought to be rated, the suggestion of a "nominal" rate is just offering the community a portion of its just due in order that it may be induced to forego the rest. Verily, a country committed to the guidance of the Nonconformist Conscience deserves every honest man's sympathy.

According to Miss Alice Seymour, the present disciple—and about the only one, we should imagine—of Joanna Southcote, that prophetess foretold, a century ago, the Paris disaster. Because the French were "quite cold in love to Me" the "floodgates were to be opened and poured on man." We presume the "Me" refers to Jesus, not to Joanna. Any way, the French are warned. Their punishment has been a long time coming, but it has come at last. Unless the French suddenly become pious, their prosperity in the future will be determined by whether "Me" or their engineers prove the stronger. We feel inclined to back the engineers.

We see that Mrs. Eddy's Christian Science Church in America is credited with 85,000 members. It is said to have reached its maximum. We do not know how anyone can be quite sure of this, but we should be inclined to accept the

statement as correct. Movements of this kind never grow in the right sense of the word. They increase in size up to a certain point, because among so many millions of people there is bound to be a certain number that form suitable material for any kind of vagary. In this way any new religious movement, no matter how extravagant, may safely reckon upon a certain number of supporters. But so soon as this number has been selected its increase stops. There is, we repeat, no real growth. And the general mental and social development around tends to take from such bodies the power of recuperating the inevitable losses from death and desertion.

Rev. F. D. Pierce, vicar of Southend-on-Sea, has issued a sort of Lenten pastoral to his parishioners, ending with the usual godly reference to "funds" and "boxes." The vicar has a special message to Southend business men. He begs them to "try to acquire a sense of the Presence of God." From what we have heard of the business men of Southend-on-Sea they want to "acquire" something very different. If you wish to know what it is, ask the bankers. Southend tradesmen, for instance, adore the summer, worship the tripper, and love the ring of the cash-register beyond all the church music in the world.

Somebody poisoned the consecrated wine in a church at Villafranca, near Vienna, and when the priest drank it up (laymen not being allowed to imbibe the blood of Christ) he fell senseless on the altar steps. A doctor found that the wine contained sulphuric acid. The priest was taken to the hospital and is recovering. But it was a narrow escape. And if "Providence" cannot protect the holy cup, and the sacred blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, one wonders what "Providence" is good for.

The Bishop of London says that religion with no mystery is no religion at all. Well, we do not often find ourselves in agreement with this episcopal luminary, but we believe he is quite right on this point. A religion without mystery would be a mystery everyone could understand, therefore it would not be a religion at all. Besides, if a religion was not a mystery, no one would need to go to the Bishop to find out what it meant; and if it was not a mystery, how could he explain it? He is in the mystery business, and his occupation is to give to other people a mystery of a meaning in order that they may realise the meaning of a mystery. And in proportion as they remain in a mystery as to what the mystery means, or what the Bishop means, so is their religious strength quickened. Undoubtedly, a religion without mystery would be no religion for Bishop Ingram. For that would equal plain, common sense; and where would the Bishop be then, poor thing?

The Bishop, however, makes the fatal mistake of telling us what his mysteries are. This, we repeat, is a mistake; for when one deals in mysteries one should be content with proclaiming them. There are, he says, five mysteries about his religion, none of which we could ever have discovered by our unaided reason—the function of revelation being, apparently, to reveal something that we cannot understand. The first mystery is that there is "a living, loving Person at the centre of everything." We presume the condition of this mystery is the existence of pestilence, plague, disease, etc. The second is that although things may seem hard and unjust, yet things will be all right one day, and that throughout all our trouble "God meant intensely, and He meant well." (Was it not Cardinal Newman who scoffed at pleading "good intentions" as an excuse for one's blunders?) So we have the Bishop's word that God means well, and that when he afflicts a child with a loathsome disease because of its parents' misdeeds, he means well all the time. We do not quite see how this makes the case any better—the catastrophe is still there; but then if it was reasonable there would be no mystery and no religion.

Mystery number three is that "sin can be forgiven." The Bishop confesses he can't see the reason why it is forgiven, or how it is forgiven; it "is shrouded in not dark, but in beautiful mystery." (What is the difference between a "dark" and a "beautiful" mystery?) But we have to proclaim this secret to the world, and the fact of our not understanding it makes it intensely precious. The fourth mystery has to do with a future life. The Bishop confesses that when dying boys look up at him and say, ten minutes before they die (evidently it is a common experience, and that they ask the question just ten minutes before they die removes all question of its actuality) whether there is anyone to whom they are going, he would not be able, if he trusted to what he is pleased to call his reason, to answer them. But he can answer them because Jesus Christ told him the truth, and "if there is one person who

must know it is the Son of God." Well, if there is a God, and he has a Son, and if the Son came from heaven and told us all about it, then we suppose it is true. Only there seems a devil of a lot of "if" about it. Finally, there is the mystery of Grace. When people live honest, decent lives among demoralising surroundings, we are witnessing an illustration of the mystery of grace. As a Bishop, he has a proper religious faith in the bestiality of human nature and the impossibility of its being decent apart from some form of coercion. The grace of God is a mystery that "no human tongue" can explain, but it is there. If so, one feels that it might be shared out more liberally than is the case. And if it were only a function of the grace of God to confer common sense upon people, one might safely recommend the Bishop of London as a most deserving candidate.

Bishops blow hot or cold according to requirements. We have quoted several of them lately, including the Bishop of London, as deploring the great defection of the people from the Church. The Bishop of Stepney, however, preaching at St. Paul's during Lent, declared that there was "a keener spirit for the love of God now manifest than there has been for some time." The only evidence he appears to have given is that two hundred working men had come out in the wet to hear him lecture at Stoke Newington. What wonderful proof of the increasing care for religion! The nearest "pictures" probably had a far larger attendance.

Rev. Principal Forsyth indulges in a beautiful piece of impudence in last week's *British Weekly*. "The higher," he says, "judges the lower; and the test of Christianity is not to be found in any other form of religion. We have at the last a Christian criticism of all religion, and not a religious criticism of all Christianity." The cool audacity of this is almost sublime. Christians are to judge everything else; nobody is to judge Christianity! It is like the gentleman who talked of "me and God."

Dr. Forsyth may talk in this high and mighty way for the rest of his life, but he will not arrest the progress of what is called Comparative Religion. When the Christian religion is put beside others it looks remarkably like them. It has all the same common characteristics that they have. Students cannot help seeing that it is only one of the great historic faiths that have been woven, all of them, out of the raw material of primitive superstition. Put a madman in a room with others; he sees that *they* are all mad—and they all see that *he* is mad. And the disinterested spectator sees that he and they are *all* mad. That is how Comparative Religion works.

Mr. Justice Darling, in the Court of Criminal Appeal, refused to allow that a man who had killed a woman, remarking "God told me to do it for the lies she told," was not insane. "Are those," his lordship asked, "the words of a sane man? They are rather the words of a lunatic." Very likely. But what does Mr. Justice Darling think of many similar declarations in the Bible? If all the people who use the name of God foolishly and wickedly were detained as lunatics the asylums would have to be greatly enlarged. Heaps of them are highly respectable Christians who go to church regularly.

Rev. Ensor Walters is lecturing at Wesley Hall, Crookes, on "Modern Unbelief," a subject on which he seems to be inadequately informed. He declares that "the Atheism of Bradlaugh is dead." It is really more alive than Mr. Walters himself is. There are far more Atheists to-day than there were in Bradlaugh's time, even in England—and millions of them on the continent of Europe, particularly in France.

Having killed Atheism, for the benefit of his audience, Mr. Walters proceeded to explain why it couldn't live. It failed to satisfy the intellect, the heart, and the soul. Christianity gave peace. Atheism held out no comfort for the dying. That's it! Christianity is based on funk. It trades overlastingly on the fear of death. It is the most cowardly religion in the world. We are glad to say that Atheism does not compete with it in ministering to the selfishness and pusillanimity of the dying. In that respect Mr. Walters is right in saying that "Atheism does not satisfy." We do not regret the fact. We rejoice over it.

The *Sheffield Daily Independent* reporter remarked that, judging by the singing of the hymns, such as "Tell me the old, old story," "Mr. Walters' address had made a great impression on the large congregation." Very likely. They

were Christians. Atheists couldn't very well start singing hymns with such accuracy and gusto.

"George Eliot dropped her vital faith," we are told, "in the course of eleven days," and a clergyman blames her for undue haste in the matter. The real wonder is, however, that the process spread itself over so long a period. We know of one who fought against unbelief for twenty years; but at the last, one moment sufficed to expose the infinite folly of belief. He marvels now that he was able to believe the unbelievable even for one hour. It is easy enough to sneer at "a young fellow who was burning all his boats and refusing henceforth to sail these vast, mysterious, glorious seas, and all because he had read a little pamphlet of not more than fifty pages from cover to cover." A sensible pamphlet of fifty pages is worth immeasurably more than ten million bulky volumes chock-full of intricate and contradictory theological speculations, especially when it effects the emancipation of a human mind.

A famous divine exclaims, "Don't let one month's hasty reading turn your backs upon the undiscovered glories of the spiritual world." What an absurd exhortation! The spiritual world itself is as yet undiscovered. Many people believe in its existence, but nobody has ever found it, or met anyone who had. How silly, then, to talk about turning one's back upon the "undiscovered glories" of an undiscovered world!

A Church parson near Birmingham has taken out licences for two male servants, two four-wheeled carriages, and one trap. A worthy disciple of the poor and lowly Jesus! Who says it pays to be a Christian? The idea is scandalous.

Lenton, a suburb of Nottingham, is not too full of piety. The local *Daily Express* reckons the population as about 16,436, and gives the following religious statistics:—

Attending no place of worship ...	2,805
Attendance merely nominal and casual ...	2,227
Attending church very irregularly...	1,755
Nonconformists (one-fourth nominal) ...	4,477
Roman Catholics (some merely nominal) ...	303
Attending churches in town ...	1,794
Attending Lenton Church and S.-Schools ...	3,074

Bad as this is, from the Churches' point of view, it is not as bad as some of the London figures given a few years ago by the *Daily News*.

While the inquiry into the religious riots at Liverpool is going on Catholics and Protestants are threatening to murder each other, and the Commissioner has to promise that the police will afford protection to both parties. If they can! Oh, the gentle Jesusites!

Catholic Trade Unionists, at the instigation of their priests, are trying desperately to get Secular Education deleted from the Trade Union Congress program. They have been holding a meeting, and talking great nonsense, at Newport. Secular Education is not a religious question at all. It is a purely civic question. How shall the nation's money be spent? Not on religious education, the Trade Unionists say, for that is a personal matter on which all sorts of citizens have all sorts of opinions. Secular instruction shall be given in the nation's schools, and parents shall be left free to have their children instructed in religion by teachers of their own selection—elsewhere and at their own expense. Surely that is equal freedom for all. What moral right have Catholics to more?

"A Mother of Six," in the *Hull Daily Mail*, with reference to the exclusion of Mr. Wells's newest novel from the Public Libraries, suggests that the Committee should push their crusade more vigorously. All the doubtful passages in the Library books should be marked with red ink. "The Bible, I am sure," the lady says, "would need a bottle to itself." Yes, a shilling bottle.

A school inspector up north, in Caledonia stern and wild, asked whether any boy or girl could tell him how Noah spent his time in the Ark. "Please, sir, he wad fish," said one boy. The inspector admitted that he might. But another boy interposed with the correction that Noah couldn't fish very long "because there were only twa worms in the Ark." These board-school boys! Luckily the Bible got written before those infernally acute little demons appeared upon the scene.

Prebendary Webb-Peploe presented to the Directors of the Great Northern Railway Company a memorial signed by

2,629 shareholders calling upon the Company to abolish Sunday goods traffic and all Sunday excursion trains. The latter, he said, were a disgrace to the Company. Lord Allerton, the chairman, suavely remarked that "they were the servants of the public." "Servants of the Lord!" the reverend gentleman exclaimed. Suavely still, the chairman replied, "The rev. gentleman's ideal is a high one, but quite impossible." Some day or other he may have to tell the Prebendary that different trades naturally take different views of Sunday business.

The *Daily Chronicle* is issuing a Western Edition, and it evidently counts on a lot of sloppy readers in that part of England. In the number dated February 11 there was a long account, with portrait, of a wonderful man called Charles R. Parsons, who industriously cultivates the Lord's vineyard, and probably his own, at Bristol. Long, long ago he heard "a voice" telling him not to go abroad but to stay and convert the heathen at home. He took the tip, and it seems to have agreed very well with him. He also claims that it has agreed very well with the Bristol heathen. Only the Lord knows the vast number he has converted. Unbelievers have found Jesus, and "Atheists have been restored to a belief in the verities of revelation." We should ask Mr. Parsons for the name and address of one—only one—but we are sure it would be a waste of time. As for the *Chronicle*, we are equally sure that it is merely trying to "earn an honest halfpenny." We can hardly conceive that its editor or its staff believe this stuff about the converted atheists. For our own part, we do not recollect that we ever heard of Mr. Parsons before. But we see that "Bristol reveres him"—so that's all right.

It appears that a number of Jews are embracing Christianity in Russia. They are doing this to avoid persecution and for the sake of advancement. The conversion movement, indeed, is assuming such astonishing proportions that the Christians themselves are getting alarmed. They fear the inrush of sharp rivals in business and the professions; they also fear they will soon have nobody to torture and murder for Christ's sake—and that is the worst infliction of all.

#### GODLINESS OF MY GRANDPA.

My grandpa loved the Holy Book,  
He read it through and through;  
And something told his saintly soul  
That every word is true.  
He learned about the fall of man,  
Then fell upon his knee;—  
And what was good enough for him  
Is good enough for me.

My grandpa fed the swine with swill,  
And taught the Sunday-school;  
He purged and scoured the sinful souls,  
Until as white as wool.  
So loud his tone and deep his groan,  
Jehovah heard his plea;—  
And what was good enough for him  
Is good enough for me.

My grandpa traded horse and mulo,  
Was keen to sell and buy;  
He doctored up the scrawny nags,  
And made them young and spry.  
His love of God condoned the fraud,  
As Christly men agree;—  
And what was good enough for him  
Is good enough for me.

My grandpa quaffed his quart of rum  
On every Sabbath day;  
It flushed his face with godly grace,  
And gave him power to pray.  
He damned the doubters all to hell,  
Fulfilled the Lord's decree;—  
And what was good enough for him  
Is good enough for me.

—Charlie Church.

#### THE PRAYERFUL LADY.

A lady who ordered some caracul coats to be sent up on "appo." on Saturday returned them on the Monday following with the message, "None wore suitable." The next morning she received a courteous communication from the head of the department returning her prayer book, which had been found in the pocket of one of the coats.



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, February 20, St. James's Hall, Great Portland-street, London, W.; at 7.30, "Wit, Wisdom, and Humanity in Shakespeare's Comedies."

February 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.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—February 20, Liverpool; 27, St. James's Hall. March 6, Manchester; 20, St. James's Hall; 27, Holloway.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: 1910.—Previously acknowledged £159 1s. 6d. Received since:—P. Q., £2 2s.; H. Jessop, £5; J. F. Aust, 2s. 6d.; T. J. S., 10s.; A. Clarke, 10s.; J. H. Ridgway, 5s.; P. Ridgway, 2s. 6d.; R. Taylor, 5s.; J. Partridge, 5s.

T. M. MORLEY.—Sorry we cannot indicate the authorship of the lines.

W. LODWICK.—Rather an odd thing— isn't it?—for the Rev. Herbert Tracey to sign a circular in which the Rev. Herbert Tracey is described as "a deep thinker and an able preacher." Pleased you feel that you "never read anything approaching the *Freethinker*," and glad to have your good wishes.

H. JESSOP, subscribing to the President's Honorarium Fund says: "I hope you will have more encouragement from the *Freethinkers* this year than ever before. My opinion is, if they don't get value for their money they are very hard to please, and will never get it."

J. F. AUST.—You omitted the name of the speaker.

W. R. DAWSON.—Thanks for reference.

F. NEWINGTON.—(1) "B. V.," under which James Thomson contributed poetry and articles to *Freethought* journals, was a contraction of "Bysshe Vanolis"—"Bysshe" being one of Shelley's names, and "Vanolis" the pen-name of a German poet by whom Thomson was much influenced. (2) Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night*, with a fine selection of his other poems, is published in a handsome volume at 2s. 6d. by B. Dobell, Charing Cross-road, London. (3) It is not "a fact that the late G. J. Holyoake was the last person imprisoned for 'Atheism' as distinct from 'Blasphemy.'" This is a legend industriously cultivated by Holyoake's "respectable" friends. No man ever was imprisoned in England for "Atheism" during the last three hundred years. Holyoake was prosecuted, tried, found guilty, and sentenced under the Common Law of Blasphemy; just as Carlile, Southwell, Taylor, Paterson, Matilda Roafe, and others were. Whoever denies it is grossly ignorant or a wilful liar. It is no use mincing language. The time has evidently come for the plainest speech.

JOSEPH HYDER.—Your friend "A. J. O.'s" paper on Altruism is able and interesting, though it contains nothing particularly new. He might have strengthened it by pointing out that all beauty in organic nature is founded on utility, and that it is only a development of this law that moral beauty should be founded on social utility.

T. J. S.—You say that the Swansea friends, who subscribe through you, are "quite anxious" as to our next visit to Aberdare. We shall be happy to pay that visit in April or May.

A. R. HUNT.—It is not a prosecution for blasphemy. A prosecution for blasphemy means a prosecution under the Blasphemy Laws. We did not open our columns for subscriptions in the case you refer to; neither do we intend to do so now. To collect money to hand over to the authorities is no part of our business, and is never likely to be. Scores of women have gone to prison on principle rather than pay fines for doing what, rightly or wrongly, they thought they had a right to do. It is a pity to see inferior courage in the other sex.

W. BRACE.—You ask whether Charles Bradlaugh was a Greek scholar. This phrase may have several meanings. Bradlaugh knew Greek, at least as far as the New Testament is concerned.

A. H. BATBURST.—It was not a reply to our paragraph, and our space is limited.

P. KIGHT.—We cannot answer such questions by post. The passage refers to extinguishing sexual passions by bodily mutilation for the kingdom of heaven's sake. This remedy appears to have been resorted to by the greatest of the early Fathers—Origen.

H. J. H. writes: "During the year 1909 I made a list of parsons mentioned in your 'Acid Drops' as having died worth a considerable sum of money. The number was 48, and the total amount left was £2,403,840." Of course there were many such "poor" men of God that we did not mention.

DORIS FINNEY.—Plenty of Catholics were burnt to death by Protestants under Henry VIII. and Elizabeth. From that time till the Catholic Emancipation Act passed last century Catholics had no political rights in England and few civil rights. Protestant laws against Catholics (the bulk of the population) in Ireland were perfectly infamous. We heard the late Lord

Chief Justice Coleridge, himself a Protestant, say from his seat of justice at the Law Courts that those penal laws, which lasted in Ireland for 150 years, were without a parallel in the history of the world.

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

JAMES DAVIDSON.—See paragraph.

S. TYSON.—Thanks, though we don't see much to criticise; perhaps the sermons would afford more matter.

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

FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

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

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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.

There was an improved audience at St. James's Hall on Sunday evening, and Mr. Foote's lecture on "Shakespeare's Personality" was listened to with the profoundest attention and enthusiastically applauded at the finish. Several questions were asked and answered afterwards. Mr. Charlton made an excellent chairman.

Mr. Foote occupies the St. James's Hall platform again this evening (Feb. 20), his subject being "Wit, Wisdom, and Humanity in Shakespeare's Comedies." This is an entirely new lecture, and should prove very attractive. We hope the improvement in the audiences will continue and increase. Last Sunday's audience largely consisted of outsiders drawn by the newspaper and other advertisements of Mr. Foote's lecture. The "saints" were not present in as strong force as they ought to have been. It puzzles us to understand why they don't make better use of this splendid opportunity at St. James's Hall.

Mr. Lloyd delivers two lectures to-day (Feb. 20), afternoon and evening, in the Alexandra Hall, Islington-square, Liverpool. Local "saints" please note.

A correspondent, who says he will "never forget the pleasure of shaking hands with Mr. Foote at Leicester after the lecture on Shakespeare's Religion," adds some very interesting details respecting himself. "I must tell you," he says, "that the *Freethinker* gets better. It is indeed an intellectual treat. I have been changed by it from a wild irresponsible youth into a thoughtful serious-minded man. Five years ago I was the most promising youthful aspirant to pugilistic honors, the holder of two ten-stone boxing championships, and was looked upon as the coming local fistic star. Now my Christian friends regard me as something of a 'phenomenon,' a person setting up 'the highly dangerous example' of living a moral life without 'religion.' And the clericals rave about the 'demoralising influences' of Secularism! May you live many more years to fight the black-coated army." We think our readers will agree with us that this is a very interesting letter.

Here is another interesting letter from a correspondent who, in subscribing to the President's Honorarium Fund, writes as "P. Q.," and gives no other trace of his identity. "I enclose £2 2s.," he says, "as part payment of a debt due to the *Freethinker*, which I have taken for the last ten years, and which is, if possible, a greater treat to me on Thursday evenings than ever. It has completely restored me to vigorous health. Not a trace of superstition or supernaturalism left. May you continue long at the helm to guide and direct." The letters we have received in connection with the Honorarium Fund since January 1, might easily turn heads that were not set on firmly. We are glad to state, in all sincerity, that they have a very different effect on us. They make us feel humble in the midst of a certain honest pride. The good we are able to do is so much owing to the great and heroic men who have been our own inspiration. We bow our head in silent reverence over their

memories, and in infinite gratitude that we have been permitted to add even a single stone to the mountain of their achievements.

An effort is being made to revive Freethought organisation at Nottingham. Lectures are being delivered on Sunday evenings at the Cobden Hall, Peachey-street. The admission is free, and questions and discussion are invited. Mr. Joseph Bates is taking part in this effort.

Under the heading of "Equal Freedom for All" the New York *Truthseeker* produces our reply to Mr. Thomas Shore's criticisms on our argument that when a Christian Church is disestablished and disendowed it becomes a purely voluntary association, just like the National Secular Society, and its members are entitled to all the rights of citizenship, including that of free combination for lawful purposes. The editor says that some American Freethinkers think "Mr. Foote goes too far," but Mr. George Macdonald evidently doesn't agree with them. Indeed, it is difficult to see how any man could go too far in consistency to his own principles. With respect to a reply to Mr. Foote, Mr. Macdonald says: "We leave that task to be performed here by somebody else." We shall be glad to see what our opponents on this point have to say. We hope they won't waste time in arguing that the Catholic Church is as bad as a wild beast, for that is precisely what the Catholic Church thinks and says of every Freethought leader. We thank Mr. Macdonald, in any case, for placing our arguments and warnings before his readers.

Mr. A. B. Moss visits Leicester to-day (Feb. 20), after a long absence, and lectures at the Secular Hall, Humberstone-gate, in the evening, on "The Philosophy of Life in the Twentieth Century."

Mr. F. J. Gould is leaving Leicester for London, where he is to fill an educational engagement in connection with the Moral Instruction League. Mr. Gould went to Leicester as secretary and organiser to the local Secular Society, and did an excellent work, which he terminated himself by throwing himself into Positivism and starting a little Church of Humanity. This, however, has not been a success from the point of view of members, and Mr. Gould is entering another field of activity, which he regards as his proper sphere, and for which he has certainly some very special qualifications. Mr. Gould gives a long and interesting account of his career in the *Midland Free Press*. He mentions his contact with Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, and adds—"Later on I became acquainted with Mr. G. W. Foote, and am still glad to retain Mr. Foote's friendship." We wish Mr. Gould all success in London. He assuredly deserves it. His great ability and integrity are unquestionable, and he is pressing forward in a special direction for which he is peculiarly fitted. But he will, perhaps, pardon us for saying that we see nothing in his Positivism which has not been presented by the best advocates of Socialism during the past forty or fifty years. Mr. Gould calls it "religion" and Secularists do not use the word. That is all the difference. And, as Shakespeare says, what's in a name?

Mr. Bertram Dobell, the author-publisher, of Charing Cross-road, has just issued a new edition of his volume of selections from the poetry of James Thomson ("B. V."). Although the price is now reduced from 8s. 6d. to 2s. 6d., the new edition is handsomely got up in every respect,—paper, printing, and binding being all excellent. The volume contains not all, but most, of Thomson's best work, including *The City of Dreadful Night*, which is generally accounted his masterpiece, and constitutes him the poet of atheistic-pessimism. One of the characters in that poem distinctly proclaims, "There is no God," and offers the fact as a consolation to all human beings who suffer or despair.

#### AFTERWARDS.

Some day the sun will rise, but I shall rise  
 No more its warmth and radiance to enjoy,  
 But lie a cold unconscious sacrifice  
 To ravening time's fierce passion to destroy;  
 And will the world when I am gone proceed,  
 Oblivious of me, on its common way?  
 Forlorn of me, will it not feel some need,  
 Some premonition of its own decay?  
 Perish such vain and childish thoughts as these!  
 The taper's use is o'er when fails its light:  
 Gladly shall fall my outworn energies  
 Into the bosom of the Infinite,  
 Grateful that I so many years have been  
 An actor on so vast and strange a scene!  
 —Bertram Dobell, "A Century of Sonnets."

## The Narratives in Genesis.

### ISRAEL AND JUDAH.

THE name in the earliest times by which a confederation of the tribes inhabiting Canaan came to be known was that of "Israel," an appellation which signifies "God fighteth." The exact date at which this confederacy was first formed, or the names of the tribes which were originally known by that name, are matters shrouded in mystery. We know, however, that during the period in which the peoples of Canaan were subject to the Egyptian kings (B.C. 1600-1250) no tribes rejoicing in the name of "Israel" were in that country. It must, then, have been after the latter date, when the Egyptians found themselves unable longer to maintain their domination over that country, that some of the semitic tribes of Canaan united for mutual protection. The necessity for some such course is shown in 1 Sam. xi.

In the most ancient document in the Old Testament—the "Song of Deborah," Judges v.—we find mentioned the names of the tribes that fought for Yahveh under the name "Israel." These are given as follows: the Ephraimites (who are said to have been related to the Amalekites); the tribes of Benjamin, Machir, Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali. The tribes of the confederacy that did not come to the help of Yahveh were Gilead, Dan, and Asher. The "watercourses of Reuben" are mentioned as a well-known locality, but no tribe of that name is referred to. Machir and Gilead are in the later books of the Pentateuch described as families of the tribe of Manasseh. The tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, and Gad are not named, and did not apparently belong to the confederation.

Later Hebrew writers represent all the tribes mentioned, including those unknown to the ancient composer of Judg. v., as descended from one man, a mythical ancestor of Jacob, whose name they allege to have been changed to "Israel" by their tribal deity, Yahveh. According to the Yahvistic writer, Jacob, after his return from Paddan-aram, "rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two handmaids, and his eleven children, and passed over the ford of Jabbok.....And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." This man, as we learn from the sequel, was Jacob's god; and Jacob was apparently a better wrestler than the god had counted on; for neither of the two could master the other, though they wrestled all night. Perceiving this, the god struck or caught hold of his antagonist below the belt, and put Jacob's thigh out of joint; but Jacob still held him firmly. The god, not caring to be seen by daylight, said "Let me go, for the day breaketh"; but Jacob, still holding on, replied "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." The god then asked him his name, and upon being told "Jacob," said "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but *Israel*: for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed." Jacob now wished to know the name of the god; but this the latter declined to give, and after blessing him departed. "And Jacob called the name of the place *Peniel* [i.e., "the face of God"]: for he said, I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen. xxxii. 22-32). The last statement calls to mind a saying alleged to have been uttered by Jesus—"No man hath seen God at any time." It also reminds us of the statement in Gen. i. 27—"And God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him." It is evident from the foregoing and several other Old Testament narratives that the Hebrew sacred writers believed their god to be of man-like form. After the injury to his thigh, Jacob, we are told, limped in his gait, and the Israelites in commemoration of this great wrestling match "eat not the sinew of the hip which is upon the hollow of the thigh *unto this day*"—a clear proof of the historical character of the story. It may here be noted that Jacob's encounter with his god took place on the eastern side of the Jordan, about fifteen miles from that river.

We have next to notice the account of this change of name by the Priestly writer (Gen. xxxv. 9-15). This writer says:—

"And God appeared unto Jacob again when he came out of Paddan-aram, and blessed him. And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob; thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel.....And God went up from him in the place where he spake with him.....And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him *Beth-el*."

In this account there is no wrestling between Jacob and his god. The name is not given because Jacob had "striven with God and men, and had prevailed." The writer assigns no reason for the change of name. Moreover, he says that the change was made at Beth-el, a place about twenty miles west of the Jordan, and forty miles distant from the Peniel in the Yahvist narrative. The god—whose name in the second account is given as El Shaddai—had evidently forgotten that he had already changed the wily patriarch's name some time before at another place. Even Jacob himself had apparently forgotten that his name had been changed; otherwise he would naturally have said, "Why, good Lord, don't you remember? You named me 'Israel' ten years ago, on the night we had that tussle on the banks of the Jabbok." Both stories are, of course, pious fictions. Jacob, we know, was a Canaanitish god, who in more ancient times had been worshiped in at least one city in Canaan. The comparison of the two stories serves to illustrate how the early Bible history was written: gods are represented as ancestors, and stories are invented to account for names, etc.

According to the narratives in the Pentateuch, all the tribes of Israel were the descendants of twelve sons of the mythical Jacob, and, after being bondmen in Egypt, had left that country and invaded Canaan, where they overthrew and exterminated the original inhabitants, including the armies of thirty-one kings. The conquest completed, they divided the land by lot amongst themselves, and twelve tribes (omitting Levi) took possession of it. Whatever substratum of fact may underlie this story, the story itself is certainly not historical. There was no conquest of the land like that described in the book of Joshua; there were not twelve tribes that were known by the name of *Israel*; the largest and most important of the Hebrew tribes—the tribe of Judah—was never known by the name "Israel." From the earliest times there appear to have been in Palestine an Israel and a Judah, as in later times. According to the Bible account, Saul, David, and Solomon reigned over the whole twelve tribes; but upon the accession of Rehoboam, all the tribes save one (Judah) revolted, and made Jeroboam their king, after which time there were two kingdoms in Canaan—Israel and Judah (1 Kings xii. 20; 2 Kings xvii. 18). It is implied that only from this date was Judah separate from Israel; but Judah appears never to have belonged to that confederation of tribes. If we go back half a century, we find that when David numbered the men in his kingdom the numbers were thus given: Israel 800,000 men, Judah 500,000 men (2 Sam. xxiv. 9). If we go back another three-fourths of a century, we find the number of fighting men given as follows: "The children of Israel were 800,000, and the men of Judah 80,000" (1 Sam. xi. 8). In the latter case the men of Judah, though not Israelites, made common cause with Israel for obvious reasons; but it is doubtful whether they ever gave their allegiance to Saul (who had just been anointed king), for during the latter part of his reign they made David king, who reigned in their chief city, Hebron, for seven and a half years until he became king over "all Israel and Judah" (2 Sam. ii. 2; v. 5). David was himself a man of Judah, besides being a popular hero, which accounts for the honor done to him by the men of Judah; otherwise David and Solomon might have reigned over Israel only.

With regard to the others, Levi originally was not a tribe at all, but a god. The Levites appear to have been the old priests of Canaan. In the book of

Judges we meet with two of these individuals strolling about looking for something to do (xvii. 7; xix. 1). The accounts in the Pentateuch of quite an army of Levites in attendance upon a grand Tabernacle of the Congregation are pure fiction: there was never any such Tabernacle in existence. The tribe of Simeon was one only in name. Wellhausen thinks that there really was such a tribe, but that it was annihilated when assisting Judah to take possession of fresh territory, as stated in Judg. i., 3, 17. The latter book, however, really commences with iii. 5, the earlier portion being added by the compiler to connect the narratives with the book of Joshua. This book also contains some minor interpolations, such as Judg. xviii. 30; xx. 18; xx. 27-28 (Phineas and the ark). As to the tribe of Gad, we learn from the Moabite Stone that "the men of Gad dwelt in the land from of old"; that is to say, they were from the earliest times a Canaanitish tribe that lived on the east of Jordan.

ABRACADABRA.

## Good Without God.

BY GEORGE MACDONALD.

COMMANDER PEARY may have discovered the Pole, but whether he did or not he found something much more valuable. In the February number of *Hampton's Magazine* he gives a sketch of the Greenland tribe of Eskimos that he employed in his polar travels. The significance of his statements, we hope, will be carefully noted:—

"The members of this little tribe inhabiting the western coast of Greenland from Cape York to Etah," Commander Peary says, "are in many ways different from the Eskimos of Danish Greenland, or those of any other Arctic territory. There are now between 220 and 230 in the tribe. They are savages, but they are not savage; they are without government, but they are not lawless; they are utterly uneducated according to our standard, yet they exhibit a remarkable degree of intelligence. In temperament like children, with all a child's delight in little things, they are, nevertheless, enduring as the most matured of civilised men and women, and the best of them are faithful unto death.

Without religion and having no idea of God, they will share their last meal with anyone who is hungry, while the aged and the helpless among them are taken care of as a matter of course. They are healthy and pure blooded; they have no vices, no intoxicants, no bad habits—not even gambling. Altogether they are a people unique upon the face of the earth. A friend of mine calls them philosophic Anarchists of the North."

We are not sure that Mr. Peary has done altogether right in describing his find, for the knowledge that a people anywhere exists without God and religion and the other vices of civilisation, will not be long endured by our missionaries before setting forth for the western coast of Greenland in the determination to change the condition of the inhabitants. There is a theory well-established among religious people, though considerably weakened by scientific exploration, that there is nowhere to be found a tribe of men with no conception of God, religion, and a future life. Christians hold firmly to this view that God and religion and the hereafter are innate in man, and in their minds it does not apparently conflict with their other doctrine that Christ came to bring immortality to the knowledge of the world.

As a mate to the dogma just mentioned, we have the one that the virtues flourish only where Christianity is accepted. One of the weapons in the armory of faith is a passage, to which the name of James Russell Lowell is forged, declaring that there are not ten square miles of territory on earth where human life is safe except where the gospel of Christ has been preached. Lowell never said it, and it has never been true. Moreover, there are not ten square miles on earth where Christianity has been preached that have not been the scene of the sacrifice of human life, and life is no safer after the preaching of the doctrine than before.

The West Greenland Eskimos owe their escape from Christian civilisation to their isolated position, which may for some time to come serve to protect them from invasion. Their land is not worth stealing. For the benefits of civilisation they have nothing to offer in exchange except fish, furs, and their exemplary habits, and they will be the losers if they ever swap those for law and gospel. When the Christian missionary to the heathen contemplates the evils which have followed his advent, his compassion as a man might influence him to spare these children of nature. His religion, however, will vote the other way; and that he will consent to let the Eskimos continue as (in the religious view) God made them, is too much to hope. These people have morals not Christian. There may be family relations which Christianity requires should be broken up. If the Eskimo is satisfied with his hut and with the subsistence he gains without manual labor, the missionaries will see that this is changed. He will be set at work constructing houses to live in and will die in them at a rapid rate. There is no way of averting the inevitable. Let us record the existence at present of a people virtuous and happy without religion, and orderly without government, and as such bid them good-bye. They are discovered, which means that they are undone.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

### Recent Lucretian Literature.

*Lucretius: Epicurean and Poet* (1906), John Masson.

*Lucretius: Text and Notes* (1906), W. A. Merrill.

*De Lucreti Carmine* (1902), Van der Valk.

*Lucretius on Life and Death, and Lucretius*, W. H. Mallock.

Mr. MASSON'S book contains most of his articles contributed to the *Classical Review* during the past twenty-five years. His essay estimating Lucretius' contribution to the atomic theory was published in 1884, and since then he has evidently kept well abreast of Lucretian criticism. At the same time, his exposition is not always trustworthy. This is especially the case when he is comparing Lucretian views on the constitution of matter with those of modern scientists. A profound knowledge of nineteenth and twentieth-century research is required for an exact estimate of the points of resemblance, and of difference, between Lucretius and the science of to-day. It may well be that Mr. Masson possesses that knowledge, but most of the "modern" works quoted by him were published previously to 1884. The Roman poet himself speaks as one uttering the last word on questions on which no last word ever can be uttered; but those who are receiving every day fresh reports of the investigations of natural science will carefully refrain from exaggerating such resemblance as there may be between Lucretian and twentieth-century physics, or from reading into Lucretius an attitude towards modern views which he could not possibly have maintained. Thus Mr. Masson, referring to variability of species—one of the difficult problems of modern biology—says (p. 173):—

"Had the theory of variation of species been actually presented to Lucretius by any contemporary philosopher, we can easily imagine him denouncing it from the standpoint of Epicurean science, because it contradicted the law of fixity of type, criticising it shrewdly enough, and asking where in Nature we see one species passing by long leaps, or even by short ones, into another."

But it is impossible to conceive a "contemporary philosopher" presenting the theory of variation, in any intelligible sense of the phrase, to Lucretius. The very discussions on this question that have been taking place during the past twenty-five years could only arise at a period when biology had already become a highly developed and specialised science, and when the microscope and the laboratory had revealed whole worlds of life unknown to the writers of antiquity. Lucretius himself is constantly re-

mind his hearers that they must proceed slowly, "step by step," along all lines of inquiry. Mr. Masson is on firmer ground when he says (p. 166):—

"When we review Lucretius's explanation of the origin and history of life upon the earth, we see that it is based on a clear conception of Darwin's doctrine, that in the organic world none but the fittest continue to exist, because these alone have been able to perpetuate themselves."

In v. 855-61 the poet certainly speaks of a "struggle for existence" resulting in the elimination of the unfit. Indeed, throughout the fifth book we feel so powerfully that Lucretius desires to impress us with a sense of the constant "struggle" towards improved and refined conditions of life, social and individual, that it is difficult to understand what Mr. Masson means by saying (p. 218) that the poet is "singularly blind to all that is implied in Life," and (p. 219) that "there must have been something abnormal, something unhealthy, in the nature of Lucretius before one great human instinct could have been thus seared within him." The "one great human instinct" is the supposed desire for immortality; but if the poet is to be condemned in this fashion, characterised as dismatured because he has attempted "to reconcile men to the thought of eternal death," it is certain that many others, whose thought and work have not been without influence on the hearts and minds of their race, must be placed in the same category. Would anyone dream of suggesting that there was something unhealthy in the nature of George Eliot? Yet she opposed the view of personal immortality with quite Lucretian energy. (Cf. Frederick Myers, *Essays*, and O. Browning, *Life*, p. 152.) And Mommson's opinion on any question concerning Roman literature or history is also entitled to respect. He tells us (*History of Rome*, vol. v., pp. 477-8):—

"Of all views of the world possible to a tender and poetically organised mind in the kindred Cæsarian age, this was the noblest and the most ennobling, that it is a benefit for man to be released from a belief in the immortality of the soul, and thereby from the evil dread of death and of the gods which malignantly steals over men like terror creeping over children in a dark room..... The man who, with a reverence for his great predecessors and a vehement zeal, to which the century elsewhere knew no parallel, preached such doctrine and embellished it with the charm of art, may be termed at once a good citizen and a great poet."

Professor Merrill's edition is a noble contribution to the literature of the subject. The notes are particularly valuable, and the Introduction is a veritable storehouse of references. Perhaps there are too many quotations and footnotes: one would have gladly had the professor's own views a little oftener. Occasionally, however, he ventures an opinion of his own. Thus he says of Tanaquil Faber's statement that Lucretius should not be read by boys, that the charge is removed "by the freedom and strength of true religion in our day." Most of us have heard something like this before. The professor also feels constrained to inform us that, "granting the principles of the system, absurd as they are, the atoms and void need explanation still; the problem of a creator and a providential divinity is simply pushed farther back." The aforesaid creator has been going backward for some time, and at present seems unlikely ever again to come to the front. Men are beginning to cease asking for an "explanation" of existence, and instead are taking a direct view of things. It seems strange that all editors and commentators speak at length of the influence of Lucretius on Tennyson and Shelley, but hardly ever say a word about Matthew Arnold. Many references to Lucretius are found in Arnold's prose writings, and when we turn to his poetry we find repeatedly both thought and language that recall the Roman. Doubtless the sonnet, "The Better Part," will at once suggest itself to some readers. Here one "long fed on boundless hopes" and angrily "spurning all simpler fare" is depicted as asking why we should forbear "from sin which Heaven records not," and giving his own answer that we may

as well, "like brutes," live "our live without a plan":—

"So answerest thou; but why not rather say:  
'Hath man no second life? Pitch this one high!'"

(Cf. L. iii., 955, seq.) Resignation to the law of death and mortality is as marked a note in Arnold's poetry as it is in Lucretius and George Eliot.

"We, O Nature, depart,  
Thou survivest us! this,  
This, I know, is the law."  
—"The Youth of Man."

"This is the law"; but that is no reason why we should fail to grasp the fulness of the Present. Better far, he urges, to keep our gaze on life here, with its joyousness or its turmoil, than on a strange Beyond where all things shall be made new. To have life to the full here, ever regarding any truth as more welcome than any lie, and opposing all that mars or enervates human thought—that is the predominating thought in both poets.

"Let him live, let him feel: *I have lived.*  
Heap up his moments with life."  
—"Early Death and Fame."

Compare, too, with the general thought of the conclusion of book iii. the well-known stanzas in "Empedocles on Etna":—

"Is it so small a thing  
To have enjoyed the sun,  
To have lived light in the spring,  
To have loved, to have thought, to have done;  
To have advanced true friends and beat down baffling foes—  
That we must feign a bliss  
Of doubtful future date,  
And, while we dream on this,  
Lose all our present state,  
And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose?"

Van der Valk's short thesis is worth reading. He entirely rejects Jerome's story of Lucretius' madness and suicide, in this respect being in full agreement with Brieger and with much, perhaps most, of the best modern opinion on this question. Jerome is a bitter partisan, and one of his favorite themes is Christian calmness in the face of death. St. Augustine, a much more restrained controversialist, speaks of the "maddening and deadly infidelity" (*impietas*) of the Epicurean materialist. And in our own times, in spite of the clearest evidence to the contrary, orthodoxy has frequently regaled its supporters with glowing accounts of the death-bed recantations of prominent "infidels." And knowing as we do how bitterly many modern writers have reviled the poet, we can easily form an idea of early Christian feeling towards him. Boujainville, Polignac's translator, remarks:—

"Some reflections on the vanity of human greatness, some maxims, stern and therefore inconsistent, sown in his poem, serve as a pretext to raise to a work of morality a poem where obscenity reigns and which breathes only irreligion."

A modern theologian, quoted by Professor Merrill (p. 89) writes of Lucretius:—

"Having thus in his own opinion, and to his infinite satisfaction, freed mankind from every restraint, moral and religious, he exhibits the system to which he would win converts, at the end of the fourth book, in its true colors, by recommending practices for adoption contrary to nature and degrading to man, and by polluting the noble hexameter with outpourings unknown to it till then, and which none but the most abandoned could ever wade through without loathing."

Think, then, of the probable attitude of Jerome to the great Freethinker!

A. D. McLAREN.

(To be concluded.)

The doctrines of immortality, of freedom, and of a God who is, in his relation to ourselves, separable from this process—is not only a system which is unsupported by any single scientific fact, but is also a system for which among the facts of science it is utterly impossible for the intellect to find a place.—W. H. Mallock.

## Correspondence.

### PRIMITIVE RELIGION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—May I crave permission to raise a point of discussion on the statement, and arguments arising therefrom, in "Acid Drops" that "In primitive life superstitious fears cover the whole of existence"? Now I venture rather to doubt this, although I know that yourself and many other leading Freethinkers hold to the belief. I suggest that superstitious fear is, on the contrary, one of the least important factors, so far as the very beginnings of a belief in God, or gods, is concerned; and I think you will find it a fact that the more primitive a tribe or race may be, there is a less degree of fear of the supernatural *pro rata*. Among the extremely primitive tribes that are left in the world to-day, there is practically no knowledge, and certainly very little fear, of God—e.g., Bushmen, the Pigmies of the Congo, Eskimo, and some others. These tribes are, as near as can be, natural primitive Atheists. Of course, not Atheists in the sense of having reached that position by an intellectual process, but in the same sense that babies are natural born Atheists. Even among tribes possessing a fairly advanced stage of religious belief one does not find a great deal of fear of the god. Do we not frequently read of the practice of taking the god out and thrashing him if he does not grant prayers? of rubbing him in the dirt and otherwise disgracing him? There is not much fear here. Even among races that possess a much greater advanced conception of God, such as the "Great Spirit" of the American Indians, there is still very little "fear" in any sense of the word. They regard him as a mighty hunter, dignified and even genial; treat him, as it were, as one of themselves—as indeed he is; Grant Allen's conception of the dead chief deified being strikingly illustrated here. In short, while thoroughly agreeing that ignorance of natural laws plays a large part in the originating of the god idea, I contend that "superstitious fear" in any important degree does not appear until the god idea has become a going concern, and has been largely augmented and improved by the priests, whose great incentive is, of course, the increase of their own power and influence. In cannibalism or civilisation, priests are always the same.

As I have already mentioned baby Atheists, a parallel can be drawn from the civilised child of to-day. Do we not find that the very young children to-day have not to commence with any fear of God? It is not until they have made an unconsciously blasphemous remark or two, and been thrashed once or twice therefor, and had religion and Sunday-school drummed into them, that they begin to develop a "wholesome fear of the Lord." And lastly, I put it as an indisputable fact, that if we examine the mental condition of all of the most primitive races left in the world in our time, we shall not find anything like the degree of superstitious fear that we know existed in the Middle Ages—a period which, compared with primitive life, was a highly advanced stage of civilisation.

G. D.

### PARIS.

France is the most emancipated nation in the West. It is, at present, governed without God. Its capital has been the principal seat of the double movement, constructive and critical, which, for more than five centuries, has been the characteristic feature of Western civilisation. No city has shaken off so quickly, or so boldly, the yoke of theology; none has fraternised more cordially with the other peoples; none has more steadily devoted herself to securing for France, for the West, and for the world, the independence and co-operation which she herself was already enjoying. Paris remains in modern times, as she was in the Middle Ages, the leading city; no other has yet superseded her in her initiating function; and, in spite of the tempest raised by savage blasphemies, this glorious vessel has pursued her course, carrying Humanity and its fortunes. To the superior minds of the West, Paris remains the common centre of all activities, all thoughts, and all affections—THE CITY.—*Pierre Lafitte*.

### FAIR FIGHT.

Religion should be treated as freely as other subjects. That is all I claim, and I will not be satisfied with less. I cannot consent to relinquish any weapon that is legitimate in other warfare. Nor for the sake of temporary feeling will I be false to the permanent interests of my species. I will laugh at folly, scorn hypocrisy, expose falsehood, and bathe my sword in the heart's blood of imposture. But I will not descend to personalities. I do not war with persons, but with principles.—G. W. Foote, "*Flowers of Freethought*."

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

### LONDON.

#### INDOOR.

ST. JAMES'S HALL (Great Portland-street, London, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Wit, Wisdom, and Humanity in Shakespeare's Comedies."

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Church-street, Upper-street, N.): 7.30, Miss K. B. Kough, "God's Ideal Woman."

#### OUTDOOR.

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

### COUNTRY.

#### INDOOR.

EDINBURGH SECULAR SOCIETY (Club Room, 12 Hill-square): Wednesday, Feb. 23, at 8, J. Robertson, a Lecture.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): Joseph McCabe, 12 (noon), "Sir Oliver Lodge on Immortality"; 6.30, "Wonderful Chapters in the Story of the Earth." Lantern illustrations.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): J. T. Lloyd, 3, "God Sent Dreamers"; 7, "The Glorious Gospel of Freethought."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): Ernest Evans, 3, "Six Centuries of Science"; 6.30, "Some Biological Problems." Lantern views. Tea at 5.

NOTTINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Cobden Hall, Peachey-street): 7.30, N. L. Whitaker, "Life and Matter Microscopically Examined."

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (above Tram Hotel, Market-street): 7.30, Important meeting.

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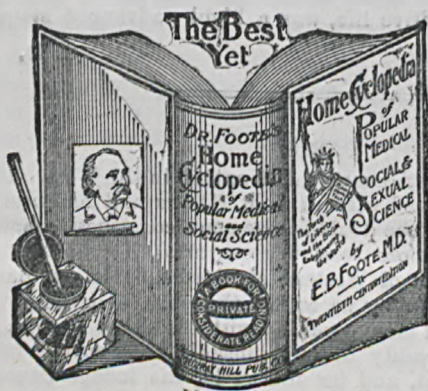
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