

# THE Freethinker

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*Love is the only God that endureth for ever, and Work the only worship that does not sink to a ceremony.*

—M. D. CONWAY.

## Let Us Pray!

KING EDWARD concluded his recent speech from the throne to his faithful Lords and Commons with these pious words: "I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may attend your labors."

His Majesty, like other people, has a memory and a sense of humor; and there was probably a twinkle in his mind's eye (as Shakespeare calls it) as he uttered that orthodox sentiment.

Why do we refer to His Majesty's memory? For this reason. Twice in his life he has been critically ill; twice he has been at death's door—with his hand on the knocker; twice his life has been specially prayed for by the nation; and twice have the nation's prayers—with the help of the most skilful doctors and nurses—brought about his recovery. So he should know something about prayer.

The first of these two illnesses occurred ever so many years ago when he was Prince of Wales. We think it was in the early seventies. He was laid low by typhus fever. Or was it typhoid? But no matter. He was in a very bad way. And his danger gave the *Daily Telegraph* its first great opportunity. That enterprising journal, owned by a Jew and edited for Christians, fanned with constant art another fever than the Prince's—the fever of loyalty in the breasts of his mother's subjects. Day by day the nation was treated to the *D. T.'s*. It was bidden to observe how the great wave of prayer was surging against the throne of grace. And when the Prince turned the corner, and was out of danger, and was creeping however slowly, towards health and strength again, the Fleet-street organ of Jew-Christian piety congratulated the nation on its prayers being answered—and almost congratulated the Almighty on the good form he had displayed in answering them.

That was not all. A special thanksgiving service was organised at St. Paul's Cathedral. God was publicly and officially told how grateful the nation was, and how it would always bear in mind the Almighty's good sense and friendly behavior. The fact that thousands of other persons had been allowed to die during the Prince's illness, in spite of all the fond prayers offered up for their recovery, was conveniently overlooked. It was a case of "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Never mind where the curses came from.

Something else went on behind the scenes. The doctors and the nurses who had assisted Omnipotence were not forgotten. They had their suitable rewards in cash and praise. One of the medical men was even knighted. It might almost have been

said that honors were easy and the Deity had the odd trick.

King Edward's second dangerous illness was after he came to the throne. Appendicitis laid him low—on the operating table, in fact—only a day or two before the date fixed for his Coronation, which had to be postponed for several months. There was another orgie of prayer. The papers prayed, the pulpits prayed, the people prayed. It was impossible for the Almighty to resist such an enthusiastic round-robin. He permitted the operation to be successful. And once more he was complimented and congratulated. That is to say, there was another thanksgiving service. But on this occasion, as on the former one, the doctors and nurses were duly considered. It seemed a fair division of payment for a fair division of labor. Besides, the Peculiar People had to be taken into account. It would never do to separate prayer and medical attendance, or how could you send those wicked—not to say tiresome and embarrassing—people to prison with a straight face?

We repeat, then, that the King has had an exceptional experience of prayer. He knows what it is worth. And that is why we think he must have felt the full joke of his own (official) prayer that God Almighty would do what he could for our hereditary and elected legislators.

But if King Edward felt the full force of the joke then, he must find it quite overwhelming now. His Godship's answer to His Majesty's prayer has begun in the House of Commons. And what a beginning! The Deity must be a first-class humorist. If his display on this occasion is not as exquisite as Voltaire's, or as fine as Swift's, it is as broad and diverting as Rabelais'. Just look at the House of Commons! Look at it! For a whole week after the King's gracious petition to the Almighty on its behalf, the House of Commons was a perfect topsyturveydom. We might even call it a pantomime. The proceedings resembled nothing so much as those which delight the children at Christmas time when a certain personage appears upon the stage with his "Here we are again!" What was it the famous Swedish chancellor said?—"Behold, my son, with how little wisdom the world is governed." He might also have said, "Behold, my son, with how little wisdom the world was made."

A curious thought crosses our mind. Is it possible that the whole joke was deliberate? We understand that the King reigns by the grace of God. It is so stated, generally in abbreviated Latin, on the coinage. Do the King and God understand each other? Did they get the joke up for the gratification of the public in general—and of Mr. Asquith in particular? The latter *must* have enjoyed it.

On the face of it, of course, God cares as much (or as little) about the "labors" of the British parliament as he does about the labors of an ant-hill. Who

can point to any trace of divine interposition in any division that ever took place in the said British parliament? Presumably the Bishops in the House of Lords are—at least, to some extent—the Deity's agents; but their actions are not very creditable to their alleged Master; they have fought tooth and nail against every wise and beneficent measure that has ever been introduced; and then they have always been beaten in the end—which doesn't look as though they represented the Omnipotent.

The chaplain of the House of Commons is a useless official. Even if there be a God, and if he does answer prayer, it would surely be better for the members to do their own praying for the wisdom which they indisputably need. Surely their "father in heaven" would sooner listen to them than to a hired proxy. Why don't they give our plan a trial? At present only a few of them attend "prayers." If they don't believe there is any use in the performance they should abolish it altogether. If their objection is to the professional performer they should abolish *him* altogether. We mean as a chaplain, of course, not as a man. Let him live and earn a decent salary (if he can) by honest and useful labor; or pension him off, if you must, but let it be according to the financial prescriptions of the Sermon on the Mount.

The Peers are hopeless. We say it and we will prove it. Church of England congregations pray every Sunday that God would "endow the lords of the Council, and all the nobility, with grace, wisdom, and understanding." Has that prayer been answered? It has been offered up every Sunday for about 350 years, and it hasn't taken effect yet. Had the Lord meant to answer it he would have done so before this. Any man who will pray for the Peers now ought to be working a praying-machine in Tibet.

G. W. FOOTE.

## Christianity and Medical Science.—V.

(Concluded from p. 131.)

In addition to the curses and prayers used to expel demons, other methods of a more personally unpleasant kind were adopted. The general theory underlying the treatment already outlined was that Satan's chief sin was pride. Accordingly it was sought to so disgust him that he would quit his temporary dwelling-place. In the same way it was argued that if this plan failed, then, by making the possessing demon physically uncomfortable, he would be driven forth. Thus it became the practice to burn drugs and evil-smelling stuffs under the lunatic's nose. To the same end whipping, loading with chains, or immersion in water became part of the recognised practice. Dr. Take, in his *History of the Insane in the British Isles*, gives the following mediæval recipe for curing insanity:—

"If a man be lunatick, take a skin of mere swine, work it into a whip, and swinge him therewith. Soon he will be quite cured. Amen."

All over Europe people were publicly whipped or half-drowned in the hopes of getting the devils out of them. Close to Launceston, Cornwall, is the pool of St. Nun, famous for its efficacy in curing insanity. The insane person was thrown into the pool, dragged up and down for some time, and then taken to St. Nun's Church and prayed over. If not cured, the treatment was repeated. Similar accounts are given of Scottish practices by Dalrymple in his *Darker Superstitions of Scotland*. In Scotland it was also the practice, up to the end of the eighteenth century, to take a lunatic into a churchyard, tie him to a tombstone, place a holy bell on his head, and so leave him all night. Whipping and ducking were, however, the most favored practices, and they were persisted in with each case until the patient was either cured or killed. As late as the beginning of the nineteenth century patients in the lunatic asylums were chained to the walls, ill-fed, and generally ill-treated.

Nothing could have been more deplorable than the condition of the mentally afflicted during this long reign of Christian superstition. People were not only half-drowned, whipped, and generally ill-treated; to be the subject of an illusion might be the condition of condemnation by the Church, with subsequent burning by the secular power. Lecky has collected a number of instances of lunatics who were burned for fancying themselves angels, Antichrists, or similar characters. Thousands of people—mostly women, for it was said that the Devil had more power over women than men—were burned on the charge of practising sorcery, and it may safely be assumed that the majority of these cases were those of mentally disordered persons. In a proclamation issued in 1483, Pope Innocent VIII. said:—

"It has come to our ears that numbers of both sexes do not avoid to have intercourse with the infernal fiends, and that by their sorceries they afflict both man and beast. They blight the marriage bed; destroy the births of women and the increase of cattle; they blast the corn on the ground, the grapes in the vineyard, the fruits of the trees, and the grass and herbs of the field."

The number of people put to death almost staggers belief. Seven thousand were put to death at Treves during the life of a single bishop. Five hundred were burned at Geneva during three months in 1515. One thousand were burned at Como in a single year. For thirty-nine years, during the seventeenth century, the number annually killed in Scotland averaged two hundred. Boxes were placed in Scottish churches to receive a billet with the sorcerer's name, and the date and description of his deeds.

In England, from 1600 to 1680, during the ascendancy of Puritanism, the number killed annually averaged five hundred. Grey, the annotator of Butler's *Hudibras*, says that he saw an account of between three and four thousand witches who had been executed between 1640 and 1666. Under the Commonwealth the Parliament appointed the celebrated John Hopkins to root out witches, an appointment thus described by Butler:—

"Has not this present Parliamont  
A ledger to the devil sent,  
Fully empowered to treat about  
Finding revolted witches out.  
And has not he, within a year,  
Hanged three score of 'em in one shire?\*"  
Some only for not being drowned  
And some for sitting above ground  
Whole days and nights upon their brooches,  
And, feeling pain, were hanged for witches;  
And some for putting knavish tricks  
Upon green geese and turkey chicks,  
Or pigs that suddenly deceast,  
Of griefs unnatural as he gueast."

One can well believe that among women of the lower classes it was a common prayer that they might never grow old.

If the crops were bad, if milk turned sour, if a preacher fell ill, a cow died, or a child sickened, some poor demented woman was accused of witchery and duly handed over for conviction and punishment. The stupidity and brutality of the procedure is almost inconceivable. The first thing to be looked for was the Devil's mark. This was supplied by a mole, a wart, or any curious marking. It was also believed that every witch had a portion of her body insensible to pain, and to discover this long pins were driven in the body until the witch funder was satisfied. If a suspected witch would not shed tears or failed to repeat the Lord's Prayer backwards, either was an infallible sign of guilt. Another test was to tie a woman's hands and legs and pitch her into a pond or river. If she floated, guilt was apparent and she was burned. If she sank, she was innocent—and was drowned. This was Matthew Hopkins's favorite method, and it is pleasing to know that he was eventually accused of sorcery, tried by his own plan—and floated. To extort confession, the leg was placed in an iron boot and wedges driven in till the limb was reduced to pulp. To the same end

\*The reference is to the county of Suffolk.

the thumb was smashed by thumbscrews. The bridle—an iron hoop passing over the head, with four prongs, two pointing to the tongue, and one to either cheek—was also in great demand. In the case of the trial of Dr. Fian, King James suggested, ordinary methods having failed, that the finger nails should be torn off and needles run into his fingers. Even this having failed to extort confession the victim was promptly burnt, his silence having been taken as a clear proof that the Devil had "entered deeply into his heart."

Perhaps, from one point of view, the most revolting among these executions for witchcraft were those which took place in Wurtzburg in 1629, a detailed account of which is given by Wright in his *History of Sorcery and Magic*. There were twenty-four distinct burnings, the total number of persons burned being 164. Among this 164 persons no less than 34 were children, ranging from an infant in arms to girls and boys of 14 years of age. Nor ought one to omit pointing out that the enormous increase in the number of punishments for witchcraft was coincident with the development of Protestantism. If possible, the Reformers had a more lively faith in Satanic agency than had Roman Catholics. And wherever Protestantism gained a firm hold there was an immediate increase in the number of victims to a thoroughly degrading and typically Christian superstition.

Bearing in mind all that has been said above, it smacks somewhat of satire to find Christians claiming that they established lunatic asylums. It invites the retort that no religion ever needed them more, or did more to fill them. And, as a matter of fact, the first lunatic asylum opened by Christians was at Jerusalem, to accommodate monks who had driven themselves insane by their barbarous practices. The statement that Christians led the way in building asylums for the insane is, however, untrue. The earliest general lunatic asylum did not exist in Christian Europe until the fifteenth century, while they were in use among the Mohammedans long before. And it is significant that when lunatic asylums appeared among Christians they were in countries nearest the influence of Mohammedanism. They existed in Spain long before they did in other countries. And, writing in 1789, John Howard remarks on the superiority of the insane asylum in Constantinople to that of St. Luke's, London.

One other word needs be said before closing this melancholy, but by no means exhaustive, chapter in Christian history. In dealing with the effect of Christian belief on medical science we are apt to think only of the people who died for lack of knowledge, or of those who were punished because they sought it. Neither aspect of the matter represents the greatest evil inflicted by Christianity upon the people. The killing of a man, whose sole offence is his devotion to the quest for truth, is bad enough; but, if that were all, the crime might be forgiven. A much greater evil is that even though his death acts as an incentive to rare spirits, it serves still more as a deterrent to the mass of the people, until these, by being brought up in an atmosphere where mental initiative and independence are counted the greatest of crimes, sink into little more than the pre-destined transmitters of senseless superstitions. So, also, with the evils arising from an absence of medical and hygienic knowledge. Paradoxical though it may sound, the disease that kills is not man's deadliest enemy. His greatest enemy is the disease that smites without killing, that perpetuates itself by merely lowering the vitality and resisting power of its victims. And in any summary of the influence of Christianity on racial history we have to count not merely the obstruction to science, but all that this obstruction involves. And when we consider how intimate is the connection between bodily health and mental and moral action, what an important part pure air, pure water, and proper sanitation plays in the *morale* of a city, it is no exaggeration to say that the usually unnoticed evils of Christian obstruction are far more important than those,

which no student of history can avoid observing. That mental and moral deterioration actually went on hand in hand with the progress of Christianity is an easily established historic truth. And the cause of this lies, not so much in the actual teaching of positive evil as in the ignorant and persistent neglect of principles upon which the well-being of every society depends.

C. COHEN.

### Biblical Criticism and Christianity.

CHRISTIAN scholars are laying the flattering unction to their souls that the Higher Criticism has left the Bible just what it found it—a book of Divine origin and authority. Professor Budde, one of the most eminent of German critics, declares that his belief "in a genuine revelation of God in the Old Testament remains rock-fast." Professor Robertson Smith, one of the earliest British Higher Critics, availed himself of every opportunity to affirm his belief in the Divine origin and inspiration of the Old Testament, and one admirer asserts that "in the last of his Burnett Lectures he proved 'the uniqueness of Hebrew prophecy and the impossibility of accounting for it by natural or historical reasons.'" Dr. George Adam Smith, Principal of the University of Aberdeen, maintains that "the most advanced modern criticism provides grounds for the proof of a Divine Revelation in the Old Testament at least more firm than those on which the older apologetic used to rely." On February 12 the *Glasgow Herald* published a long article which indulges in precisely the same contention. The writer, who is evidently a theologian, says that "like logic, the Higher Criticism is nothing more than an instrument for arriving at truth." Certainly, that is what it ought to be, and would be if used without prejudice or bias. According to this writer, however, the instrument is used wrongly unless, among other things, it "brings out the fact that the revelation of God in the Old Testament was historical and progressive." That is to say, no one can be a good and reliable Higher Critic who does not approach the Bible as a firm believer in its divinity. And yet the writer has a correct idea as to what a genuine critic is, as the following extract shows:—

"There are bad Higher Critics as there are bad logicians—logicians and critics who set out from false premises and fallacious assumptions, and whose arguments, however specious and imposing, lead to erroneous conclusions."

In the innocent simplicity of his mind, it never occurs to this defender of the faith that it is even possible for orthodox divines to "set out from false premises and fallacious assumptions," and to arrive at "erroneous conclusions." He fails to see that a believer in the Bible cannot be an impartial critic of it, unless his critical faculty has been especially well developed by work in other fields, in which case his critical work on the Bible will most likely destroy his faith in it.

But let us contemplate the results of Biblical criticism. The first result is the discovery that the Bible is a collection of fallible and contradictory documents; the second, the establishment of the fact that its history is largely legendary, and written, now from the standpoint of the prophet, and now from that of the priest; the third, the disclosure of the unwelcome truth that it is a painfully unequal book, portions of it recording immoralities, indecencies, and obscenities too shocking to be described, other portions discredited by their contradictions, absurdities, and atrocities, while others, a few here and there, rise to the sublimest poetry and the noblest ethical enthusiasm; and the fourth, the theologically disastrous finding that its doctrine of God is an exact reflection of the moral development of the Jewish people. These are the results of Biblical criticism, even according to so orthodox a divine as Principal Smith; and we ask, in wonder, where, in view of such criticism, the revelation of God comes in? Is

there anything in the whole Bible, thus critically regarded, to show that a God existed who was making himself known to the world by means of the Jewish nation? Observe that on every point wherein its statements can be critically tested, the Bible is found to be unreliable and misleading. Its astronomy is radically false, its creation story a flat contradiction of the science of geology, its history a strange mixture of fact, fable, and fiction, and its ethical attitude varies according to the periods represented. With this fact in mind, how can anyone conscientiously aver that "we have in the Old Testament a true knowledge of the character and ethical purpose of God which we do not find original to any race except Israel"? The critics all agree that the Bible is untrustworthy in most matters whereon its teaching can be tested; but the theologians among them affirm that in matters whereon its teaching cannot be tested it is not only trustworthy, but absolutely infallible. Is not such a position illogical and absurd in the extreme?

From Biblical criticism the writer in the *Glasgow Herald* passes on to Comparative Religion. The study of this subject, he maintains, has revolutionised our ideas as to the place and power of religion in human life and history. This is true, but not in the sense indicated by the author of the article. The universality of religion is an invention of the theologian. No "psychological necessity to be religious" can be proved to lie in human nature. On the contrary, if religious instruction and training are omitted in early childhood, there soon appears "a psychological necessity" to be non-religious, as the author will find out for himself if he thoroughly investigates the point. He allows, however, that Judaism "in its beginnings was no isolated phenomenon, but an outgrowth from the vast background of primitive Semitic belief—the spiritual 'Hinterland,' as it has been called, of the Hebrew faith." He goes further still and admits that "Christianity itself sometimes suggests the older faith of Buddha," that "the very Christ of Israel has his parallels in Pagan Christs," and that "the Pagan mythologies include doctrines of an incarnation and a virgin birth and an atoning God-man." The following passage is highly significant:—

"Moreover, in addition to these broad parallels, there appear innumerable minor points of contact; for other religions have their blood covenants, their laws of uncleanness and taboo, their sacred animals, and even such special features of the Hebrew narratives as the brazen serpent and the rod that budded and the sacred ark. One has only to read a few of the really great works that have appeared on the subject of Comparative Religion, such books as Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, Frazer's *Golden Bough*, and above all, as bearing particularly on Israel and the Old Testament, Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites*, to realise the problems raised by the science of religion for those who have been accustomed to regard the Bible of the Christian Church as the record throughout of a Divine revelation."

No fault whatever can be found with that felicitously expressed extract. The writer undoubtedly belongs to the most advanced section of the Higher Critics, and one cannot conceive of him as holding any specially narrow and bigoted system of theology. And yet, at this point, he falls foul with Rationalists and Agnostics who have been "quick to seize upon these problems." The charge he prefers against them is that while magnifying the striking resemblances between the different religions, they almost completely ignore the differences which he regards as more significant. The charge is true, but its truth does not reflect unfavorably on those against whom it is levelled, because the reason why they lay so great an emphasis on the resemblances lies in the fact that such resemblances have been hitherto vigorously denied by ignorant and prejudiced divines. Freethinkers are fully aware of the significant differences between religions, and they know, further, that such differences are due to corresponding differences between the peoples among whom the religions respectively sprang up. No other explanation is admis-

sible. Surely the author of the article under review would not be guilty of holding the Deity responsible for the differences; and yet he can logically do no other if he believes, as he seems to do, that all religions have had a Divine origin. If he accepts Christianity as transcendently superior to all other religions, he does so at the expense of making God an infinite respecter of persons.

It is not quite clear what exact meaning this writer attaches to the word "religion." He speaks of "the faith of Abraham," "the pure ethical insight of Moses," and "the spiritual vision of Isaiah," as if the three stood on the same plane. Christianity is a supernatural religion in which the faith, said to have been exhibited by Abraham, may have ample scope; but there was nothing supernatural about "the ethical insight" displayed by Moses, which was certainly much inferior to that possessed by Buddha, who repudiated supernaturalism. Freethinkers do not acknowledge the "transcendent superiority" of Christianity as a system of morality.

But, after all, the real question at issue is not which of all existing religions is ethically the best, but whether or not there is any truth in supernaturalism. In its essence every religion is a form of supernaturalism. Early Buddhism was not a religion, in the conventional sense; it was simply and solely a moral code, or an ethical philosophy, without a single reference to God, immortality, or the soul. There is a sort of moral code in Christianity, which, when weighed in the balance of history and experience, is found lamentably wanting; but whether adequate or inadequate, it is by no means synonymous with Christianity, and, at best, occupies but a dependent, servile position in it. Christianity claims to be a supernatural provision for the salvation of a world that has got into wrong relations with God. The crucial question is, Does a supreme, personal Being exist who sent his only begotten Son to redeem the lost human race by dying for it? No Biblical criticism can answer that question, while Comparative Religion brings before us a host of Divine Sons or God-men who had virgin mothers, and died atoning deaths, and rose again triumphant. The truth is that supernaturalism, in all its forms, is the child of ignorance and fear. Knowledge cannot tolerate it; and, in the proportion in which the knowledge of the world and its laws increases, supernaturalism decreases; as the former waxes, the latter inevitably wanes.

Biblical criticism, as applied to the Four Gospels, is rapidly shattering the belief in their historicity; and with the belief in the historicity of the Gospel Jesus is vanishing the reliance on Christianity as a redeeming religion. The writer of the article blames the Churches for their masterly inactivity in the matter of defending Christianity; but the inactivity of the Churches is a symptom of their impotence. Biblical criticism and the comparative study of religions are indeed but instruments for arriving at the truth, and by means of them it is becoming more and more manifest that the truth about religions is that they are all man-made and are by man being steadily destroyed.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Narratives in Genesis.

### THE HEBREW PATRIARCHS IN CANAAN.

THE monuments of the ancient kings of Egypt and the tablets discovered at Tel-el-Amarna are sufficient in themselves to prove that the stories related of the Hebrew patriarchs in Genesis are nothing but pious fiction. All that we need do in order to realise this fact is to compare the real history and condition of the people of Canaan, as shown by the inscriptions, with the state of that country and its inhabitants as described or implied in the Bible narratives.

As a matter of history, we find that for about four hundred years (B.C. 1600-1200) Canaan was subject to the sovereigns of Egypt, and that during this

period its Phœnician and Amorite inhabitants, aided by the Hittites who occupied a district north-east of Palestine, were continually revolting from the Egyptian rule, and had again and again to be reconquered. Thothmes I. effected the conquest of the whole of Canaan, as well as of a large portion of Syria. Thothmes III. had many and long wars with the Canaanites, and after seventeen years succeeded in reducing them all into subjection. Seti I. had to battle with a new generation of the same people, but finally reconquered all the revolted cities and provinces. Ramses II. had the same trouble with the Canaanites and their allies, and spent twenty years in reducing them to subjection. Ramses III. defeated a great confederacy of the kings of Syria and Canaan, headed by the Hittites, on the frontiers of Egypt, and followed up his victory by marching through Canaan into Syria, and reconquering one after the other all the revolted provinces. This accomplished, he returned to Egypt with a large number of prisoners, including thirty-eight kings.

The spoils taken by the Egyptian kings prove the inhabitants of Canaan to have been not a number of savage tribes, but a comparatively civilised people. Among these are recorded gilded war-chariots, coats of mail, gold and silver statues, vases, rings, jewels, tables inlaid with gold, thrones of cedar wood and ivory, an ark of gold, rich hangings, etc. As to the condition of the country, we know from the record of an Egyptian military officer in the reign of Ramses II. that the southern portion of Canaan was infested by bands of robbers and marauders. The tablets of Tel-el-Amarna prove that Canaan contained a large number of petty kings, each hostile to and envious of the others, but all nominally subject to the King of Egypt. The King of Jerusalem, for instance, informs his suzerain that the kings of Gezer, Gath, and Keilah had occupied the country round about, and had intercepted his communications with other cities. The King of Babylon, in a despatch to the Egyptian king, complains that his ambassadors had been murdered in passing through Canaan. The latter country, then, more especially in the south, was evidently not a safe place for travellers or aliens, among whom must be ranked the Hebrew patriarchs.

Now the condition of Palestine and its inhabitants in the days of the last-named individuals, as described or implied in the narratives in Genesis, is that of a land perfectly peaceful. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are represented as living in complete security, and as leading about immense flocks and herds from one part of the country to another without the smallest interference from anyone. Moreover, from these narratives it would appear that during this period—which was that of the Egyptian domination—the land was very sparsely peopled, and that the few scattered inhabitants were a primitive, law-abiding people, of peaceful disposition, who stood somewhat in awe of the Bible patriarchs. Abraham finds pasture land in plenty, apparently belonging to no one, wherever he chose to go. So does his nephew Lot; so does Isaac, and so does Jacob. They even take upon themselves to change the names of places in the country. No one ever questions their right to appropriate all the fields and meadows in any locality, nor attempts in any way to molest them. According to the chronological statements in Genesis, the period during which the three patriarchs named sojourned in Canaan was 215 years. Yet, during the whole of this time—though the land was continually the scene of the most sanguinary wars, and robbers and freebooters abounded—not one of these patriarchs suffered the slightest annoyance, nor were they even aware of what was taking place throughout the length and breadth of the country. So far from this, indeed, two sons of Jacob are actually represented as massacring (with impunity) all the males of a whole city (Gen. xxxiv.)—which narrative supplies a good illustration of the fabulous character of the so-called patriarchal "history."

According to the story, Jacob's daughter Dinah "went out to see the daughters of the land," and

was ravished by Shechem, the son of Hamor. The young man, however, being desirous of making the girl his wife, he and his father waited upon Jacob to arrange the marriage. The latter left the matter in the hands of his sons, who "answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully," and made it a condition that Hamor and all his people should be circumcised. To this Shechem and his father agreed, and shortly afterwards they and all the men of their city submitted to the necessary operation. On the third day, when the Shechemites were in an enfeebled state, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, "took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword." Furthermore, "the sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city.....They took their flocks and their herds and their asses.....and all their wealth; and their little ones and their wives took they captive" (xxxiv. 25-39).

This story, as everyone with a grain of sense will at once perceive, is from beginning to end pure fiction. It is seriously related as a historical event by the Priestly writer, and is thus a fair sample of patriarchal "history." The statement that two young men could, unaided, slay all the males of an entire city, even under the circumstances mentioned, is a gratuitous outrage upon common sense, and needs not any serious consideration to be at once rejected. We are asked to believe that the men of Shechem allowed themselves to be slaughtered, one after the other, like sheep, and that none of the women of the city was able to use a weapon in defence of husband, lover, brother, or son. We have further to imagine "the sons of Jacob" leading away captive all the women and girls of the city, and also taking with them all the flocks and herds which they would have to collect from the fields and pasture land in the vicinity. There would seem, too, to have been no one in the land at that time—no friends or relatives of the murdered men—able or willing to bring the murderers to justice; so that Jacob and his sons were allowed to remove to another part of the country without molestation. To believe this story one must possess in a superlative degree the blind faith and unreasoning credulity of the professional Christian Evidence man.

But, even according to the later narratives in Genesis, the story of the massacre is a fable. After leaving Shechem, Jacob and his sons moved about, first to Bethel, next to Bethlehem, then to Hebron. Here Jacob remained with his favorite son Joseph, while the other ten sons "went to feed their father's flock in Shechem," just as if nothing had ever happened there (Gen. xxxvii. 12-17). It is, in fact, clearly implied in the narrative that the sons had no reason for fearing any of the inhabitants of that city, or of any other place in the neighborhood. The sons, moreover, are only in charge of their father's flocks and herds, and have no women or girls with them. The wives and daughters of the slaughtered men of Shechem have disappeared, and are never again heard of: clearly, the writer of this portion of Genesis (who is the Yabvist), knows nothing either of them as captives, or of the massacre of the male inhabitants.

We turn now to the so-called *Blessing of Jacob* (Gen. xlix.), a document far older than any of the other narratives in Genesis, in which the mythical Jacob is represented as blessing his sons before his death. In verses 5-7 the doings of the two heroes of the massacre are thus referred to:—

"Simeon and Levi are brethren; weapons of violence are their swords.....In their anger they slew a man, and in their self will they houghed an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath for it was cruel."

From the foregoing it would appear that the two sons named had upon one occasion been guilty of manslaughter. Between them they had slain a man, though the reason or the provocation for the act is not mentioned. We may take it that in the earliest version of the story the two brothers were said to

have slain the seducer of their sister; while in a much later version of the legend the slaughter of one man had in process of time been transformed into the massacre of all the males of a whole city. But Levi, as we know, was a god who, like Jacob, was worshiped in at least one city in Canaan; there can therefore be no doubt as to the fact that both stories are equally fictitious. Leaving this matter, we can say with complete assurance that the real condition of Canaan and its inhabitants, as proved by the Egyptian monuments, during the period when the Hebrew patriarchs are represented as living in that country, is a conclusive proof that the narratives in Genesis are fictitious.

There can be no doubt, also, that traditions of the many and long wars in Palestine between the Egyptian sovereigns and the kings of Canaan must have been known to the more ancient Israelites, and been handed down to the days of the Hebrew sacred writers. As a matter of fact, we do find some records of those wars; but the pious and egotistical Bible writers have made a mythical Hebrew general named Joshua the conquering hero, and are discreetly silent respecting the kings of Egypt. According to the Hebrew version, it was the Israelites, just escaped from bondage in Egypt, and not the Egyptian armies led by Egyptian kings, who had waged all these wars and had brought into subjection all the peoples of Canaan. This is the only substratum of fact that underlies the Book of Joshua, and, strange to relate, no modern Biblical critic appears ever to have noticed it.

ABRACADABRA.

### Acid Drops.

Freethinkers have always been in favor of Peace. Charles Bradlaugh nearly lost his life in protesting against the war in Egypt. It is more than twenty years since Mr. Foote wrote his *Shadow of the Sword*. And one of the Immediate Practical Objects of the National Secular Society is—"The promotion of Peace between nations, and the substitution of Arbitration for War in the settlement of international disputes." The Rev. A. J. Waldron climbed up to his present job as Vicar of Brixton by reviling and slandering Secularism and Secularists. During all those years he never saw the good of Peace. But he appears to see it now he is a made man; at least, he says he does. He announces—for he always has big notions of his own capabilities—that he is going to form an international peace association to unite all the churches. Well, it will be just like the churches if he succeeds—which is a big, strong "if." They always come into the field of progress at the eleventh hour—when the work isn't quite so hard and dangerous, and the credit of victory is within measurable distance.

Mr. Waldron's congregation doesn't consist of scientists and philosophers. He has been assuring them that no danger need be apprehended from Halley's comet. So *that's* all right. Waldron's in the know. He and God understand each other. He (Waldron, not God) assures the world that "no astronomer can be an Atheist." No doubt he (Waldron again) has never heard of Lagrange, Lalande, and La Place.

One of the subjects to be discussed by the Congregational Union at Lincoln on March 14 and 15 is "The Problem of the Decadent Church." It is a problem that stares all the Churches in the face.

The Great Northern Railway Directors smiled the other day at a clerical protest against Sunday trains. It is now announced that the Great Eastern Railway is increasing its Sunday trains by putting on a service during church time. Fancy! Sabbatarians must be thinking that doomsday's near.

The Dean of Salisbury forgets that the clergy have cried "Wolf!" too often. Otherwise he would not have told a St. Paul's Cathedral congregation—and got it printed in the papers—that if Church schools go down "moral responsibility" will go with them, and that "moral degeneracy must work its ravages until the nation is ruined." These awful results are always prophesied when people propose to pay less attention to the clergy. Christianity teaches

exclusive salvation—and exclusive morality. It is certainly mistaken in the latter case, and probably in the former.

"The catacombs and early Christian art"—which, by the way, was no art all—was the subject of a lecture lately by Mr. A. Herman Thomas at Sheffield University. In the course of his lecture Mr. Thomas said that "Christianity broke down the barrier of race and rank, and fused all believers into one great family." We should like to know when and where this feat was performed. Race-hatred is stronger now than it was under the Roman Empire, and "rank" is only broken down in "infidel France." Here, in England, we are busily discussing the House of Lords.

Three years' penal servitude is the sentence upon Violet Charlesworth and her mother. These adventuresses are trapped at last. They seem to be religious—as usual. Mrs. Martha Smith, whom they "did" for £400, said "it was all religion with them," and she trusted them on that account. When she wasn't getting her money back, nor even the interest, she began to be restive; and Mrs. Charlesworth wrote back—"Trust your Heavenly Father; all will come right." This sort of thing is so common in the annals of crime that it is hardly noticed. So much for religion as the security of morality!

Rev. J. Dale, preaching at St. Austell (Cornwall) United Methodist Church lately, overlooked the fact that the Bible is almost the boozier's text-book. He denounced the liquor trade in the name of God, who, according to the Bible, is "cheered" by wine, just as man is. Members of parliament, he said, had floated to Westminster on beer. We believe this is true, but what special concern is it of Christian ministers? That is what we want to know. When the reverend gentleman went on denouncing scepticism—as if sceptics were like clergymen, famous for holding shares in breweries and distilleries—he simply conformed to the custom of his trade. "A blatant, foul-mouthed Scepticism striking at the very roots of virtue, declaring God to be a myth, Jesus Christ an impostor, and religion a superstition"—that is how Mr. Dale eased his mind on the subject. The first clause is, of course, a bit of vulgar professional jealousy. Mr. Dale claims a monopoly of the "roots of virtue" for his profession. It is a foolish claim, and an impudent claim; and the public are beginning to see it in that light. It is not true that Christian ministers are better than other people; they are often a good deal worse; and nearly all the scoundrels who attract attention in the criminal courts belong to the Christian persuasion.

A religious contemporary arrives at the conclusion that had historic Christianity done its duty, many of our racial ills would have been cured before the present generation was born. Well—assuming Christianity to be or to contain a gospel of social reform—this is true; but it is not the whole truth. For Christianity was not merely negative in relation to social work, it was positive in the wrong direction. It not only ignored social reform, but opposed and persecuted those who perceived the importance of the work. Secular work was disparaged as useless, or condemned as injurious to the spiritual life. The world is not yet liberated from this evil view of life, and the time and energy wasted by social reformers in combating it is some measure of the injury inflicted by Christianity upon civilisation. If we assume that energy so spent had been otherwise employed, and if we allow also for the depressing influence upon life of Christian teaching, it does not need great imaginative power to realise that many centuries of development have been lost by the Christian conquest.

The altered attitude of Christians is not due to Christianity. It is an expression of the altered environment in which Christianity now finds itself—an environment produced by non-Christian forces. When one reads, as in Dr. E. Chadwick's new book on *Social Relationship*, that "Organised Christianity must cultivate the true humanitarianism, the divine philanthropy of Jesus, who was always conscious at once of man's physical, mental, moral, social, and spiritual needs," one can dismiss the statement as a piece of "bluff," or as being due to ignorance of what the New Testament Jesus really taught. Some attention to man's physical and moral welfare is of necessity included in all teaching, although, with the gospel Jesus, the attention is unintelligently bestowed. But a consciousness of anything in the nature of a social problem appears to have been quite absent in Jesus. The labor problem (Slavery) that then faced the world is not only not condemned, it is even endorsed. The gospel taught a pure atomistic individualism, leavened by a faith that supernatural agencies may lighten the human lot. Of man's need for mental culture there is not a trace. Every current superstition is accepted,

there is no hint of the slightest acquaintance with the best knowledge of the ancient world, nor of the intimate relation between moral and intellectual development. The outlook of Jesus is essentially that of a peasant of his time, who uses a number of stock religious and moral maxims that are always remarkable for the small influence they exert upon human action.

Here is a story told by the *Christian World* that is worth recording. A Presbyterian congregation in St. Louis required an organ for the church. As Mr. Carnegie—although said to be an Agnostic—has a habit of giving organs to needy churches, an appeal was made to him. The first letter brought no response. Accordingly a regular epistolatory siege was established, and after the receipt of the eighty-eighth letter the congregation received the desired cheque. On this an American newspaper properly remarks:—

“That any body of Christians can write eighty-eight letters to Mr. Carnegie asking for a church organ and retain a shred of self-respect, one may refuse to believe. They may get the sacred instrument, but what must they get besides? Could one go among such people and find the slightest trace of sturdy reliance upon one's own manhood and womanhood, of robust independence and scorn of the unspeakably vulgar ideals of a meretricious parasitism?”

With this we agree. And the story is not, in its way, a bad comment upon the alleged power of religion to develop lofty ideals and create self-respect.

Another American story that reaches us is to the effect that the crossing of the Red Sea by the Children of Israel has just been reproduced on the cinematograph. Of course, the pictures for a cinematograph are easily manufactured; but we have no doubt that the sight of the moving figures will bring comfort to many pious minds. The next thing will be to reproduce Moses' reading of the law on the phonograph. Or perhaps some other incidents in the life of Moses might be cinematographically displayed. His famous interview with Jahveh, for instance.

The revolution in Turkey has provided a great opportunity for Christianity. So says the *Methodist Times*. It believes that the success of the new régime depends entirely upon the foothold which Christian principles can gain in the minds of the people. What impertinence! The Turks secured their revolution without Christian assistance; they would have secured it much earlier but for Christian interference; after it was an accomplished fact Christian greed and jealousy threatened to undo the work; and now the *M. T.* has the impudence to tell them that future success will depend upon the extent to which they adopt Christianity! Or perhaps the statement is not intended for them, but for the dupes who are asked to subscribe towards a proposed mission-hall in Constantinople? Anyway, the Young Turks might well ask their would-be instructors whether their revolution would have been accomplished as peacefully had they had to deal with a Christian population? And they might point to Russia and Spain for answers to the question.

The feature commented on in the last paragraph is also illustrated by the same journal's comment on affairs in China. It is admitted that what the Chinese are really anxious for is Western science, and that this is undermining the native religious beliefs. So the public at home is informed that the real “Yellow Peril” is a new China minus Christianity, with knowledge imported from “the standpoint of the Materialist and the Agnostic.” Prophecy is not our line, but in this case we venture the prophecy that China, like Japan, will take all the positive knowledge that the Western world has to offer, and leave Christianity alone—or its adoption will only be by the Chinese that still retain the more primitive mental characteristics. Increased political development will, too, impress Chinese—more than ever is the case now—with the parochial impertinence of English religious societies who calmly inform other nations that their only chance of healthy progress is becoming like unto them. Hitherto neither the Chinese nor the Japanese have been impressed by our self-advertised moral superiority, and increased acquaintance will only be likely to strengthen their earlier impressions. The habit of treating non-Christian peoples as undeveloped and morally inferior has already been responsible for much evil, both upon them and upon us, and the sooner intelligent social and political leaders openly set their face against this the better for all concerned. It is no use appealing to religious people, for their religion only consecrates their impudence and stereotypes their folly.

Japan isn't going to take Christian insolence lying down. The new Land Bill provides that no foreigner shall own land

in Japan unless he is a native of a country which permits Japanese to own land within its boundaries.

The Welsh Free Churches have a Disestablishment Campaign Committee, and this body has been foregathering at Shrewsbury. Its hatred of the Established Church was shown by all the speakers declaring that after the disposal of the Budget and the veto of the House of Lords they “would not allow any Parliamentary measure, not even Home Rule for Ireland,” to take priority over a Welsh Disestablishment Bill. We fancy they are counting their chickens very prematurely.

More clerical nobbling! Rev. Thomas Phillips, of Bloomsbury Chapel, says that the theatres and music-halls “must be captured for righteousness.” He would “like to see the Bishop of London exercise the same influence over the theatres as he does over the churches.” The theatre and the music-hall “should be the servants of religion.” Which is a very pretty idea. In the course of time we should have Beerbohm Tree, George Alexander, Lewis Waller, H. B. Irving, and other theatrical lights scintillating in the pulpit on Sunday—and Bishop Ingram, Rev. Silvester Horne, Rev. Dr. Horton, and Rev. J. Scott Lidgett doing breakdown's and step-dances, and singing comic songs, at places of entertainment on Saturday night.

A Windsor clergyman, the Rev. G. D. Nicholas, appears to have a high opinion of his sermons. He objects to a hymn being sung after his exhortation. He says that practice is the Devil's invention to destroy the good effect the preacher has been trying to produce in his hearers' minds. So the reverend gentleman pronounces the Benediction immediately after the sermon; that is, he hands his congregation over to the care of God. And they may want it.

A very detestable fashion is creeping in. Several rich persons (curiously enough, all Protestants) have lately left provisos in their wills against any legatee deriving advantage if his or her religious views happen to differ from those of the testators. A conspicuous instance of this occurs in the will of the late Mrs. Harriet Morrison. Not content with leaving £10,000 to those comic-opera Protestant reformers, the Kensittes, Mrs. Morrison inserted a clause in her will to the effect that any legatee becoming a Roman Catholic, or marrying a Roman Catholic, or undertaking to bring up a child as a Roman Catholic, shall forfeit all benefits. This offensively bigoted clause can only apply to those whose benefit under the will is controlled or supervised by the executors. Those who receive definite legacies are, from the moment they do receive them, free to follow their own religious opinions. Whether such a clause should be allowed to apply to any legatee is at least a debateable question. It seems to us that the State should not connive at the mental and moral coercion of the living by the dead. To leave a person money is one thing; to exact that he or she shall always remain of the same religious opinions, or at least profess to do so, even if they change, is hardly consistent with any reasonable view of the relation of citizens to each other under the authority and powers of the State.

Christians would soon see the impropriety of such provisions in wills if the testators were Freethinkers and the legatees were Protestants or Catholics. They would call it “insolent, vicious, scandalous.” Is it not equally insolent, vicious, and scandalous when they are the actors in the miserable drama?

“The literature which assumes that religion is obsolete,” says the author of a much-puffed religious book, “does not, as a rule, suffer itself to be much hampered by the fetters of morality.” We won't call a gentleman who writes in that roundabout way a liar. We will simply say that he doesn't appear to have a bowing acquaintance with Truth.

There was a notable passage in the chief leading article in the last issue of the *New Theology* weekly:—

“What the New Theologians have done has been to put a Christian interpretation upon facts commonly supposed to have an anti-Christian bearing. They have turned the enemy's guns against himself.”

Such is the Fool's Paradise in which the New Theologians are basking. They make Christianity mean the opposite of what it has hitherto meant, and what it still means with the great majority of professed Christians. This hocus-pocus pleases a certain number of people, who are really neither Christians nor Freethinkers, having too much brains for the former and not enough for the latter, and being constitutionally timid. It enables them to go on professing and calling

themselves Christians, while believing scarcely one article of the historic Christian faith. And this little game will last for a bit. But it cannot last for ever. Every attempt to rationalise Christianity has come to grief in time, and has only ministered, after all, to the success of a more thorough-going Freethought. Stepping stones are all very well in their way, but people won't sit upon them—at least, not indefinitely. No persuasion will make them do it. Most of them will go back—or go further.

Mr. E. Belfort Bax is an able man, and what he says on any subject is entitled to a certain respect. His temperament, however, is not exactly that of a lover of toleration. We can conceive Mr. Bax working the guillotine quite cheerfully, and with the profoundest conviction of his own justice and humanity, upon his intellectual, moral, and political opponents. It does not surprise us, therefore, to find him arguing in a Socialist paper that "the existing French law is much too favorable to the Catholic propaganda," and that "Most French freethinkers would like to see some check placed upon the present freedom of the Church to do its best to poison the youthful mind with its dogmatic teaching." One would like to know how Mr. Bax is authorised to speak for "most French freethinkers." He is certainly not entitled to speak for most English Freethinkers. The majority of English Freethinkers would smile at Mr. Bax's seriously talking, in an argument like this, of Catholic "poison." Of course, it is poison—to Freethinkers; but Freethought teaching is also "poison"—to Catholics. Mr. Bax is simply borrowing the jargon of the historic enemies of freedom. It would not take a tenth part of his ability to see (if he could open his eyes) that the same principle which would justify Freethinkers in restraining the freedom of Catholics also justifies Catholics in restraining the freedom of Freethinkers. The question then becomes merely one of power. It is might making right. And the man who takes that ground is only a comical figure when he denounces, as Mr. Bax does, the "murder of Francisco Ferrer."

We quite agree with Mr. Bax—we might even say that he agrees with us—that between Catholicism and progressive mankind "there can be no truce; it must be a fight to a finish." We have said that in the *Freethinker* for nearly thirty years, and Bradlaugh said it before us. Yes, it must be a fight to a finish. But that does not mean a fight with illegitimate weapons. Mr. Bax may ask "what are illegitimate weapons?" We will tell him. Illegitimate weapons are weapons that can only be used in contravention of our own principles. It is idle to argue, as Mr. Bax does, that Catholics show no toleration and deserve none. Persecution is a Catholic weapon. True. But this does not prove that Freethinkers should use it. Catholics are not to choose our weapons for us. We are to choose our own. And in choosing them we are not to ask any other question than this: Are they clean and honest from our own point of view and in the light of our own principles?

Those who argue like Mr. Bax seem incapable of reasoning on this topic. We have pointed out again and again that the Catholic Church was fought and beaten in France, not by political and legal action, but by the mental and moral attack of generations of brave and brilliant Freethinkers. Now that the fight is virtually over the Baxes come in and plead for "death to the vanquished." This would be a wicked policy if it could be carried out literally, though something might be said for it on other grounds; for the one wisely wicked policy of persecution is sheer extermination. But you cannot kill out all the Catholics in France. All you can do, if you go beyond absolute religious equality, is to annoy and irritate them. And how will that help you? Will it not rather produce the opposite effect? You will stimulate the zeal of earnest Catholics; you will raise sympathy for them amongst the general public; you will make them more powerful and more dangerous. If you think otherwise you are much mistaken. We appeal to history. We appeal to common sense. We appeal to the nature of things. It is a good way yet to the end of the present struggle in France. And we are satisfied that endowing the Catholic Church with the halo of martyrdom is the very worst policy its adversaries can pursue.

Rev. R. F. Horton is a funny sort of man to select as chief speaker at a public meeting in connection with the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre movement. If the reverend gentleman were to tell us that he is genuinely interested in Shakespeare or the Theatre, we should disbelieve him. It is obvious from his Hampstead speech that he sees the Theatre is a power and wishes to nobble it.

Whitefield's Tabernacle was a theme of discussion at a recent meeting of the St. Pancras Borough Council. Councillors contended that it was largely a political show, with the Rev. Silvester Horne (who is now M.P. for Ipswich) as the boss. The following resolution was eventually referred to the Finance Committee: "That in view of the fact that places of worship have recently been used for electioneering purposes, they should now be placed in rating." The initial trouble, of course, arises from Nonconformist churches getting relieved from local rates and taxes on the ground that they are religious buildings. To the extent of those rates and taxes the Nonconformists receive State support. They may deny it as long and as loudly as they please, but denials don't alter facts.

We have given the poor clergy, who die worth a lot of money, a rest for some time; but we just note, in passing, that the Rev. Charles John Steward, of Ipswich, has left £42,452. He must be pretty warm now.

Here is another of them. Rev. William Shaw, of 5 Devonshire-buildings, Bath (present address unknown to the Post Office), left £13,740. He must be warm too.

The *Boston Guardian* justly raps the Clerk to the local Magistrates over the knuckles for saying to a witness who claimed to affirm instead of swearing, "You do not wish to call God to witness that you will speak the truth." It was a gratuitous piece of insolence on that official's part. Perhaps after the lesson given him by the *Guardian* he will refrain from repeating it.

More "Providence." Two children—Sarah Leech, aged 8, and John Bowker, aged 5, both of Hyde—went for a walk on Monday morning and fell down an old pit shaft. Although it was forty feet deep, they were not seriously injured. On Tuesday morning their voices were heard by two men, and they were soon rescued. "I prayed God to get us out," the girl said; and the newspapers hint that God did so. But wouldn't it have been wiser and better if God had saved them from falling in?

Rudyard Kipling, when a small boy, left some pudding uneaten. He was told to eat it, or "God would be angry with him." "Boo, boo," he said; "then I shall change my God." But his sister told him he couldn't change his God, as it was "the Government God." He seems to have the same God still.

It is reported that the Czar is going to give King Ferdinand of Bulgaria some warships (probably old ones) lying off Sebastopol; and that, in return for this seasonable present, King Ferdinand, and all his family, are going to embrace the Czar's brand of Christianity. What a commentary on the text of the song of "the herald angels"!

Fleming, the hero of the Swindon football team, is reported in the *Daily Chronicle*, on the authority of "a gentleman occupying a prominent position in the town," to owe his hold on his team entirely to his "fine character" and his "strong basic faith in God." When Swindon next loses a match we presume Fleming will cry "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Rev. Jabez R. Ackroyd, addressing the Men's Own meeting on Sunday afternoon in Dodderidge Church, Northampton, had to give an instance of "the kind of man required to lead men—the man who could not be bought," and he was obliged to mention "Charles Bradlaugh."

We appear to be likely to get an improved Divorce Law presently. When the old one was introduced, in 1857, it was fiercely opposed by the clergy and all the more pious politicians, including Gladstone, who fought it on purely theological grounds. To the very last days of his life Gladstone discussed Divorce with reference to "Christ's words" in Matthew and elsewhere. He had a mind which only progressed under the pressure of political necessity.

Judges giving evidence before the Divorce Commission differ from each other just like other people. But it is good to see that none of them refer to religious principles; they base their conclusions and recommendations on social utility. Sir George Lewis—not a judge, but a great lawyer—spoke like a man of the world, and also like a man of honor and humanity.



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, March 6, St. James's Hall, Great Portland-street, London, W.; at 7.30, "No Traveller Returns."

March 13, Liverpool; 20, Leicester; 27, St. James's Hall, London.  
April 3, Glasgow.

### To Correspondents.

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

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: 1910.—Previously acknowledged, £170 10s. Received since:—S. Hudson, £1; "Blackheath," 2s. 6d.; A. Aldwinckle, 5s.; T. Flinn, 2s.; H. A. L., 10s.; F. E. Davis, 5s.

G. ROLEFFS.—Many thanks, though it is too big a bundle to go through on Tuesday.

F. HERRMANN.—There is no such thing in any of George Meredith's writings. Thanks for getting us two new subscribers. We wish all our friends would try to help us in this way.

F. E. DAVIS.—Glad you think this journal the best twopenny-worth you get. Shall be sent as desired.

A. W. HUTTY.—Too late for this week.

W. CANNON.—Musgrave Reade never was "an Atheist leader" in any reasonable meaning of the words. He was connected with the Manchester N. S. S. Branch some twenty-five years ago. He was so much of an "Atheist leader" that we had never heard his name.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss Vance, Sec., acknowledges:—Huddersfield Branch, 5s.

D. McLEAN.—Thanks for cuttings.

G. H. SOUTHERN.—See the seventy-second Canon of the Church of England, still unrepealed, in which the clergy are forbidden to cast out devils without their bishop's authorisation.

S. HUDSON, subscribing to the President's Fund, says: "I have got another reader and taker of the *Freethinker*." We wish half (or all) our readers would do ditto.

T. FLINN.—Glad to have your wife's "admiration and affection" as well as your own. We particularly value the adhesion of women to Freethought.

W. E. LEWIS.—Our readers help us, and each other indirectly, by sending us useful cuttings.

H. J. HYETT.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.

E. B.—Will be useful. Thanks.

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

A. D. HOWELL SMITH.—Kindly let us know what replies you receive, and we will deal with it presently.

W. S. WALKDEN.—We saw the article you refer to. You will observe that it is reprinted from another periodical dated 1901. It is so nebulous that to criticise it is like wrestling with a cloud or fighting a pillow. Perhaps it is best described by a quotation from Shakespeare: "Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing.....His reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff." The rest of the quotation might be considered rude.

THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

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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.

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

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

### Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote occupies the St. James's Hall platform this evening (March 6), taking for his subject a world-famous sentence, "No Traveller Returns," and dealing with the whole question of a future life up-to-date. Incidentally he will refer to Sir Oliver Lodge's last book, *The Survival of Man*. It is to be hoped that members and friends of the N. S. S. in London will advertise this lecture amongst their friends and acquaintances. What the St. James's Hall

enterprise wants more than anything else, after decent weather, is advertising. And our friends can do a good deal of this with very little trouble and no expense to themselves.

Mr. Foote had fine and extremely enthusiastic audiences in the great Birmingham Town Hall on Sunday, in spite of the fact that the weather (for a wonder) was beautiful and a strong invitation to people to be out of doors—if only for a change. There is no doubt that Secularism is making headway in the Midlands capital, and it is a most gratifying sign of the times. The chair at both lectures was taken by Mr. Fathers, the Branch president.

It has been impossible to engage the Picton Hall for Mr. Foote's lectures at Liverpool next Sunday (March 13). They will therefore be delivered in the Alexandra Hall. As that is pretty sure to be very crowded, the district "saints" who wish to secure seats should lose no time in applying for "reserved" tickets (1s. front and 6d. back, each lecture)—which can be obtained of the secretary, Mr. J. Martin, 342 Edge-lane, of the president, Mr. J. Hammond, 99 Belmont-road, of Mr. G. Roleffs, 49 Whitefield-road, or at the Alexandra Hall before the date of the meetings.

Mr. Lloyd delivers two lectures to-day (March 6), afternoon and evening, in the Secular Hall, Manchester. South Lancashire "saints" should give him good meetings and a hearty welcome.

Mr. Sydney A. Gimson has just completed his twenty-first year as President of the Leicester Secular Society. Mr. and Mrs. Gimson give a reception to the members at the Secular Hall on Monday evening (March 7) in commemoration of the event. Mr. Gimson has also just been elected to a seat on the Town Council, where we are sure he will do excellent work for the cause of progress. He has certainly been a tower of strength to the local Secular Society, sometimes in circumstances of serious difficulty.

The Annual Members' Meeting of the Secular Education League is to be held on Tuesday evening, March 15, in the Essex (Minor) Hall, Essex-street, Strand, London, at 7.30. We hope the Secularist members will attend in good strength. After the members' meeting there will be a public meeting in the large Hall at 8.15. Lord Weardale, the League President, will take the chair; and Mr. Halley Stewart, Mr. George Greenwood, M.P., Sir Henry Cotton, Father Hogg, and Mr. G. W. Foote are on the list of speakers. This oratorical bill-of-fare ought to attract a large company—to say nothing of the vast importance of the subject the speakers are all to deal with.

Owing to the exceptional state of things in many ways, including the fever in the political world, the National Secular Society's Executive has resolved that it would be imprudent to hold the Annual Conference this year in any provincial town. Expense, of course, is one serious item; and to incur a considerable expense (which the Executive must find) for what, in the circumstance, must be a very inadequate return, is certainly not wise. All things considered, the only possible place for the Conference this year is in London. Immediately the Executive's resolution was arrived at steps were taken to secure St. James's Hall. We are happy to state that the steps were successful. The Hall has been secured. The Conference will be held in a large anteroom, and the usual evening public meeting in the beautiful large hall—which provincial delegates and visitors will be glad to see and assemble in.

### THE WORLD'S WANT.

'Tis courage that mankind doth chiefly need  
 Courage the false to scorn, though fair and smooth;  
 Courage to seek and shrink not from the truth;  
 Courage, if need be, for its sake to bleed;  
 Courage to brand as false an evil creed;  
 Courage to welcome worth in garb uncouth;  
 Courage to keep in age the spirit of youth;  
 Courage the cry of Faintheart not to heed.  
 'Tis courage only can the world redeem  
 From all the nightmare ills it suffers under;  
 Without it even the best and wisest scheme  
 To mend it will but prove a futile blunder;  
 Error and tyranny must rule supreme  
 Till men shall dare to rend their chains asunder.

—Bertram Dobell, "A Century of Sonnets."

## The Kingdom of God in Geneva Under Calvin.—II.

*A Lecture delivered before the Independent Religious Society, Chicago.*

BY M. M. MANGASARIAN.

(Concluded from p. 140.)

BUT let us resume the thread of our story: During the period in the history of Geneva that we are now describing, the files show that there were sometimes as many as three executions in one day out of a population of ten thousand inhabitants, and with the Church in supreme control. Religion was the first business of the State in those days. Prayers, sermons, hymns, worship, Bible study and fasting were the prevailing order of the day. Notwithstanding all this piety and orthodoxy, fire and the halter were in daily use.

On March 11, 1545, two girls and a widow were first mutilated, and then burned. Ten days later three women suffered the same fate. The charge against the majority of these victims was that they had given their bodies and souls to the Devil, who in return had taught them the arts of sorcery and witchcraft. Sickness, sudden deaths, and plagues were supposed to have been caused by these women. Twenty-eight out of thirty-eight of the executions of this order were women. What shall we think of a religion that will burn women? There is this difference between a brave and cowardly religion: The former challenges the strong and is chivalrous to the weak; the latter plays the sycophant to the strong and strikes at the weak. During the twenty-four years of Calvin's reign in Geneva—that is to say, while "the Kingdom of God" lasted—there were three hundred executions in the city, mostly of women. Twenty-four in three hundred goes a little over twelve times; which means that there were over twelve people burned or killed every year that Calvin ruled in Geneva. It means about one official murder a month in a city of 10,000 inhabitants, and where God was king and the Bible was law.

But in the above figures is not included the number of people imprisoned, banished into exile, or subjected to indignities of one or another kind,—such, for example, as compelling a man to walk the public streets in his shirt, with a lighted candle in his hand, and begging everybody's pardon for having spoken disrespectfully of the *Seigneurie*. Even more than by its frequent executions the government wished to strike terror upon the people and to keep God on his Genevese throne by the tortures it inflicted. This is a very painful subject. I had much rather speak of pleasanter things. It would never have occurred to me to reproduce so frightful a page from Calvinism, were it not for the fact that the religion which inspired it is still in the saddle in our own country. Of course, it is not as active as it once was, but it is not as yet dead, either. I can imagine people saying to me, "You keep holding up your umbrella after it has stopped raining," or "Why do you keep fighting a religion which has been floored and fatally wounded?" For an excellent reason: A religion that could at one time burn women and children alive should be attacked again and yet again, and, if need be, yet again, until it affronts the daylight of our intelligence no more. "I do not believe in fighting" says another. Very well, brother, go home, eat your dinner, and take your sleep. We will fight for you. We will watch over your rights, and protect your liberties. We know it is against fearful odds, but the battle must be fought, and we are willing that you shall receive its benefits even when you are not willing to assume any of its risks.

The system of torture under Calvinism was so rigorous that in comparison death was considered a boon. When a prisoner was brought before the authorities who refused to betray his comrades or

his own secret, his hands were tied behind his back and he was lifted up by pulleys as high as the ceiling would allow, and then suddenly dropped down on the floor. Then the examiners would rush to him with pen and paper in hand to hear what he had to say. This was repeated until nearly every joint in the man's body was dislocated, and he was a heap of bleeding flesh. "Thy Kingdom Come!" When this measure failed, the prisoners were "walled in" alive. We have the names of four people who were subjected to this treatment during Calvin's religious reign in Geneva: Louis Durant, Antoine Besson, Thevenaz Pelloux, and Bartholomé Chabo-Roset,—two men and two women who were built into a wall as so many bricks or rocks. "They shall not be removed," says the record of the proceedings, "until they have told the truth." Five days later, Antoine Besson was found dead from hunger; the other three, noble souls! still refused to betray their comrades, and were burned alive. "Thy Kingdom Come!" And how easy it was to make God a king! Calvin found it even easier to get the Genevese to acknowledge God for their king than Moses did to get Pharaoh to do the same. It took ten abominable plagues, nay, every first born in Egypt had to be killed in one night before Pharaoh could see the light. Calvin was more successful. As it was, the "Kingdom of God" cost less to the Genevese than it did to the Egyptians or the Jews.

We are not surprised to read in the records that the prisoners preferred death to the Calvinistic torture. So many of them committed suicide that the gaoler was instructed to tie the hands of the prisoners behind their backs during the night, and in front of them in the day time. In a sermon delivered in St. Gervais by John Calvin in July, 1545, that is to say, just 363 years ago the month of July that I was in Geneva, occurs a sentence which answers the many questions that may arise in the minds of my readers. In defence of Calvin, it is often urged that he was not responsible for the barbarities of the Genevese government. But by whatever name the government was called, or whether it was the Council or the Consistory, or the *Seigneurie* that did things, *Calvin was the government*. He had power of life and death. And he took the model of his government from the Bible. Even as Moses did not spare his enemies who were supposed to be also the enemies of Jehovah, Calvin showed no mercy to his. And the sentence from the St. Gervais sermon which I am going to quote gives a better likeness of the man than any of his photographs:—

"Il faut élever deux gibets sur la place pour y pendre sept ou huit cents jeunes gens."

Translated into English, it reads as follows: *There ought to be raised two gallows from which to hang seven or eight hundred young people.* That is the way to get an answer to the prayer "Thy Kingdom Come!" What can the cross do without the gallows? Did not Jesus say, the kingdom of heaven is taken by violence, or words to that effect? Calvin defended God in Geneva with the sword, just as any earthly king is defended by his soldiers. What, then, is the difference between King God and any other king?

Before we bring this part of our discourse to a close, we would also notice another argument sometimes advanced to excuse Calvin's severities—namely, that he was compelled to make an example of those who, in the interest of Romanism or immorality, were conspiring against the Protestant reform in Geneva. "Libertins" was the name given to all supposed to be in this conspiracy. In Protestant text-books and histories Calvin is represented as defending true Christianity against these "libertins" who were in the service of Rome and the Devil. But that is making history to order. The facts are that in 1584, before Protestantism was definitely established in Geneva, two hundred of the leading citizens of Geneva, whose names appear later in the list of the "libertins," were sentenced for heresy by the Catholic bishop of the diocese. That does not look as if they were trying to betray the liberties of the

city. As for the charge of immorality brought against the men whom Calvin persecuted, it is equally unfounded. The Registrar's accounts give the names of the pastors and the elders, then of the members of their flock who figured in criminal suits brought against them for misconduct, while the names of the patriots whom Calvin pursued into prison, exile, and death are not among them. The men punished by Calvin were the scholars, the independent thinkers, the authors, the patriots, the men with a new idea.

"Take any shape but that."

A list of the names of the scholars who wished to restore liberty of conscience in Geneva, and whom Calvin's government persecuted to death, will be found in the archives I have been quoting from. And the name of Michael Servetus is not by any means the only one of distinction in the list. One of the sayings heard in a whisper in Geneva was that "when Calvin sets his teeth against a man there is no hope for him." And so it was. "If Servetus ever comes to Geneva," wrote Calvin, "I shall see that he does not escape alive." He kept his word.

I have detained you, as it were, in front of the Cathedral of St. Peter, that I may, before taking you inside with me, give you some idea of the time when John Calvin filled its pulpit every Sunday. But now let us enter the church. Do you think we will find Calvin in his old chair? We will not even find his ghost there. That empty chair, leaning against the column which supports the pulpit, is all that is left of him. The wooden chair has been preserved, but Calvinism, the iron system, was conspicuous by its absence. The preacher of the day was no more a Calvinist than you or I, and his lukewarm sermon had no more of his theology in it than there would be in a sermon by a Unitarian or a Universalist. In no city is Calvinism more dead than in Geneva. It will be difficult to find one man in the pulpits of the Reformed Church in all Geneva who would agree with Calvin in the main contentions of his system. That is why I said "I found Calvinism in ruins" in Geneva. That is what I meant when I spoke of the rout—the rout of a powerful antagonist!

In the Cathedral of St. Peter, on that Sunday in July, I felt just as safe as in our own Orchestra Hall. And I sat within the range of the preacher's eye. The deacons and elders brushed past me, but not one of them could or would touch so much as a hair of my head. A more uncompromising heretic than Servetus, I sat in my chair in this Protestant cathedral without the slightest sense of danger to my life. I felt the everlasting arms of modern thought, sane, sweet, reasonable, round about me. Science had spread its wings over my head, as well as over the entire congregation—the preacher included. The lesson of tolerance which religion had failed to teach, science had inscribed in letters of living light upon the heart and brain of our age. I sat there not only safely, but proudly. If any apologies were needed, it was not I who had to offer them. Let the Church apologise for its past. Let the Church "beg pardon" for its antiquated dogmas. It was not my place to try to win the approval of theology for my rationalism; while every argument in the sermon of the preacher was an effort to trim his theology so as to make it acceptable to rationalism. What a change has come over the world! As I sat there safely and proudly, I could not help thinking how, four hundred years ago, another stranger, a scholar and a physician, slipped into this cathedral as I had done, and was recognised, apprehended, and burned at the stake. But in those days God was king, the Bible was law, and Calvin was pope in Geneva. Those days are no more; Calvin and "the Kingdom of God" have completely passed away. A republic has sprung up in their places, and the Geneva of to-day is free.

As soon as church was dismissed I asked to be directed to the spot where Servetus suffered martyrdom. I had seen the house in which Jean Jacques Rousseau was born; I had seen the castle, so to

speak, of Voltaire at Ferney, about a stone's throw from Geneva, and now, on the first Sunday in July, I wanted to visit the spot honored by the death of a great soldier of progress. Everybody seemed to know where the place was. Women with babies in their arms, sitting at the door of their humble cottages, knew where Servetus died. That name had brought thousands of visitors to Geneva, and thousands of dollars besides. I was one of the many who had come from beyond the Atlantic out of reverence for the same name.

I cannot remember when I have felt more agitated than on my way to Champel, where Servetus perished in the flames on October 27, 1553. Every now and then I would ask myself, "Am I really in Geneva? Is this Sunday? And will I soon be on the very spot where Servetus suffered martyrdom?" My hands and temples grew hot. Anyone observing me would have thought I had a fever. Every time the conductor rang the bell, I would ask if we had reached our destination. And at last, when my eyes fell on the white slab of granite rock, set up just as it came from the quarry, unhewn and rugged, with the name of Michael Servetus inscribed upon it, my mind was at a white heat. I wished you could all have been there with me, that I may have clasped you by the hand in that overwhelming moment.

I was standing on the plateau of Champel. At the foot of the hills was Lake Lehman, the bluest and most caressing sheet of water I had ever seen. All around me were the prettiest summer villas of the Genevese, with their lovely gardens laden with purple and white and gold, and trailing vines which whispered to the zephyr as it went by. Beyond, on the pearly horizon was Mont Blanc, whose snows blushed rose-red with the kiss of that summer day's sun. Immediately before me was this simple slab with its tragic story. Once more I dipped into the past, and swung myself over the centuries into the autumn afternoon, nearly four hundred years ago. Then I saw people crowding toward the plateau from every direction. An eager crowd, hurrying, pushing, and panting for breath. Then I saw climbing up the hill a procession headed by men dressed in black; it was a long procession, very solemn and very severe. I thought I had never seen such human beings before. The cold glare of their eyes fell upon me, and I shuddered. I was so frightened I almost cried out loud. Then I saw climbing up the same hill, and guarded by men who also carried fagots and a torch, an aged man.\* His eyes were red with weeping, his cheeks were sunken and hollow with hunger and suffering, his back was bent with much pain and anguish. As he advanced wearily towards where I was standing, I thought I smelt the odor of the foul dungeon upon his tattered clothes. He was wearing a mock crown of leaves upon his head. On the leaves was scattered sulphur. I saw him wearing a belt from which hung at his side a book. A book! a book! He is the man with a book,—with a new idea!

"Take any shape but that—"

The aged man had come to pay the penalty for having written a book—a new book! The two—father and child—must die together. That explains why there was hanging at his side a book. Then I saw them lead the aged man to the very spot marked by the granite slab. They tied his hands behind his back, and then tied him to the stake. A hypocritical preacher, with the Bible in his hands, approached to tell him about the love of God, who was king in Geneva, while the executioner was piling up the wood all around and under the martyr at the stake. I saw now the executioner take up the lighted torch in his hand. A sudden silence fell upon the assembled throng. "Is there not somewhere in the universe a merciful spirit," I called out, "who would rip open the heavens and come down to the rescue?" God was king of Geneva, but he was absent. Only his representative was there, and he did not lift a finger to

\* Servetus was not yet fifty years old, but years of persecution and imprisonment had given him the appearance of an old man.

save the doomed man. The executioner touched the pile with his torch, the flames leaped forth, a terrible cry from the lips of the martyr—and all was over. Except for a small pile of hot ashes around which, playfully, flame and smoke kept chasing each other.

When I awoke out of my dream, I was in a sweat. "Servetus! Servetus," I cried. "I am coming. I will push my way through the crowd to save you from the flame and your persecutors from eternal shame. I am coming!" but, alas! I arrived too late. I arrived nearly four hundred years too late.

This monument to Servetus which stands in a triangular plot of ground between the streets of *Rosarie* and *Beau Sejour*, in Champel, was erected, not by the rationalists of Geneva but by the Calvinists. That is interesting. Still another interesting bit of news I have to communicate is that John Calvin has as yet no monument in Geneva, while his victim has one, and it was raised by the Calvinists.

This monument with its remarkable inscriptions on both sides of the slab tells a number of truths, and, I regret to say, it also tells one or two untruths. I shall presently read the inscription to you that you may judge for yourselves. Of course, the Protestants of the city deserve great credit for honoring Servetus, even if after nearly four hundred years. By this act they not only make a public confession of their responsibility for his execution, but they also express sorrow for it. When I was still in the Presbyterian Church, in one of the sermons which gave my elders offence, I said that, "If Calvin were now alive he would fall upon his knees on the spot where Servetus was burned, and implore his forgiveness." Well, this fine hope has been fulfilled; the Calvinists have wept over the sad fate of a brother who asked for hospitality and received a stake. In this connection we cannot resist calling attention to a radical difference between the Protestant and Catholic spirit. There is, if I am not mistaken, no instance of any Catholics raising a monument to one of their victims, or expressing regret for the blood shed by the Church. It is true that Joan of Arc has been canonised a saint, but then, not because the Church had no right to burn her, but because this particular person was burned by mistake. The Church has discovered that she was not a heretic at the time she was burned. Did the Church think that she was a heretic she would never have been made a saint. But the Protestants regret having burned a heretic, and admit they had no right to do so. This is, as yet, beyond the Catholics.

But as already intimated the inscription on the monument tells a few untruths. Let me first read the inscription as it stands:—

"On the 27th of October 1553  
Died at the Stake  
On Champel  
Michael Servetus  
Of Villeneuve D'Aragon  
Born on the 29th of September 1511."

The inscription on the other side of the monument reads as follows:—

"Sons  
Respectful and Grateful  
Of Calvin  
Our Great Reformer  
But Condemning an Error  
Which Was That of His Age  
And Firmly Attached  
To the Liberty of Conscience  
According to the True Principles  
Of the Reformation and the Gospel  
Have Raised  
This Expiatory Monument  
On the 27th of October 1903."

It will be observed that "respectful sons of Calvin" characterise the burning of Servetus as a mere "error." A stranger comes to their city for protection against his pursuers and walks into their church trusting in the principle of liberty of conscience. He is a scholar and a reformer. But he is unceremoniously clapped into jail and then dragged into

the fire where he is roasted alive—if you will pardon the expression. Four hundred years after, the act is lightly dismissed or put down as an "error." Let us quote once more from Shakespeare. You remember the scene in which Macbeth, horrified at his bloody hands, tells his wife that the sight of his hands "pluck out" his eyes, and he wonders whether "great Neptune's ocean" could clean his hands. Answering his own query, he fears his red hand "will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red." But see what a trifling little thing the murder of Duncan appeared to Lady Macbeth:—

"A little water clears us of this deed;  
How easy is it then!"

"How easy is it then!" And just as the lady thought that "a little water" could clear her and her husband, the Calvinists of Geneva seem to have entertained the impression that by calling the burning of an innocent man alive "an error" they would be making their peace with posterity. Was the crucifixion of Jesus a mere error, too?

"How easy is it then!"

But the inscription which reads

"But condemning an Error  
Which was that of his age,"

tells, I am sorry to say, another untruth. The attempt is made to smut a whole age to lessen the enormity of Calvin's conduct towards a fellow reformer. For the sake of argument, suppose we grant that burning people alive was an error of the age, why was not this premier of God, this great apostle of the Reformation, this reverend and holy minister of the Gospel, above his age? Why was he not better than his age? And if his closeness to God, his grasp on the word of God, his piety and prayers, his special fitness to speak for God could not raise him above the jealousies, cruelties, bigotry, and malice and blind zeal of his age, what was his religion worth?

But was burning one's fellow-men for God's glory "an error" of the age? It was "an error" of the Church; it was "an error" of the clergy; it was "an error" of the bigot and the fanatic. But was it "an error" of the philosopher? Was it "an error" of the philanthropist? Was it even "an error" of enlightened churchmen like the great Erasmus? And we know that it was not "an error" of the rank and file of the people—the peasant, the laborer, the merchant. These people did not wish to see their neighbors burned or hanged. It was the clergy who invented the punishment and instructed the common people in the ways, we regret to say, in the inhuman ways, of persecution.

Once more: Who makes the age? "The age," says Goethe, "is always the same." The difference between one age and another is a difference in the master minds who control it. Why was the eighteenth century tolerant? Because Voltaire was its soul. Why was the sixteenth century "red in tooth and claw"? Because men like Calvin dominated it.

But there is a third untruth, in my opinion, and perhaps the most serious one of all, in the inscription I have read to you.

"And Firmly Attached  
To the Liberty of Conscience  
According to the True Principles  
Of the Reformation and the Gospel."

Indeed! If the Gospel is for liberty of conscience, is it so plainly, strongly, clearly, or only obscurely and vaguely? If the former, how is it that for nearly two thousand years that fact was not known? If the Gospel is clearly and honestly for liberty of conscience, and something or some power succeeded in preventing the Christian world from discovering that fact for two thousand years, the feat must be classed as among the greatest miracles on record. Was the deity hardening the heart of Christendom as he did that of Pharaoh, to prevent them from seeing the truth? Moreover, if the Gospel is for liberty of conscience, why is there a State Church in England and a State Church in Germany even as late

as our day? Why are not all sects on an equal footing even in Protestant countries? Was there ever a time when the Church had the opportunity to persecute and did not take advantage of it? Is she not to-day as repressive as public opinion will allow? If, on the other hand, the Gospel is for liberty of conscience, but has not been able to make itself understood, or if it has expressed itself so badly that the whole of Christendom for twenty thousand years has believed it to be the exponent of one, and only one, infallible religion, who is to be blamed for it? As we asked in a recent lecture in reply to Tolstoi's criticism that "the world has not understood Christ," we ask again, why has not Christ made himself understood? If a god, or a divine man has something to say, and cannot say it, who is to be blamed for it?

And so it has just been discovered, after, alas, a sea of blood has been shed during the past twenty centuries, that the Gospel is for tolerance! Why was not that discovery made when the Church was strong and commanded the State? Tolerance is the doctrine which adversity, not prosperity, has taught the Church. Deprived of her prerogatives and power, she has become neighborly. There are too many people to-day who object to be burned alive, which is reason enough why the Church should alter her policy. But the change is one of policy alone. The Gospel is the same; the Church is the same; the people alone have changed. How can an infallible faith advocate liberty of conscience? Can a religion respecting the rights of conscience say, "He that believeth not shall be damned?" or, "He that will not hear the church, let him be to thee as a heathen"?† As a heathen! Is that the language of tolerance? Not as a brother to be helped! not as a neighbor to be respected, but—"as a heathen," to whom it is forbidden even to say, "God speed."‡ In what part of the Bible or the Gospel, then, is liberty of conscience taught? It is a pity that the people who were generous enough to set up a stone to the memory of a great martyr were not brave enough to tell the truth and nothing but the truth.

No, good friends! tolerance does not come from above; tolerance is the gift of man to the gods. The liberty of conscience has been conquered by the martyrdom of man, not revealed by a book. Science has taken the rack from the hand of religion and converted it into a spinning wheel. Blessed be the name of science! At the monument of Servetus, Rationalist and Calvinist may clasp hands and respect sincerely one another's rights. Religion is more concerned about Christ than about man; the Church seeks first the glory of God. Science, on the other hand, knows but man and devotes to him its undivided attention.

This monument to a heretic by the followers of Calvin proves beyond a doubt that the world has changed masters. Servetus has replaced Calvin. The power which orthodoxy has lost, free thought has gained. Let us be worthy of the high position to which the trend of the ages has promoted us. Let us meet the new responsibilities with a larger charity, a more sincere devotion to progress and liberty. One of the fine sayings of Henry George is that, "as civilisation progresses a finer conscience and a higher courage are needed to preserve it." The Rationalists, too, will lose the world to which they have fallen heir unless in truth and honor and love and justice and courage and service—they shall excel their predecessors. The archives of Rationalism, which some future student may read, must be—will surely be—very different from those which Calvinism has left behind. The story I have told you this morning spells but one word—Progress! Theology has given its place to science; the State has stepped to the front, and the Church has dropped back; "the Kingdom of God" has yielded to the Republic of man. In the same year that Calvin died, Shakespeare was born. It was a very good exchange.

\* Mark xvi. 10. † Matt. xviii. 17. ‡ Epistle of John.

## Correspondence.

### L.C.C. ELECTIONS AND "PROGRESSIVES."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—A few days ago I was invited to cast my vote in favor of the "Progressives" of Dulwich, but being dubious with regard to the quality and quantity of progression in the minds of the appointed candidates for the Progressive Party, I wrote the enclosed letter to these gentlemen, Dr. Boon and the notorious Rev. Waldron. By this letter you will see that I requested their views on three points, which are:—

1. Corporal punishment in the L.C.C. schools;
2. Sale of literature in the parks; and
3. Sunday play on public grounds.

To the first Dr. Boon says (I presume speaking for himself and his compatriot, who, by the by, appears to be very ill) that he is of opinion that the head master of the school should undertake to be the castigator (or is it tyrant?)

To the second question, and to the third, he says that he is *against* such practices, which, to say the least, shows that my state of dubiety with regard to how much these gentlemen could be trusted with progression was not unfounded.

GERALD CHRISTIAN.

### A Freethinker's Protest.

WHY dost thou always shrink from Truth, O Man?  
 Why dost thou flee in fear, and madly cling  
 To Falsehood's slimy robe? Truth would but bring  
 Thee peace and rest. Then wherefore dost thou ban  
 And curse him still? Since Nature's sport began  
 Truth hath not sought to wound a mortal thing:  
 Fain would he pour sweet balm on every sting,  
 And quench the burning thirst in every man.  
 The prayers for light and comfort, sent in vain  
 To the dark priests and barren gods of lies,  
 Truth fain would hear. Why are thine eyes so dim?  
 Why worship lies, that cause thee all thy pain  
 And wear thy soul out, mocking at thy cries?  
 O, why still cling to Falsehood, shunning him?

THOMAS MOULT.

### TENNYSON AND FREETHOUGHT.

To turn to another topic—the attitude of Tennyson towards free-thought. We are all familiar with his famous eulogy of "honest doubt." But how if the religious moralist be of opinion that no doubts are honest except his own? This was certainly the conclusion reached in Tennyson's later utterances; for, acting on the same principle of denouncing all for lost, unless his own creed were accepted by others, he deliberately depicted free-thought as the ally and concomitant of libertinism, falsehood, and brutality. The worst instance of this reckless method of handling a momentous question is seen in *The Promise of May*, the villain of which drama—a scoundrel whose wickedness is rightly described as being "beyond all language"—is represented as being also a land-reformer, a socialist, a republican, an evolutionist, and a free-thinker. Such were the weapons which this "honest doubter" employed against those whose convictions did not coincide with his own.—H. S. Salt, "Tennyson as a Thinker."

### A SANGUINARY DEITY.

Whatever may be God's future, there will still remain his past. If the lives whom in the future he is to bless are to be witnesses to his divine goodness, the lives whom in the past he has blighted will be still crying to him out of the ground; and, since the theist maintains that he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, the hand which is red with millions of years of murder will never cease to incarnadine all the seas of eternity.—W. H. Mallock.

There can be no doubt at all that the religious creed of Sophocles differed in no essential respects from that of Shakespeare and Goethe. He no more believed in the objective existence of the Deities of his Pantheon than Shakespeare and Goethe, or indeed any of his own enlightened contemporaries did.—J. Churton Collins.

O life-loving mortals, who yearn to see the approaching day, burdened though ye be with countless ills, so urgent on all is the love of life; for life we know, of death we know nothing, and therefore it is that every one of us is afraid to quit this light of the sun.—Euripides.

**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, "No Traveller Returns."

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Church-street, Upper-street, N.): 7.30, Ivan Paperno, "Is Christianity True?"

**OUTDOOR.**

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

**COUNTRY.**

**INDOOR.**

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): Mrs H. Bradlaugh Bonner, 12 (noon), "Peers and Principle"; 6.30, "The Influence of Religious Beliefs on Morals."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, J. Hammond, "The Origin of Religion."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): J. T. Lloyd, 3, "Spiritualism from a Freethinker's Point of View"; 6.30, "The True Substitute for Christianity." Tea at 5.

NEWCASTLE RATIONALIST DEBATING SOCIETY (Vegetarian Café, Nelson-street): 7.30, A. L. Coates, "Christianity and the French Revolution."

NOTTINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Cobden Hall, Peachey-street): 7.30, F. R. Chasty, "The Christian God the Worst Character in the World's History."

STANLEY BRANCH N. S. S. (Ante-room, Co-operative Society): of Members' meeting.

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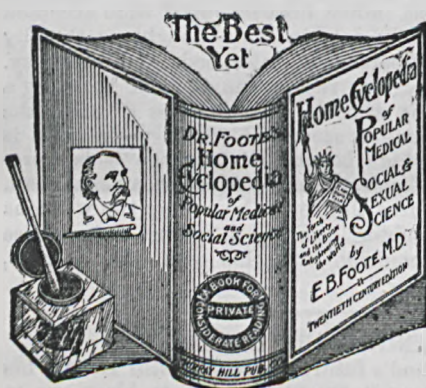
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