

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XXX.—No. 13

SUNDAY, MARCH 27, 1910

PRICE TWOPENCE

All truths partake of a common essence and naturally coincide with each other, and, like the drops of rain which fall separately into the river, mix themselves at once with the stream and strengthen the general current.

—CONYERS MIDDLETON.

“The Fight is Over.”

IGNORANCE, indolence, and timidity are constantly asserting that the war against bigotry and superstition is over, that there is no more need of fighting, and that militant Freethought is not only a waste of time and energy but a nuisance. The time, they say, has come for construction; but when you make enquiries you find that they have constructed nothing. Occasionally a well-meant effort fails because it is premature. Frequently the so-called “constructive” efforts are only the old “destructive” efforts carried on in a politely melancholy manner and with a show of “respectability.” Sometimes they are poor compromises that are bound to end in obvious futility. And every now and then some triumphant act of persecution occurs at which some of the “constructives” shudder or protest, according to their latent capacity for enthusiasm; while others of them are so much the slaves of their shibboleths that they follow an ostrich policy by pretending that the persecution is not real but merely imaginary. They wax eloquent, or at least excitedly fluent, over the judicial assassination of a Ferrer; but they never perceive the necessity of vindicating freedom nearer home. Their love of liberty is theoretical, not practical, and is consequently all the easier, and cheaper, and less dangerous.

We shall probably have something to say before very long about a serious attack on the rights of Freethinkers in a town which had better be nameless for the present. Meanwhile we wish to refer to two other cases—one English—the other American.

Councillor A. B. Moss has reopened the *Freethinker* question in Camberwell. It will be remembered that the Christian bigots on the Borough Council, urged on by the district Free Church Council, had the *Freethinker* excluded from all the Free Library reading-rooms. The protagonist in this movement was a pious publican, who frankly admitted that he had never read the paper, and did not see what that had to do with the question. Was not the very name of the paper enough to satisfy every Christian man of its poisonous character? Did it not oppose Christianity every week—and could there be anything more disreputable? In the name of sobriety, morality, and religion he moved its exclusion from the Free Library,—and it was excluded. Mr. Moss made a capital fight against this tyranny, but if he had the eloquence the other side had the votes. Since then there has been another election, in which Mr. Moss fortunately kept his seat, and he has taken an early opportunity of bringing the *Freethinker* question forward again. On Wednesday evening, March 16, he moved that the report of the Libraries' Committee should be referred back as a protest against “the narrow, bigoted, party spirit displayed in rejecting certain controversial journals from the library tables.” Mr. Moss made an excellent speech, and was well supported by Councillor

Hearson; but, of course, the motion was lost on a show of hands by a large majority,—the “Progressives” being nearly as bad as the “Moderates” on a matter of this kind.

Something was gained, however, by the discussion. The bigots had to drop their old pretence that the *Freethinker* was “obscene.” That had had its day, and was played out. Councillor Jennings, alias the Rev. H. E. Jennings, chairman of the Libraries Committee, is reported in the *Camberwell Times* as saying that “the principle of the paper in question was to treat with ridicule and contempt things which are generally regarded as sacred by the majority of Englishmen, and this was the cause of the action of the Committee.” The *Dulwich Post* makes him talk of our “profanity and scurrility in attacking the Great Being that the vast majority of the ratepayers adored.” Now we don't want to discuss theology with this professional Christian. That subject ought not to arise on a Borough Council. Mr. Jennings sits on that body, not as a parson, but as a citizen; not as a representative of the Christians, but as a representative of the ratepayers. We beg to ask him, then, what moral right he has to put a public taboo upon papers that are opposed to his own religious opinions? The Free Libraries are public property; they are as much Mr. Moss's as they are Mr. Jennings'; and it is not exactly clear upon the face of it that Mr. Jennings has any more right to exclude the *Freethinker* than Mr. Moss would have to exclude the *Christian World*. Will the reverend Councillor kindly explain? As far as we can make out from his speech, he claims protection for a certain Great Being whom he adores; but we venture to suggest that no Great Being, but only a Little Being, would seek protection against criticism at all; and to demand it of a body like the Camberwell Borough Council is a stupid and scandalous abuse of Mr. Jennings' public position.

The American case is this. Mr. M. M. Mangasarian, whom we are proud to know personally, is perhaps the ablest representative of Freethought in America. He is lecturer to the Independent Religious Society (Rationalist), and has spoken for some years to large audiences on Sundays in the Orchestra Hall, Chicago. A few months ago the bigots had an advertisement of his lecture on Joan of Arc removed from street railway hoardings. They have since induced the Orchestra Hall trustees to give the Society notice to clear out by the first of May. Two or three thousand good citizens are thus wantonly insulted and injured,—in the name of one who is alleged to have said “Love your enemies.” Mr. Mangasarian meets the situation with the fine temper we expected of him. His congregation talk of building a place of their own, and perhaps this will be their only security.

When this sort of thing is possible in “free” America it is certain that the fight against bigotry and superstition is *not* over. It may be over intellectually, but it is not over practically. The Churches still have millions of uneducated or half-educated supporters; they are wealthy and powerful, and they are clearly bent on using all the advantages they possess in a last effort to crush their adversaries. We warn Freethinkers against the soft delights of a fool's paradise. Our last word to them is “Beware!”

G. W. FOOTE.

Signs of Collapse.

THE liberal Christian papers have manifested a somewhat uneasy agreement in reprimanding Dr. Forsyth for the tone and matter of his recent address before the Free Church Council. He is accused of a want of Christian charity, of manifesting an air of papal infallibility, of illiberality, and of fomenting the unrest he is anxious to allay. All this may be, and probably is, true; and yet it does not amount to an impeachment of Dr. Forsyth's character as a Christian. The charity that is quite properly discriminated by being called Christian has never, historically, been distinguished by kindness or goodwill towards opponents, and the strength of a man's belief in Christian doctrines has usually been in exact proportion to his intolerance of opposing opinions. It is, indeed, one of the problems of Christian history to which liberal theologians might profitably concern themselves, why, during the whole of its history, Christian belief has been so prolific in its production of exactly the faults for which Dr. Forsyth is now being blamed. Merely denouncing these faults is discarding the problem, not answering it. If Dr. Forsyth were less convinced than he is of the truth of orthodox doctrines, he would be more kindly disposed than he is towards reforming theologians. If he were less Christian he would be more human—or at least more humane. His is the attitude of one who feels the old faith going, and recognises as among the agents of its disappearance those whom he believes should act as its strongest supporters.

The most serious of Dr. Forsyth's charges was contained in the following passage. If, he said, a man surrenders historic and apostolic Christianity

"while he is all the time enjoying the name, the credit, and the funds of that faith, we think it dishonest and ignoble. It is obtaining influence under false pretences, and eating the bread of a faith denied. It shatters a man's influence where it does not shut his mouth. No man has any moral right to criticise the capitalist system or the ethics of business from a pulpit that is only held by a malversion of trust which goes far beyond a mere modification of theology. Straight men do not understand how the truth can be held in such unrighteousness. Nor can they associate spiritual dignity with intellectual immorality. It is conduct that would wreck a business man's credit, to promote Unitarian belief by smart capture of evangelical resources."

Although the New Theologians appear to have taken this stricture to themselves, one would probably be well within the mark in saying that one-half the churches and chapels in the country are held under the conditions denounced by Dr. Forsyth. These preachers do not preach up—or down—to their trust deeds for two reasons. One is that they do not themselves believe in the religious doctrines stated therein, and the other is that their congregations would not stand them if they did. Scores of churches are tied down by their trust deeds to the Westminster Confession, but who is there to-day who would dare to preach that barbarous document in its plain and literal meaning? How many Church of England clergymen would dare to act in a similar manner with reference to the Church of England Articles? Or further still, how many of any denomination would dare to preach a plain and unimpeachably honest interpretation of the New Testament? One may safely say, very few; and among these few not even Dr. Forsyth would be reckoned.

What, then, would be the honest policy for such clergymen to adopt? Well, they might come right out from the Churches, and stand or fall by the sanity of their own preaching. Or they might remain, utilising the revenues of the churches, while openly denying the moral right of anyone to bind down future generations to particular beliefs through the agency of trust deeds. Either course would be legitimate and honorable, although the latter contains elements of difficulty. But there is both social and intellectual danger in money being able to pur-

chase the mental liberty of unborn generations by way of endowing specific opinions. Such endowments act as bribes to the dishonest, and encouragements to mentally and morally retrogressive characters. The organised power of society is by this method utilised to the end of robbing society of its most important instrument of progress. No one can question that ideas such as are championed by Dr. Forsyth would not have nearly the power they possess were it not for the endowments that have kept them alive. And, therefore, if those who depart from the teachings of trust deeds were to raise the whole question of their moral validity, and raise it openly and straightforwardly, they would be doing society a service of no small value.

The regrettable thing is that these men remain in the churches, maintaining a silence upon this most important subject while talking largely about the spirit and nobility of the founders and of the spirit of "true Christianity," thus dulling their own moral perceptions and confusing those of their hearers. The aim of the founders is clear and precise. It is expressed in the very deeds preachers are charged with traversing. Of course, any incumbent might argue that if these men were alive to-day they would agree with him. But to this the obvious reply is, that if they were alive to-day they might not be in agreement with any form of religion. We ought to think kindly even of theologians. And as to "true Christianity," this is so nebulous a thing that it has always served as a warranty for all forms of folly and rascality, and in all probability will continue to do so. At present we are getting a new reading of Christianity almost with each year, while New Theologians in particular seem to imagine they can combine the theology of Christianity with the Atheistic Socialism of Karl Marx, and satisfy the rest of the world with the assurance that, on their honor, all is well.

What Christianity might be made to mean is limited only by the ingenuity of liberalising theologians,—some of whom are past masters in the art of logical counterfeiting. What it actually has meant is a question of historical verification, and is expressed in the creeds of the churches and in the sermons of preachers. And in throwing over this historic Christianity there is opened up a danger which bigots, because they are bigots, see, but which less bigoted Christians either do not, or will not, consider. Christianity, they tell us, must be interpreted in the light of the social necessities and knowledge of to-day. Nothing could be more desirable—if only they would carry out so excellent a rule. For this is bringing Christianity to the test of experience; not the semi-mystical hallucination or the misunderstood feelings of the religious enthusiast that are usually connoted by that word, but the experience that is the property of all, and appeals to all normally constituted minds. It is making present knowledge and social requirements supreme, and no Freethinker ever asked for more than this. Only, if the religion advocated is one that springs from the life of to-day, is there any reason why we should be sent back a couple of thousand years to a poor Jewish peasant for guidance? Is there any reason why even the name of Christian should be retained? Historic Christianity is, on this line, a tissue of absurdities; Biblical Christianity a supernaturalism that needs explaining away in terms of social science. The retained religion becomes a mere tissue of empty phrases, and the orthodox believer is substantially correct in challenging the Christianity of those who imagine they can retain the thing itself while disowning its historic and authoritative forms.

The *Christian Commonwealth*, in a leading article on Dr. Forsyth, speaks of "the historic Jesus as He is being rediscovered," and argues that he must "be allowed to be the interpreter of His own gospel." But who has rediscovered the historic Jesus? All such alleged discoveries are the products of theologians creating a historic figure that will suit their own theories. By declaring that the Jesus of the

Gospels could not have said this, or did not mean that, or that he meant something entirely different to the meaning the alleged reports plainly bear, and by discreetly dropping the supernatural it is, of course, possible to create a Jesus that will suit anybody or anything. But the same might be done with almost any character associated with any religion. The truth that will have to be recognised is, that there is no evidence whatever for a historical gospel Jesus, and that a candid comparison of the Christian with other mythologies almost demonstrates it. Some are already recognising this to be the real state of the case. Thus the Rev. K. C. Anderson, a prominent New Theologian, said in an article of two or three weeks ago,—

"No story is so universal as that of a dying Savior God. All over the East that was common in the form of Adonis or Thammuz, Attis, Dionysus, Osiris; the whole Roman Empire was flooded with cults from the East which had this as their central feature. All the evidence goes to show that the death of Jesus is but a version of this oft repeated tale. The trial and crucifixion of Jesus bear no historic marks; but in every feature follows this pre-Christian sacrifice. And not only is the death pre-Christian, but the teaching and the twelve apostles are pre-Christian likewise; and the difficulty of supposing that a real teacher got foisted on to a going sacrifice-God-cult seems insuperable. It is purely arbitrary to stop with the supernatural features of the Gospel in peeling off the accretions that have grown around a real man. Most, if not all, of the natural features are seen to be accretions as well. You cannot put your finger on a single feature of the life, or a single precept of the teaching, and affirm that it came from a real actual Jesus."

This is well said, and it is gratifying to note how surely, even though slowly, the more thoughtful Christians are recognising the truth taught by the ignorant, unspiritual, and generally benighted Freethinker. But if the historic Jesus is given up as a myth, what remains? True, there is still the belief in a God, in a soul, in a future life; but of Christianity there is not left a trace. That took its stand on an alleged historic fact—the miraculously born Son of God—and if that is dismissed nothing is left of Christianity. That a certain good man existed, around whom these ancient myths gathered, *might* be true, although there is no evidence even for this. Still, Freethinkers are not called upon to prove, nor are they concerned in proving, that someone lived two thousand years ago, went about doing good, and that people afterwards wove myths around him. Good men are not, after all, so scarce in the world as theologians would have us believe, nor is it unusual for legends to be told of good, and bad, men. It is the supernaturally fathered, miracle working, resurrected Christ that Freethinkers have opposed, and it is with this that Christianity, as a creed for thoughtful and honest men, must either ultimately stand or fall.

Here, then, is the present position. We have a religion which, on the one side, intelligent men and women find it impossible to accept without modifications and reservations that are a serious slight upon either their intelligence or their candor. And on the other side, a number of bigots who, because of their bigotry, are able to read the other class a lesson in consistency and straightforwardness, and challenge them to be honest in their dealings with the Christian religion. It is a position which gives to the bigot a power he would not or could not otherwise possess. For it is the timidity of those who see, this clinging to a name when the thing itself has departed, which gives to the bigot nine-tenths of the power he wields. And apart from both is the Freethinker with the conviction that reason, and therefore time, is on his side, and makes for the destruction of both. Every fresh attempt to rationalise Christianity makes, ultimately, for the growth of Freethought. An absurdity may live on indefinitely as an absurdity; give it a coating of reason and you apply a covering that inevitably destroys the material it is meant to preserve.

C. COHEN.

The Degradation of Easter.

ONE cannot too often emphasise the fact that Easter is a movable feast. While this year it occurs on the twenty-seventh of March, last year it fell on the eleventh, and the year before on the nineteenth, of April. The very idea of observing a movable feast in commemoration of a historical event of two thousand years ago is intolerably absurd. Yet it is to such an absurdity that the Christian Church has deliberately committed itself. On every Easter Sunday it sings out, "Christ has risen to-day," when it knows perfectly well that there is no truth in the old chant. This is frankly acknowledged by the theologians, though they continue to claim this festival as if it were legitimately their own, and wax religiously angry if you gently hint that they are guilty of theft. The truth is, however, that the connection between Christianity and Easter is purely artificial or fictitious, quite as unreal as was the connection between the traditional deliverance of the Jews from Egypt and the Passover. As the Passover was more ancient than the legendary Exodus, so was Easter much older than the myth of the resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, the Passover and Easter are but two different names for the same festival, a festival that has been celebrated, with essentially similar rites, from times immemorial by almost every nation under the sun. In Greece, Phœnicia, Syria, Egypt, Hindustan, and many other countries, it was customary, thousands of years before the time of Christ, to worship gods who rose from the dead on Easter-day. Adonis, Dionysus, Osiris, Krishna, and many more, were resurrection-deities, corn and wine gods, annually slain for the good of mankind, and annually coming back to life amid universal rejoicings. That is to say, they were personifications, under varying disguises, of the powers of Nature as they exhibited themselves in the spring of the year, or the vernal equinox.

It is highly interesting to note that so early a Church historian as the Venerable Bede informs us that our word *Easter*—Anglo-Saxon *Eastre*, *Eoster*—is derived from *Eostre*, or *Ostara*, the name of the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring. This fair divinity was duly honored by the dedication of the fourth month—practically our April, and on that account called *Eoster-month*—to her worship. Bede tells us further that this month corresponds to the "Mensis Paschalis," when, as he believed, "the old festival was observed with the gladness of a new solemnity." Now, in the olden time, the worship of the goddess *Eoster*, under one name or another, was well-nigh universal. In his *Golden Bough* Dr. Frazer furnishes particulars concerning the observance of her festival in ancient Rome. In the temple of Vesta the sacred fire was kindled anew every year on the first of March. To this day bonfires, which owe their origin to that old custom, are burned in many parts of Europe, notably in Germany. Dr. Frazer says: "The fires are always kindled, year by year, on the same hill, which accordingly often takes the name of Easter Mountain. As far as their light reaches, so far, in the belief of the peasants, the fields will be fruitful, and the houses on which they shine will be safe from conflagration or sickness. As the flames die down, young and old leap over them, and cattle are sometimes driven through the smouldering embers," in the belief that immunity from disease may thus be won.

It is an exceedingly suggestive fact that these German bonfires are also but a perpetuation of the ancient Beltane festival observed by many heathen Celts. Originally Beltane was a festival common to all Celtic people, and traces of it were to be found in Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland down to the beginning of last century. Now, Bel or Beal was the twin-brother of *Eoster*, and between them they constituted the complete god of light and life. During the celebration of the festival, two bonfires, in close proximity, were religiously kindled, and as in Germany, so on this island, men and cattle were

driven between them, in the conviction that health would thereby be assured and disease avoided.

It is now an established fact, not only that the Easter festival is of Pagan origin, but also that as a Christian festival it has retained most of its Pagan characteristics. We still glory in our brightly painted Easter eggs, and delight in presenting them to our friends; but how many of us are aware that these eggs are symbolical of the reappearance of spring, and may be traced back to a Magian or Persian origin? Who has not heard of that mundane egg for which Ormuzd and Ahriman, God and the Devil, were to contend till the end of time? According to one tradition the world itself was originally an egg Divinely laid, which was hatched at Easter-tide. Have we not also our "hot cross buns" on Good Friday, which have no connection whatever with the Christian cross except by adoption? It is well known to all scholars that the cross is not a Christian symbol except by adaptation. Long before Christianity was founded it was in constant use in many countries, sometimes as an ornament, sometimes as an object of worship, but mostly as a symbol. The Scandinavians set up runic crosses as boundary marks. John Fiske informs us that the Mexicans employed it as "one of the emblems of Quetzalcoatl as lord of the four cardinal points and the four winds that blew therefrom." In some parts of Greece it symbolises the four quarters of the moon. It was a custom with the Greeks to offer cakes with "horns" to Apollo, Diana, Hecate, and the Moon. They were truly wonderful cakes, for they never grew mouldy. Now read the old lines of Poor Robin in the *Almanack* of 1788:—

" Good Friday comes this month : the old woman runs
With one a penny, two a penny ' hot cross buns,'
Whose virtue is, if you believe what's said,
They'll not grow mouldy like the common bread."

The same thing is true of the many Easter games, songs, dances, and dramatic shows of which we read. They have all been derived from the Pagan world. Indeed, the whole of Eastertide is an inheritance from despised Heathendom. Not only the conceptions that underly Easter, but all the rites and ceremonies that characterise its observance, are non-Christian, and do but poorly serve the Christian cause against the grain. Jesus said that men do not "put new wine into old wineskins; else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled and the skins perish." And yet his so-called followers did the very thing against which he so definitely warned them. They declared that the Christian faith was a new wine which was calculated to put new life into this decayed old world; but what they so earnestly offered as wine of an infinitely superior vintage to all others they poured into the wineskins that had been in use for countless ages, with the result that the skins burst, the wine was spilled, and the skins perished. Or, to borrow the illustration employed by the late Mr. Wheeler, "The man who stole the saucepan, and made a new lid for it, took good care that the lid fitted. But the Christian lid put on the old Pagan saucepan does not fit." Fancy converting one of the most beautiful and joy-giving events in Nature into the anniversary of the alleged resurrection of a slain God-man in Palestine, and putting a correspondingly changed interpretation upon the rejoicings of the people at every repetition of the event. Filching the Easter festival, the Christian said: "The corn and wine Gods whom you Pagans worship never existed. Their death and resurrection are idle tales, having absolutely no foundation in fact. But our God man actually died and rose again; and now that we are in power, we command you, not to discontinue the old festivals, but to 'observe them with the gladness of a new solemnity'; not to cease rejoicing, but to rejoice over our Lord Christ's triumphant rising from the tomb to redeem this lost world." Well, Easter *nominally* became a Christian festival, but never *really*; but the nominal conversion was a degradation of the festival. It was divested almost entirely of its original jubilant signification, but its new meaning was never realised by the populace.

This was true even during the Ages of Faith; and it is very much more true to-day. Out of London's six million people scarcely one million will be found in its sanctuaries on this Easter Sunday. To the masses of the people the resurrection of Jesus has no meaning, and the same thing can be said of not a few professing Christians. In all Christendom the number of those who verily believe that Jesus rose from the dead is a small and ever-dwindling minority. The overwhelming majority in almost every Christian country are in reality Pagans, but *minus* any of the Pagan religions.

Of course, this is a fact deeply deplored by the Churches. The general complaint is that all classes are at last forsaking the House of God, and finding their supreme delight in secular pursuits; and, judging by the signs of the times, it is probable that the complaint may be, to adopt Lamb's words, "prolonged into an endless jeremiad." But we have our consolation in the fact that, although neither Osiris nor Jesus ever returned from the tomb, this grand old earth undergoes a fresh resurrection once in every year, and that this resurrection we may all join in celebrating with gladness of heart and uprising of soul. Spring is ever beautiful, with its steadily increasing light and warmth and revivifying processes. Naturally it is a happy, joyous, triumphant season. Winter has set, and summer is already rising with healing in its wings. We feel the soft and soothing breezes, we listen with rapture to the sweet music of the forest, with joy we behold the flowers blooming, and the trees expressing their gladness by covering their nakedness with lovely foliage. Surely our Easter holidays cannot be more pleasantly and profitably spent than in the gladsome contemplation of the beauties of Nature, of the music and magic of life as it mounts its golden throne and proves victorious over all the forces of death. The essential message of Easter, therefore, is, Love life, dwell close to Nature's heart, and from her learn how to use life to the best advantage. Winter shall return again; but even winter is not to be despised, in that it supplies "the fuel, decay," which "brightens the fire of renewal" when spring comes round next time. "And we?" asks George Meredith, and answers:—

" Death is the word of a bovine day,
Know you the breast of the springing To-be."

J. T. LLOYD.

The Buddhist Priesthood.

READERS of the *Freethinker* would doubtless notice with some pleasure, a few weeks ago, the acknowledgment of a subscription and a letter from a Buddhist priest in far-off Rangoon. That the priest of a religious faith should be an ardent admirer of the strenuous labors of the editor of the *Freethinker*, and in full sympathy with the aims and objects of the Freethought movement in England, may seem, to those unacquainted with the tenets of Buddhism, to savor of inconsistency. But the Buddhist priesthood affords an interesting study in the philosophy of names and things. It may be a priesthood in name, but, as Mr. Fielding says in his admirable book, *The Soul of a People*, "the whole idea and thing of a priesthood would be repugnant to Buddhism." The title of priest is merely one of accommodation, as there is no English equivalent that will describe the nature and office of this secular order. They are neither priests, clergymen, ministers, nor monks in the sense in which we use these words. In their practice of celibacy, and in their communal life, this monkhood may exhibit a resemblance to some religious orders; but here, it would appear, the resemblance ends. One of the vows which every person who enters this brotherhood is obliged to make is, that he will never claim any supernatural authority or power. And this non-theological basis of their order differentiates them from every other

priestly caste. The weapon of supernaturalism, which has been such a potent instrument in the hands of the priest to subjugate and degrade the human mind, has never been wielded by this secular priesthood. Contrary to the universal practice of priestcraft, they have never sought to stultify the human intellect by fettering it with absurd dogmas, or to deceive it with elaborate and meaningless ritual. Unlike the Christian priesthood, they have never sought to grasp at secular power as a means of the aggrandisement of their order, nor have they ever sought to accumulate personal wealth.

Quite recently I chanced to look into Howitt's *History of Priestcraft* to see what he said concerning this Buddhist priesthood. And while he seriously indicts every priesthood, ancient and modern, Pagan and Christian, of every conceivable vice, he is significantly silent regarding the numerous priests of the Buddha. The only reference he makes to them is in connection with the festival of Juggenauth, where, he says, they used to unite with the Brahmins in the commission of sacrificial cruelty and lust. And he speaks of the thousands of victims who were annually sacrificed beneath the wheels of the Juggenauth Car. This allegation puzzled me, being in contradiction to all that I had read of the humane teaching of Buddhism. What, I thought, could the priests of the gentle Buddha have to do at such a horrible sacrificial festival? It so happened that the same day I was glancing through Moncreu Conway's *My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East*, when I came upon the following reference, which sufficiently explained the presence of the priests of Buddha at the festival of Juggenauth.

On page 179 he writes:—

"I found learned men in India, both native and English, puzzled by the evil reputation of Juggenauth and his famous Car throughout Christendom. He is a form of Vishnu, the Lord of Life, to whom all destruction is abhorrent. The death of the smallest creature beneath the wheels of that car, much more of a human being, would entail long and costly ceremonies of purification. It is surmised that the obstinate and proverbial fiction about the Car of Juggenauth must have originated in some accident witnessed by a missionary, who supposed it a regular part of the ceremonies. There have been suicides in India, as in Christian countries, from religious mania, but the place where they are least likely to occur is in the neighborhood of Juggenauth.

In 1876 I gave a discourse in London in which this subject was alluded to, a newspaper report of which led Professor A. Bain, of Aberdeen, to address a letter to the *Academy*, citing high authorities in England for the traditional belief about Juggenauth. I was able to fortify my statement, and Professor Bain wrote me a private letter saying he was convinced that it was correct. Even Professor Max Müller told me that until he read the letters in the *Academy* he supposed that suicides had formerly occurred under the car.

It is a notable example of the irony of mythology that this same calumniated Juggenauth should for many years have been the deity under whose protection Buddha has been steadily returning into India. Wherever we see an image of Juggenauth—whose noble countenance is pictured in Christian imagination as ferocious—there is always beside him an image of Buddha. When we remember that this deity is not only the source of that catholicity which is renewing Buddhism in India, but also of the liberty that enables Indians of rank to travel abroad without losing caste, there is brought before us one more lesson in the untrustworthiness of the missionary reports on which popular notions of distant countries are founded."

Thus the only charge which Mr. Howitt makes against this Buddhist priesthood is one without any foundation in fact, and the alleged commission of cruelty and lust at the Juggenauth festival a pure Christian fiction. And it is surely significant of much that the only religious order which is blameless of the crimes and superstitious cruelties that have characterised the priesthood of all ages and climes is one which has never claimed a supernatural sanction. Freethinkers may honorably extend the right hand of fellowship to the followers of a great

Teacher, whose whole doctrine resolved itself, as Rhys Davids says, into a system of intellectual and moral culture. And if the yellow peril from the East comes in the shape of sympathetic support of Free-thought propaganda, and of golden contributions to the President's Honorarium Fund, we, at least, will have no reason to dread its coming. Many of us would even be willing to meet the trouble half way.

JOSEPH BRYCE.

Holy Water and Mugs.

Copy of Bill exposed in Workshop Window, at Leabrooks Engineering Works, near Alfreton.

In that book wrongly called *Holy Bible* one may read of the "water of life," that precious fluid which, like the "blood of Jesus," is supposed to be efficacious in removing all spots and blemishes from the human soul.

It is advertised in Isaiah as being offered for sale "without money and without price." We wonder if modern sharps have learnt their lesson from the parson's text-book when they advertise in the *Daily Mail*, "Absolutely to be given away, free gratis, gent.'s solid silver watch."

This holy water is to be obtained principally at churches and chapels, and it is served out in mugs—free gratis. If you want a pint it costs you nothing, and a gallon will cost you no more. But be careful how much you ask for; like the aforesaid advertisements, there is something in the background. Although the watch is free, you will find, if you are foolish enough to send for it, that you are expected to purchase a chain to hang it on; and the chain and watch together are worth less than you pay for the chain. So the cute advertiser makes a profit out of the credulous buyer, and thus manages to lead a life of luxurious idleness.

And so, although the precious water of life is free, you have to pay for the mug in which it is served up to you. Mostly the mug is either a parson or a pastor, and you will find it very expensive. The Jews pay their mugs two shillings out of every pound of their earnings, and this you will see is not at all a bad trade for the mug. (Those who spend their hard-earned money in this way are mugs of another sort!)

If you have been trained from your childhood to drink the stimulating water of life, we feel sorry for you; you will find it a hard battle to break away from the bad habit. That is why the parsons love to get hold of the children; in fact, Sunday-schools are kept going to train children, so that as they grow up and become wage-earners they will think it is their duty to help to keep these black-coated heaven-pilots out of the workhouse.

As we have said, you will find it very expensive to keep on imbibing the water of life. Far better get a well of your own called *Reason*, and use the vessel called *Common-sense*. You can then take deep draughts, and you gain health of mind and intellect with every mouthful. And, unlike the water of life, which leaves a bitter taste of unsatisfied intellectual craving behind it, the water from the well of Reason lies sweetly on the palate for many hours afterwards.

If, however, you feel you cannot really live without the water of life, we should like you to try the Methodist Chapel in Leabrooks [a large chapel with a big debt, and served by local preachers]. Although we are Atheists, we don't mind being charitable once in a way, and we recommend this chapel because we fear it is not doing so good a trade as such firms as the Reddings Congo [a local Congregational Chapel with resident minister and well attended by respectable people]. Possibly this is due to the lack of a resident minister to look after the well and keep flies off the water.

Still, we have every reason to believe that the water is practically the same, and the mugs will certainly cost you less. Mugs that have taken years to make at a mugs' manufacturing college are forced to be more costly than ordinary mugs made at a drain-pipe works (local preachers).

In these days of keen struggle working men cannot always afford to pay for the best, and so we advise you horny-handed sons of toil to try Leabrooks water before going elsewhere. If you prefer your water diluted with hops, you might try—but there, we don't want you to think that we are paid for advertising water.

N.B.—Holy water mugs vary considerably in price. We believe the New Theology mug at the City Temple is worth £3,000 a year. (A better job than digging for coal.) In the Church of England you can have your pick of mugs ranging in price from £15,000 a year to £40. Methodist mugs mostly run at from £100 to £150 per annum. England spends as much on mugs as would keep all widows, orphans, cripples, blind, etc., in comfort.

THE LEABROOKS HUMANITARIAN SOCIETY.

Acid Drops.

Lord Hugh Cecil is vigorously pursuing his Chinese hobby. He has made another "striking" speech on the subject—this time at the Mansion House, where a meeting was held under the chairmanship of the Lord Mayor to promote the United Universities' scheme for establishing a University for China. The object of this University is really and entirely religious. It is hoped to Christianise a good number of young Chinese students, and thus to help the missionaries indirectly. This fact, indeed, explains the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Rev. J. Scott Lidgett on the platform at the Mansion House meeting. What earthly interest can these gentlemen have in Chinese education as such? Everybody knows the answer to that question.

Let us return to Lord Hugh Cecil. His policy seems to be to frighten Englishmen into subscribing towards this University scheme. He warned the Mansion House meeting that the awakening of China meant the advent into the world's comity of a nation "great, formidable, transcendent beyond the bounds of any sober imagination." China would be a terrible danger to the Western world unless she accepted Western "religion" as well as Western "civilisation." Japan, unfortunately, had already taken the wrong turning. She had taken "the fruits but not the roots of Western civilisation." And what are its roots? Let us hear Lord Hugh Cecil on this point:—

"You cannot listen to a speech in Parliament, you cannot read an article in a newspaper if you are on the watch, without observing that Christianity is pre-supposed—that a Christian assumption underlies all that is written and said. Nothing, I suppose, can be more certain than that if there had never been Christianity there never would have been such a thing as a magazine rifle or a lyddite shell. Japan will get the magazine rifle and the lyddite shell, but she will not get all the conditioning and limiting forces over the use of those instruments which a Christian atmosphere implies."

We incline to agree with the speaker that there would not have been magazine rifles and lyddite shells if there had been no Christianity. We also agree with him that Japan is not going to accept Western religion. She has accepted enough Western science to repel the insolence of Western religionists. That is all. She does not wish to imitate their manners or their morals. And it will be very surprising if China acts differently. Lord Hugh Cecil is sure, as everyone else is sure, that she is "going to accept a spirit from the West," and he asks, "Is it to be angel or demon?"—by which he means, "Is it to be Christian or Pagan?" We believe he may lay his bottom dollar on its being Pagan.

The pious effort by which Lord Hugh Cecil & Co. seek to avert the paganising of the China of the future is extremely simple. The bland Celestials will see through it in five minutes. It is "the founding of a university in China, in which the atmosphere is distinctly Christian, while the teaching remains secular, and in association with which are denominational hostels where Christianity is freely taught." The spider spins his enticing web, and the flies are expected to drop into it wholesale. But will they? We fancy that Lord Hugh Cecil & Co. take a ridiculously low view of the Chinese intelligence.

Mr. Runciman, President of the Board of Education, was amongst the speakers at that Mansion House meeting. He might have been better employed. The mess he made over English education in his last Bill, and in his subsequent foolish attempt (which was defeated) to establish "Simple Bible Teaching" by a stroke of his pen, is not yet forgotten. The right honorable gentleman is a little too ostentatious in his desire to infect England, and now apparently the world, with his own religious sentiments.

Mr. Runciman has been telling the House of Commons that no less than seven-ninths of the income of denominational training colleges comes from the State. Nevertheless he suggested that "they should let sleeping dogs lie" and not "revive the old religious controversy round the question of training colleges." The Board of Education had endeavored to preserve their denominational character and atmosphere. Such is the way in which an essential principle of the old Liberalism—namely, the separation of religion from the State—is treated by Liberal upstarts of to-day, who have as many principles as Artemus Ward. That humorist being asked what his principles were, replied that he hadn't any—he was in the show business.

When the London County Council banned the sale of Mr. Foote's *Bible Romances* at Freethought meetings in

Victoria Park, and presumably elsewhere, we did not notice that any protest was made by any "advanced" people outside the National Secular Society. We now hear that other "advanced" people are being treated to the same sauce and don't like it. The Battersea and Clapham Common Freethought Society applied for permission to sell R. P. A. sixpenny publications at its meetings, together with Blatchford's *God and My Neighbor*. Such "respectable" publications, however, are now taking their turn to be tabooed—as we prophesied they would be; for when the most wicked Freethought publications are dealt with the bigots naturally turn their attention to the less iniquitous ones. The Parks Committee of the L. C. C. replied that they had specially considered the application but "did not see their way" (good old jargon!) to grant the permit asked for. No other reason is given, nor is it likely to be: bigots rarely like to be too explicit when a considerable number of people are fond of fair play.

The "Progressives" on the L. C. C. are very little more friendly to free religious discussion than the "Moderates." A sympathetic letter has been received by the Battersea Society from the Rev. Stewart D. Headlam, but other Councillors seem to regard discretion as far the better part of valor in this instance.

Mr. A. D. Howell Smith tells us that he attended a great "Progressive" demonstration at the Battersea Town Hall just before the recent elections, and passed up the following question in writing: "The Moderates have refused to allow the sale of literature, published by the Rationalist Press Association and the National Secular Society, on Clapham Common. What is likely to be the policy of the Progressives in this matter, if returned to power?" The Chairman read the question out in a very weak and watery tone, and called on Mr. Davies, one of the Progressive candidates, to reply. Mr. Davies made the silly and impertinent announcement that "if, in the opinion of the officer concerned with the issue of permits, the literature to be sold was of an obscene nature, and likely to demoralise the visitors to the Common, the Progressives would no more sanction its sale than have the Moderates." Obscene! And some of the authors that were refused a permit were F. W. Newman, Grant Allen, and John Stuart Mill! To be insolent to G. W. Foote is one of the regular privileges of Christians, but they appear to be desirous of extending their insolence over a wider area, and they start on J. S. Mill for a beginning! Such is what Whitman called "the never ending audacity of elected persons." They are elected to look after our business, but that is too little for their gigantic brains, so they volunteer to look after our intellect and morals. And the London people look like putting up with it.

We see that during General Booth's tour in Germany he was faced with organised opposition on the part of some of the workmen's Unions. We read that "great processions" of working men demonstrated against the "Army" by marching past the house where the General was staying. Evidently German working men are not so easily gulled as the Army had hoped.

The Berlin Correspondent of the *Christian World* writes that while "in England Socialists may be, and often are, sincere and avowed Christians, in Germany this is almost inconceivable." He also says it is "a well known fact that the Socialist leaders are infidels to a man, and that all their influence is cast on the side of the secularisation of the country and the abolition of the Christian Church, Established or Free." He also cites the Socialist leader, Herr Hoffmann, as saying: "The Church has only one interest, and that is, to keep the people as stupid as possible, and to beguile them into believing that their chains are not so heavy as they appear. The best patriots are the Atheists and Socialists, whose aim it is to set the people on the heights of intellectuality. Belief in what the churches teach is intellectual slavery. 'Away from the Churches!' that must be our cry."

General Booth talked for himself, to a *Daily News* interviewer, about his German tour. One thing that he says we may believe, for he would not say it unless it were wrung from him. "Everywhere," he told the interviewer, "I find the complaint that the crowd are turning away from the Churches.....Religion has become a matter of form instead of a living, breathing, active principle—a withered husk, a dead shell. And the man in the street has thrown it away." "The outlook," he added, "is not promising. I might even say it is melancholy. When I think of it all I am distressed." No wonder. General Booth has posed for forty years, at least, as a God-appointed savior of the people; and he finds at last that all his work is as nothing in comparison

with the immense decline of Christianity amongst all sections of the community.

General Booth positively gave himself and the Salvation Army away in the course of that interview. He was expatiating on the transcendent importance of the spiritual work, and the interviewer remarked that "almost all the recent appeals for financial help for the Army have been based upon its activities in social service." "That is so," General Booth replied, "but you must remember that our appeals are largely made to people who have no strong sympathy with directly spiritual work, but who are ready to respond to any appeal which shows that men are being lifted from the gutter and made more respectable citizens." What is this but saying that General Booth is exploiting the secular spirit of humanity in the interest of a supernatural religion?

Men let women do all the religious work they can which is unpaid. When there is a salary attached to it men keep the job for themselves. Rev. R. J. Wells, secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, writes to the *Daily News* denying that it has been resolved to admit women to the ministry in that denomination. Suffragettes please note. We often wonder why the ladies are so eager to visit the polling booth and so satisfied with their exclusion from the pulpit. Is it because they prefer to listen to a man preaching when they go to the house of God?

The Bishop of London says that thirty years ago he was made a teetotaler by someone throwing a brick at his head outside a temperance meeting. At last we have the secret of how to appeal to the Bishop's intelligence; although we imagine it would need a pretty liberal supply of bricks to make him intelligent on some topics. The Bishop has had other kinds of bricks thrown at him during his career. While he was in the East-end, a brick was thrown at him in the shape of a sinecure Canoury of St. Paul's, which carried with it £1,000 a year. When he was made Bishop of Stepney he was struck with another £1,000 brick, making £2,000 in all. And still later he was assaulted with a £10,000 brick and extras. We do not say that it was the blows from these bricks that made Bishop Ingram believe in Christianity, but their influence was certainly not in the direction of weakening his faith. No doubt he felt he was being stoned in the Lord's service, and humbly bent his neck beneath the shower.

A New York paper has it that there are 22,000 missionaries at work among non-Christian people, while the contributions reach the sum of £5,000,000 annually. England and America are well to the fore in this form of folly.

The *British Congregationalist* suggests that it would be a good thing if, in the middle of a political meeting, Gipsy Smith could be put up to make an appeal for converts. Well, from the ostentatious piety of some of our politicians, we should not be at all surprised if some of them took the proposal seriously. And when it came to "terminological inexactitudes," the most thoroughgoing politician would find that he could learn much from the professional evangelist.

In Germany it is said that the Protestant Churches are losing at least thirty thousand members per year. From what is going on with us we can easily credit the statement. The collapse of Christianity is not local, but universal. And let it also be borne in mind that no possible effort of the Churches can add to it its original vitality. The world may advance but slowly, but an advance in the direction of shaking off this particular superstition is not likely to be frustrated by anything that Christian ingenuity can accomplish.

Perhaps the most amusing thing about many of the New Theologians is their easy assumption that they are freed from the verbal quagmires in which the ordinary Christian is still floundering. Here is one illustration from an article by the Rev. D. B. Fraser. Words used by orthodox people, he says, are like curtains hung before an empty stage. They mean nothing. There is, for instance, the word "Transcendence." "A transcendent God is a contradiction, for, if He be transcendent, you don't know whether he is God or not." Now we quite agree that a transcendent Deity—something, that is, which is above experience, and which experience neither furnishes nor confirms—is transcendent nonsense; and we congratulate Mr. Fraser on recognising this much. But consider the ingenuity of the remark that under certain conditions "you don't know whether he is God or not." Really our acquaintance with gods is of a very limited character, and how on earth would any of us

know a god if we met one? Mr. Fraser is in just the same kind of bog as are other Christians, although the mud may be of a little different color. God is never anything more than a term of mystification, and New Theologians do not effect any substantial improvement by substituting one form of mystification for another.

The *Methodist Times* publishes a pageful of remarkable conversions by Methodist preachers. Although the names of the subjects vary, there is a remarkable sameness about the narratives. All of the saved subjects are broken-down, miserable wrecks, whom the power of God miraculously transforms into most admirable men and women. It is, of course, not at all improbable that the unbalanced and ill-balanced nervous system of the drunkard or derelict may respond to the emotional fervor of the mission room, and while the emotional strain can be kept up some little improvement may result. But, apart from this, it is simply untrue that any really diseased character was ever transformed in the manner described by the professional missionary. Sudden transformations of character simply do not occur, although even the converts themselves, with the desire to darken the shadows of their unconverted life, may assert otherwise. Improvements or retrogressions in character may be more or less rapid, but they never cease to be gradual. And as to the value of these conversions, well, one does not observe any serious decrease in the crime or drunkenness of a district after one of these missionary efforts, any more than one sees any increase in the membership of churches and chapels. From the religious point of view, it is now being recognised by large numbers of clergymen that these missionary efforts are futile. One day they will recognise that the social efforts are equally imaginary.

Mr. George Barnes, the new chairman of the Labor Party in Parliament, says that the proceedings of the Church Congress show that the Church is feeling the way the wind blows, and is determined, as it always has been, to be on the right side of it. We quite agree with the statement, and a perception of its truth should put Mr. Barnes and others on their guard against such friends. Meanwhile we beg to enlarge Mr. Barnes' generalisation so that it may cover all the Churches without exception. Church and Chapel are alike in this matter, and the only reason why the Church is selected for mention and the Chapel ignored is, we imagine, the fact that the Labor Party is in a more or less friendly alliance with the Nonconformist Party in Parliament.

Mr. Barnes, being interviewed by the "New Theology" weekly organ, said that the Churches "perhaps assume a more sympathetic attitude than they did" towards the Labor movement, but "it is not very evident." He expressed a hope that "the Rev. R. J. Campbell, and those like him, will be able to convert the Churches to Christianity." This was rather odd in view of what followed. "I am speaking," Mr. Barnes observed, "of Mr. Campbell's teaching in their human aspects only. I know nothing about his theology." Well, unless Mr. Barnes was merely sarcastic, he must know very little about Christianity either. Does he fancy there ever was a Christianity without theology?

Jews, it is said, cannot get as far north as Aberdeen. But heresy can. We see that it has cropped up on the Presbytery of Turriff. Rev. A. Spark, of Forglen, drew attention to the story of Jonah and the whale appearing in the teachers' magazine, and asked whether its appearance there was sanctioned by the Presbytery. He was told that it was. But he was also told that he could regard, and teach, the story as allegorical if he liked. Either way seems to suit the Presbytery. It is an awful falling off from the old orthodoxy. Robert Burns might laugh, and a smile spread over the face of David Hume, but John Knox would have a paralytic fit at the sight of this degeneration.

A correspondent writes to one of the religious papers asserting that the religious department of the *Daily News* is under the control of one of the New Theology groups, and bidding other Christians beware. How these Christians love, and trust, one another! And fancy the pious *Daily News* being placed on the list of suspects!

Here is the kind of thing that ought to disgust all decent people with religion. The Rev. H. R. Mackintosh, in a recently issued book called *Life on God's Plan*, says, "Destroy Religion, and in twenty years society will fall to pieces by its own rottenness." The elegance of the language matches the ignorance of the statement. Human nature has its dark side and uninviting moments, but a religion that

can lead its followers to believe that human nature is so vile that it could not stand for twenty years in virtue of its own inherent strength is—if the phrase is admissible—as immoral a creed as one can well conceive. And yet it is precisely this class of people who have the impudence to reprimand Freethinkers because they take a low view of human nature. As though any view could really be lower than that expressed by the Rev. Mackintosh.

A Munich man's child was killed by a motor-car. The calamity so affected him that he thought of committing suicide. But he says that God appeared to him in a dream and made him swear revenge on all motor-cars. He appears to have wrecked several by placing heavy blocks of wood across the road. Most people will think him unreasonable in punishing persons in one motor-car for the sins of persons in another motor-car. But he would probably reply that vicarious suffering is a good Christian doctrine.

Rev. R. J. Campbell still delivers long-winded addresses to God before his sermons. Both, of course, are meant for the congregation, who are the only demonstrable auditors. The prayer printed before his last-published sermon runs to a hundred and nine lines of the smallest type. What egotism to fancy that Omniscience would listen to such a long talker from a single human being!

Rev. Dr. Clifford says that amongst the impressions he received at the Hull Free Church Congress was "that the Free Churches hold with increased conviction that Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior of men." He might have said this at a venture without going to the Congress at all.

The Nonconformist Conscience is as haughty as ever. The *Christian World* tells Mr. Vernon Hartshorn, the adopted Labor candidate for Mid-Glamorgan, that unless he "recognises the existence and the influence of the Nonconformist Conscience, his seat will never be a safe one." He knows now what he has to sit on if he wants to sit securely.

Rev. W. A. P. Johnman, presiding at a concert in connection with the Y. W. C. A. at Hawick, delivered an address on "How to Spoil the Child." We judge from the report in the local *News* that he did not try to enforce domestic discipline by quoting texts from the Bible about the merits of the "rod" treatment. The reverend gentleman wound up with a not very appropriate, and apparently legendary, story about a Mrs. Crossley, of Halifax, who had been a kitchen drudge until she was sixteen and then married a wealthy manufacturer. Having a new house built, the lady knelt down on the doorstep and said to the Lord:—"If Thou wilt bless us and this house, I promise that the poor shall never want." This is held up as an act of splendid piety, but it seems to us very "Yorkshire." The Lady's part of the contract was conditional on the Lord's fulfilling his. If the Deity looked after her she would look after the poor. There was something of Jacob in this bargain. The wily patriarch promised that if the Lord would feed him, and clothe him, and keep him in the way in which he was going, and bring him safe back again, then the Lord should be his God. He also undertook that if God provided him with unlimited capital God should have ten per cent. of the profits.

Great Yarmouth magistrates have shut up the Hippodrome and the "Gem" on Sundays. Animated pictures can no longer be viewed on the Lord's Day. Concerts used to be given on Sundays on the Wellington and Britannia Piers. These also are stopped. A band only is allowed in each case, to play between 12 and 5 and from 8 to 10—that is, during times that involve no competition with the gospel-shops. Wellington Pier, by the way, belongs to the Corporation, which is thus obliged to punish itself in the interest of its Sabbatarianism.

What funny heads those Yarmouth magistrates must have! In their opinion, it is piety to listen to a band on Sunday, and desecration to watch the cinematograph. We suggest that they should be duly honored by the Lord's Day Observance Society, which might go to the expense of presenting each of them who voted for this resolution with a suitable souvenir—say a red herring, somewhat past its prime.

Mr. Samuel Kilburn, relieving officer for the Harrow district of the Hendon Board of Guardians, has disappeared, leaving a wife and seven children, the eldest a lad of sixteen, behind him. A young lady, a fellow worker of his at the

local Baptist Church, disappeared at the same time. Friends on both sides have no doubt that they are fulfilling the Lord's commandment to "love one another." The pious Lothario was a member of the choir and "a respected figure in many branches of chapel work"—including one, apparently, which he had better not have undertaken. We should commend cases of this kind to the attention of the Christian Evidence Society if they were less common. As it is, they are taken for granted, and cause no sensation, even amongst those who are always dilating on "the (imaginary) vices of infidelity."

We are all accustomed to think of the doctrine of an eternal hell as being dead. Yet the *Christian World* reports that a Wesleyan local preacher is threatened with official disqualification unless he accepts the belief in an eternal hell. Evidently Christianity is not yet as civilised as some people imagine.

Jane Davis, not quite twelve, of Blaencwm, near Gartheli, Cardiganshire, has won a prize from the local Church Sunday-school for learning and reciting the whole of the New Testament. It is to be hoped she doesn't believe it, or she may get into serious trouble. The Peculiar People believe it and "do time" in consequence.

Rev. S. Chadwick, of Cliffe College, in the last of a series of lectures on Bible Study, under the auspices of the Sheffield Wesleyan Mission, made the curious observation that "people who had so much to say against the Bible knew very little about it." The reverend gentleman must be very little acquainted with Freethinkers if he said this with perfect sincerity. People get to disbelieve the Bible by reading it—and thinking about what they read. This is so natural that it ought to be obvious even to the clerical mind. Mr. Chadwick made another curious observation. He said that if anyone wanted to be a good politician he should read the Minor Prophets; if he wanted to know how the ideal of brotherhood was to be realised he should study the New Testament. The reverend gentleman forgets that the Minor Prophets and the New Testament have been read for hundreds and hundreds of years, yet the ideal of brotherhood is not realised, and good politicians are far from common.

The President of the Sheffield City Guild of Help is the Lord Mayor and the Executive Committee is composed of the most influential Christians in the locality. Last year they distributed £585 in relief, and spent £800 in distributing it. Such is Christian charity!

Sabbatarianism has met with a rebuff at Scarborough. The vicar (Archdeacon Lindsay) headed "a large and influential deputation" to the Town Council, urging the Council not to allow the new Floral Hall to be used on Sundays for concerts or other entertainments. The reverend gentleman urged that it would really be for the good of the town from a business point of view; moreover, there were "other interests higher than the financial interests of the town at stake." The professional Sabbatarian, however, pleaded in vain. The Council refused to place any restrictions on the use of the Floral Hall on Sundays.

"We, the undersigned ministers of Christ," have signed a pious and pompous Sabbatarian appeal to the "Citizens of Carlisle." These professional exhorters call upon the said citizens to avail themselves of "the privilege of public worship"—in other words, to patronise the exhorters' places of business. We believe the "Citizens of Carlisle" will jog on as before—and rather more so.

Rev. Arthur Havelock Straffurth, rector of Anwick, near Sleaford, was being driven by his coachman to a neighboring village church where he was going to preach. He was taken ill on the road, and was dead before the coachman could reach home again. More "Providence"!

What is a Christian? According to Jesus Christ he must be poor. That is a vital condition. But the Pope of Rome and the Archbishop of Canterbury appear to differ from Jesus Christ. So does John D. Rockefeller, who is worth about a hundred millions. This gentleman is a Christian too. Evidently the term "Christian" is the most elastic in the dictionary,

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, March 27. St. James's Hall, Great Portland-street, London, W.; at 7.30. "The Drama of Calvary."

April 3, Glasgow; 10, Shoreditch Town Hall; 24, Shoreditch Town Hall.

To Correspondents.

- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—March 27, Holloway. April 10, Glasgow; 11, Falkirk.
- PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: 1910.—Previously acknowledged, £179 17s. Received since:—G. Smith, 5s.; Oscar Bracht (S. Africa), £5 5s.
- H. SLINGER.—Sending as requested.
- W. P. ADAMSON.—Thanks for the cuttings. The two letters by Mr. Manson's critics are foolish and impudent. If that is the best that Aberdeen can say in defence of the Salvation Army's finances, the case is bad indeed.
- T. W. HOMER.—Pleased to have the photograph. Glad you think the *Freethinker* improves with age, and that "as food for the brain it has no equal on the market." We fear that is one reason why its circulation moves forward so slowly.
- J. D. SHAW (Waco, Texas).—Very sorry to see that you are obliged to suspend the *Searchlight* on account of illness. We wish you a speedy recovery, and financial as well as other means to resume your paper. All success to you and it—as both deserve.
- G. BRADFIELD.—We doubt the policy of "getting at" children with obviously "improving" literature. We will deal with your question later on, from a better point of view.
- J. L. PEARSE.—Your question cannot be answered in a few words. You should read Canon Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, which ought to be in your Public Library.
- E. WOODHEAD.—The cutting conveys nothing new to us. We know quite well that the Catholic Church is the historic enemy of freedom of thought. But that fact does not in the least degree affect our own policy. Evil is never overcome with evil, but only with good. So said Buddha hundreds of years before Christ, and it is an eternal truth. You say it is useless fighting Catholicism with the gloves on; but when did we object to hard fighting? What we object to is foul fighting. We repeat, most deliberately, that any Freethinker who believes that Catholics should be denied full rights of propaganda, when the denial is possible, is simply foolish or hypocritical in protesting against the murder of Francisco Ferrer.
- F. D.—Thanks for your interesting letter. Pleased to hear you became aware of the *Freethinker* through an advertisement eighteen months ago, and have not missed a single copy since.
- A. RIVETT.—See paragraph. Thanks.
- OSCAR BRACHT (S. Africa), sending a cheque towards the President's Honorarium Fund, in recognition of what he considers our "valuable services to the cause of Freethought," says that he has been a reader of the *Freethinker* for a good many years, and adds: "I look forward to it every week with the greatest delight. There is no paper which I appreciate more, and which I would miss so much."
- "SAXON."—You misread what we wrote; or rather you read something extraneous into it. We did not advocate "revenge." It is the last thing we should think of doing. Our words were rather a compliment than a complaint.
- V. WHITTY.—We note that you were "delighted" to see our advertisement in the *Athenaeum*, also our reference to Meredith's letters, which certainly will be "an eye-opener to many."
- G. T. WHITEHEAD.—We cannot "compare," as we do not keep such communications when we have dealt with them. Sorry.
- B. H. TENNS.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks. Glad you look forward to the *Freethinker* every week, after enjoying it as an "intellectual treat" for seven years. The distribution of back numbers when done with is good work.
- T. STRINGER.—We quite understand your being, as a Freethinker, a bit lonely in the Army.
- W. P. BALL.—Much obliged for cuttings.
- W. JOHNSON.—Mr. Foote took a bit of a cold with him to Leicester, which was rather aggravated by the five hours' travelling on Sunday, and made his platform work harder than usual, but he is all right again now.
- J. TOMKINS.—That is all "blasphemy" really means. Parodying Shakespeare, it may be said: "That in a Christian is a jovial word which in the Sceptic is flat blasphemy."
- W. DODD.—Shall be pleased to see you again at the N. S. S. Conference.
- W. F. BEESON.—An interesting letter. Thanks.
- T. V. T.—Glad your hearing General Booth at Manchester made you resolve to join the N. S. S. and the Secular Society, Ltd., at once.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.

Easter Eggs for Freethought.

I HOPE my readers are going to take this matter seriously. I am not asking them to lay Easter Eggs, but only to give them, in the shape of Shillings—to the cause of Freethought.

I propose to keep this Fund open, as we did last year, for a month; from Tuesday, March 22, to Tuesday, April 19. This makes a full four weeks, with five numbers of the *Freethinker* to contain the acknowledgments, including the present number, which may be regarded as preliminary.

The Shillings (one or more) ought to flow in freely during the Eastertide. No subscriber will ever miss what he sends in, and the money will help to brighten the world by being applied to the spread of enlightenment and the dispelling of superstition.

Too many Freethinkers are indifferent to the emancipation of others. They are freed from superstition themselves, and they do nothing to secure the same blessing for their fellow-men. This is not generous. It is not even wise. For the world has suffered again and again from reaction; civilisations have been obliterated by a deluge of barbarism; and the only security for the freedom of those who enjoy it is to extend it to all the rest of the community. This is the task which the National Secular Society and the *Freethinker* are engaged in.

I have said that we raised 1,705 Shillings last year, and that we ought to raise 3,000 Shillings this year. We can do it easily, if we choose, without collecting it from outsiders as the Salvationists do during Self-Denial week. There are few Freethinkers so poor that they cannot afford a shilling for the cause—their cause. Those who are too poor are excused, and they have our sympathy and sincere wishes for better luck. Of the rest, there are some who always respond to our appeals, and whose names are in every subscription list. But the remainder are earnestly invited to begin to practise the art of giving. They will find it more pleasant than they expected. Many of them have only to make a beginning and they will continue cheerfully. We beg them to make it. It will do them good.

G. W. FOOTE.

Easter Eggs for Freethought.

(The Figures mean the number of Shillings)

Herbert T. Clarkson, 10; Manchester, 1; Francis B. Wood, 2; F. D., 5; Electron, 2; S. Tyson, 2½; J. T. Griffiths, 2; A. W. Huty, 2; C. Shepherd, 4; V. Whitty, 2; T. Stringer, 2; R. F. Simpson, 6; J. Tomkins, 2; W. Dodd, 10; W. F. Beeson, 2½; T. V. T., 2; R. Lancaster, 2; M. Corleyn, 2.

Sugar Plums.

"The Drama of Calvary" is the subject of Mr. Foote's last lecture, for the present, at St. James's Hall. Nothing could be more appropriate to the date—Easter Sunday. During the evening Mr. Foote will read from Swinburne's powerful poem "Before a Crucifix." This lecture winds up the St. James's Hall three months' course of lectures. The next gathering there will be in connection with the N. S. S. Conference on Whit-Sunday.

Mr. Foote had a capital audience at the Leicester Secular Hall on Sunday evening, and his lecture on "The Real Meaning of Easter" was, to all appearance, very highly relished. In the absence of Mr. Sydney Gimson, the Secular Society's president, who was away from home, the chair was taken by Mr. Brant, who turned out to have been a correspondent of Mr. Foote's in the old *Liberal* days. A gratifying feature of the meeting was the presence of a large number of ladies. A good many Freethinkers came from distant places.

We hear that the reception given by Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Gimson at the Secular Hall in commemoration of his twenty-one years of service as president of the Leicester Secular Society was a great success. The place was crowded, and a

most enjoyable evening was spent. We hope this means increased prosperity to the Society in the immediate future.

Mr. Lloyd delivered an extremely able lecture at St. James's Hall on Sunday evening, and dealt as ably with the questions asked afterwards. We regret that the lecture was not heard by a much larger audience. London Freethinkers are evidently not exerting themselves to give publicity to these meetings. We are sorry for it; and perhaps they will be sorry when they think the matter over.

London "saints," and provincial ones who may happen to be in London then, should make for Anderton's Hotel, Fleet-street, on Thursday evening, April 7. That is the date of the next "social" under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive. A little dancing will be added to the usual program on this occasion. There will be songs, readings, conversation, and "a few words" from the President. Members of the N. S. S. are free to attend and introduce a friend. Non-members must apply for free admission tickets to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, 2 Newcastle-street, E.C. We hope to see a big gathering.

The course of three Sunday evening lectures at the Shore-ditch Town Hall will be started on April 10 by Mr. Foote. Mr. Cohen takes the second lecture and Mr. Foote the third. Mr. Lloyd was not available for this course.

The Secular Education League's Annual Meeting, held at Essex Hall on Tuesday evening, March 15, passed off quietly, as was to be expected in the present state of politics. Lord Weardale consented to continue in the presidency, and Mr. F. J. Gould was added to the Executive Committee. The public meeting which followed was held in the large hall, and there was a good attendance. Lord Weardale, who presided, made a brief but very effective introductory speech. The subsequent speakers were Mr. G. Greenwood, M.P., Sir Henry Cotton, Mr. G. W. Foote, Father Hogg, the Rev. Dr. Hole, and Mr. Swinny, the well-known Positivist. The platform was therefore comprehensively representative of the Secular Education movement.

The Trial of Jesus Christ.

"That the particulars of this trial are of a legendary character, and will not bear a close examination, must be evident to all who are acquainted with Roman history."—REV. DR. GILES, *Christian Records*; 1877; p. 312.

"No one point in the whole trial agrees with Jewish law and custom. It is impossible to save it. It must be given up as a transparent and unskilled invention of a Gentile Christian of the second century, who knew nothing of Jewish law and custom, and was ignorant of the state of civilisation in Palestine in the time of Jesus."—RABBI WISE, *Martyrdom of Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 77.

"With an impossible continuity, the action goes on through the night.....it is needless to insist on the absolutely unhistorical character of a narrative which makes the whole judicial process take place in the middle of the night, a time when, as Renan notes, an Eastern city is as if dead."—J. M. ROBERTSON, *Pagan Christs*, p. 191.

"It is the unavoidable fate of a spurious historical work of any length to be involved in contradictions."—HENSTENBERG, *Dissertation on Pentateuch*.

It is related of an old woman, to whom a curate was reading the story of the Crucifixion, that she remarked: "Well, well! it was a long time ago; let's hope it never happened." There is many a true word spoken in jest, and the inventor of this jest undoubtedly spoke more truth than he was aware of. Many Christians, like the Unitarians, think that it is only the miracles in the New Testament that form a stumbling-block to the Freethinker's acceptance of the life of Jesus, and that if these were eliminated there would remain an historical and authentic biography in the Four Gospels. But an examination of these records in the light of our historical knowledge of that time makes it plain that the writers had no knowledge of the laws, manners, and customs of either the Jews or the Romans. Their ignorance of contemporary history is phenomenal. On every point where their evidence can be tested by the history of that time they are found to be in irreconcilable and flagrant contradiction.

Jesus is represented as the idol of the people one day and execrated by them the next. When he enters Jerusalem the populace welcome him with shouts of Hosannah! with songs and palm branches, throwing their garments at his feet. A few days later they are represented as preferring the release of a notorious criminal, and shouting "Crucify him, crucify him."

Then Jesus is represented as being so obscure and unknown that the priests were obliged to bribe Judas with thirty pieces of silver to betray him by a kiss. As Judge Strange remarks:—

"There was certainly no occasion for any such sign, the person of Jesus being well known to those who had to arrest him, 'Are ye come out,' he said to them, 'as against a thief, with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple and ye laid no hold on me.'"^{*}

The Jews are not usually credited with a desire for unnecessary expenditure.

The Fourth Gospel speaks of Caiaphas as "high priest of that year," as if he were elected yearly, like a Lord Mayor. "It is," says Matthew Arnold, "like talking of an American 'president of that year,' as if the American presidency were a yearly office." And, as he points out, the social distinctions are equally confounded:—

"The disciple who, at the high priest's palace, brings Peter in, is called by the writer of the Fourth Gospel 'an acquaintance of the high priest.' One of the poor men who followed Jesus *an acquaintance* of a grandee like Caiaphas!.....which is like the exaggeration of calling a London working man, who is in the throng round a police-court during an exciting inquiry, and has interest enough to get a friend in, 'an acquaintance of the Secretary of State'!"[†]

As he remarks, we are in a land of fables, "where one is transported from Bagdad to Cairo by clapping one's hands, or in which one falls asleep and wakes understanding the language of birds and hearing the grass grow."

The examination and trial of Jesus by the high priest and Sanhedrim was illegal, and contrary to Jewish law from beginning to end.

Mr. Austin Bierbower, in his very able essay, *Was Christ Crucified?* says:—

"In the first place, the preliminary examination of Jesus before trial by Annas or Caiaphas was illegal, it being the right of the accused to be free from any personal investigation whatever until brought for trial before his congregated brethren (*Salvador's Institutions*, i., 366). The Jewish law, instead of providing for a preliminary examination, as some modern States do, expressly prohibited it."

And if, as John states, Jesus was first sent to Annas and by him examined, and then sent to Caiaphas and tried by the Sanhedrim, then "the whole trial would, on that supposition, be contrary to Jewish law and Jewish custom." Moreover—

"in the next place the trial could not, according to Jewish law, have taken place at night, as related by Matthew and Mark. Capital trials, says the Mishna (*De Synedrus*, iv., 1), are commenced only in the day-time, and must also be concluded only in the day. They may be concluded in the same day if there is a sentence of acquittal, but must be postponed to a second day if there is to be a condemnation. Here, however, the trial appears, according to two gospels, not only to have been held at night, but to have been commenced and ended on the same day (or night rather), without any intermission, both of which were illegal." (P. 7.)

There are other legal difficulties, says Mr. Bierbower. "One is that Jesus was questioned in his own case, which is not permitted in Jewish law. For the Jews could not even plead guilty. 'Our law,' says Maimonides, 'condemns no one to death upon his own confession.' Nor could the judges make any judicial use whatever of his testimony." "It is a fundamental principle with us," says Bartemore, "that no one can damage himself by what he says in judgment." And yet, according to the Gospels, when the

^{*} Strange, *The Bible: Is it the Word of God?* p. 340.

[†] Matthew Arnold, *God and the Bible*, p. 144.

high priest, by dint of questioning Jesus, had led him to confess that he was the Son of God, he convicts the prisoner out of his own mouth, declaring, "What further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy."

The Sanhedrim before which Jesus appeared was the highest court of the Jews; it consisted of 24 priests, 24 scribes, and 24 elders—72 in all of the most learned, upright, and trustworthy men of the nation. They were "required to be married, above thirty years of age, well instructed in the Law, and of good report among the people."* And yet it is of this council that Matthew says: "Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false witness against Jesus that they might put him to death." "This," says Mr. Bierbower—

"This is all the more strange since in the administration of the Jewish law the judges were understood to have somewhat the character of the advocates of the prisoner, like our judges-advocate at a court-martial, and to be charged with preventing any undue influence from prevailing against him. Even if the judges were corrupt enough to do what is here charged, it is hardly credible that they would have deemed it safe to do so, and especially that so many would do so—the whole Sanhedrim.

A further incredible procedure is that no witnesses for the defence were allowed to testify. We are told that as soon as the case for the prosecution was made out the high priest asked, 'What further need have we of witnesses?'.....Now, in all Jewish times the right to put in a defence was guarded with most scrupulous care for the protection of the accused; and to condemn one on the completion of the prosecutor's testimony alone would be to end the trial in the middle, in fact to give no trial at all." (P. 9)

Then again, the first three Gospels speak of the Last Supper as the Passover, the first day of unleavened bread. The apprehension, trial, and execution all took place on the following day. Now the day following the Passover was a Sabbath day, on which it was forbidden to administer judgment. No one could be tried and executed on such a day any more than they could be tried and executed in England on a Sunday. As Rabbi Wise observes, "The whole trial from the beginning to the end is contrary to Jewish law and custom as in force in the time of Jesus."†

The writer of the Fourth Gospel, who wrote later than the others, silently corrects one blunder by placing these events before the Passover, and tells us that the priests and elders "went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the passover," and Pilate is made to go backward and forward from the judgment hall to the people. But, as the Rev. Dr. Giles points out—

"Perhaps there is probably no nation in the world in which the public administration of justice would be rendered so undignified as that the chief magistrate should quit the judgment seat in the trial of a public criminal, and, in a question of life and death, go backwards and forwards between the accuser and the prisoner, that he might hear what they had to plead. It may be said without hesitation that no Roman governor ever condescended to an act which he would deem so derogatory to his rank and dignity."‡

This writer was as ignorant of Roman as the other writers were of Jewish customs. "In particular," says the same author,

"the question 'What hast thou done?'—asking the prisoner to state his own offence and convict himself—reminds one rather of a father's expostulation with his son, or of a master's castigation of his pupil, than of a trial in a court of justice by the governor of a large and important province, conducted according to the laws of the greatest people that ever yet existed upon the earth." (P. 315.)

Moreover, we know that Pilate, far from being the weak and pliable character pictured by the Gospels, was a stern and uncompromising tyrant, quite incapable of being browbeaten by the Jewish priests.

The learned author of *The Gospel History* observes: "The Pilate of history is the exact opposite of the Pilate of the Gospels. Philo (Leg. ad Caium) says of him: 'Pilate was of a violent and obstinate disposition, which could not lend itself to please the Jews.'" And he cites the Jewish historian Josephus as saying:—

"'The Jews said that it was a settled design of Pontius Pilate to abolish the Jewish law.' Such is the man who is represented in the Gospels as sacrificing his own convictions and the honor of the Roman name, and allowing a judicial murder to take place in order 'to content the people.'"*

It is well to remember that Philo was a learned Jew and a voluminous writer, who lived and wrote and frequented Jerusalem at the appointed festivals at the very time that Pilate was ruler there. Josephus also wrote his *Wars of the Jews* and his *Antiquities* long before the Gospels were in existence.

The proceedings before Pilate, as related in the Gospels, are absolutely incredible to a student of Roman history. The late Sir George Cox, who was a clergyman in the Church of England, in his work on *The Four Gospels as Historical Records*—published anonymously—observes:—

"Pilate was in Judea to exercise an authority before which the whole world bowed down. He was there to screen and defend the guiltless and to punish the guilty. The idea that he was there to surrender the innocent, knowing him and asserting him to be such to those who were thirsting for his blood and eager to slay him with cruel insults, was one which the Emperor and the Senate would have scouted as treason, as a wild and monstrous extravagance. Yet of Pilate, the guardian of the Roman peace, the first evangelist tells us that, finding all his efforts to rescue Jesus useless, he called for water, and, going through a symbolical ceremony which was not Roman, and which for a Roman would have neither force nor meaning, solemnly pronounces wholly innocent a person whom, according to the fourth Gospel, he had already scourged, knowing him to be guiltless, and whom he immediately proceeds to scourge again, and then to deliver to his enemies to suffer crucifixion—a penalty which could be inflicted only by Roman officers." (P. 425.)

And he concludes: "It is altogether impossible to believe that any Roman governor or officer would pour such complete contempt on Roman judicial processes as to commit murder at the dictation of a few riotous men." Besides, crucifixion was a penalty only inflicted upon slaves and the vilest malefactors and quite inappropriate to a man in whom Pilate could find no fault.

He also remarks that, according to John,—

"Pilate asks, in the first instance, the reason of his being brought before him; and the Jews, instead of answering his question by putting forth a formal charge, insolently inform him that if Jesus had not been a malefactor he would not have been brought before him at all—an answer which no Roman governor would be likely to put up with, and which would assuredly have defeated the purpose of the accusers." (P. 241.)

Of the release of Barabbas, the Rev. Dr. Giles declares:—

"The custom pleaded by Pilate, of releasing one prisoner and sacrificing another on behalf of the people. This custom is nowhere mentioned by any historian, sacred or profane."†

Then again, Caiaphas, far from being the independent leader of the priests and scribes, as he is represented in the Gospels, was, in fact, a mere tool in the hands of the Romans. Josephus tells us that no less than four high priests were successively deprived of their office on account of their hostility to the Romans; but Josephus surnamed Caiaphas—that is, "the support" of the Romans, held the office of high priest for eleven years in succession. The author of *The Gospel History* (p. 140) says:—

"The Caiaphas of the Gospels resembles the Caiaphas of history as little as Pilate does. In the Gospels he is represented as acting in concert with his father-in-law,

* The Oxford Helps to the Study of the Bible, p. 107.

† Martyrdom of Jesus of Nazareth, p. 66.

‡ Christian Records, p. 313.

* The Gospel History; 1873; pp. 138-9.

† Christian Records, p. 315.

Annas, and with the chief priests and scribes, and never as acting under the orders of Pilate. The fact, however, is, that at this period the authority of the high priest had been all but abolished in consequence of the action of the Roman procurator. Matters had come to such a pass that the room in the temple to which the high priest retired on the Day of Atonement, and which was formally called the council chamber, was then called the servant's cell.

It is clear that the Gospel writers knew nothing of the characters they introduce into their story, beside their names.

Then, again, it is as certain as anything can be, that all the events related could not have occurred in the short time given. Beginning with the agony in the garden and the sleep of the disciples, say at midnight, for Jesus found them asleep three times, "for their eyes were heavy."

Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested at the Mount of Olives.

He is brought to the high priest's house, examined by him, and mocked by his servants.

He is then tried before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrim, the false witnesses sought for and found with difficulty; they are examined and Jesus is condemned.

The Sanhedrim send him to Pilate. Pilate sends him to Herod. He is again mocked by Herod and "his men of war." Herod sends him back to Pilate.

He is tried before Pilate, who seeks to release him. He is condemned, scourged, and mocked, and led away to be crucified.

According to Mark (xv. 25) Jesus was crucified at the third hour, that is, at 9 o'clock in the morning. And all these events are said to have happened between midnight and 9 o'clock in the morning. It is a fairy tale.

To crown all, we are told that when the chief priests heard that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb, they bribed the Roman guard to say that the body was stolen while they *slept*. A fine tale for Roman soldiers to take to their officers! The penalty for a Roman soldier found sleeping at his post, was death.

Here is a true story of a Roman guard. On November 9, A.D. 79, only some forty years after the events recorded in the Gospels, a Roman soldier stood on guard at Pompeii. Suddenly, the volcano of Vesuvius begun to thunder and the burning lava rained down on the doomed city. The inhabitants, mad with fear, fled until struck down by the fiery hail, and their skeletons have been found, after nearly two thousand years, where they fell, shielding their faces with their arms from the fiery torment. But one figure has been found erect; it was the Roman soldier on guard at the city gate. No thought of flight from the awful hell entered that valiant heart. The unconquerable spirit which made Rome the ruler of the world asserted itself, even though the very world itself seemed to be dissolving into eternal night. Stern and indomitable in his helmet and cuirass, still grasping his spear, this Roman gives the lie to this tale of bribing the Roman guard to say they had slept at their post.

W. MANN.

Prudes and Books.

THE mild flutter of excitement in the literary dovecote, which was recently occasioned by the action of the Circulating Libraries' Association with regard to the prohibition of certain books from their institutions, has now subsided, and with the censorship in full blast we are better able to estimate the significance and effect of the movement.

It will save time if it is stated at once that the censorship has only succeeded in making itself ridiculous. It has acted only in a half-hearted manner. Its ban has fallen upon several books, but in deference to public opinion it does not dare to exclude them entirely. They are placed upon a secret shelf away from the horrified gaze of the Stiggins'

and Chadbands, and are only issued by special request. By such devices those whose eyes affect to be chaster than the rest of their bodies are conciliated.

This is an amusing and typical instance of the moral hypocrisy which would be impossible in any other part of Europe than England. It affords an illustration of the Puritan method of solving social moral problems which is in vogue in this country. Here are certain books which, in the opinion of the censors, come under the category of "personally scandalous, libellous, or immoral books." Yet the Libraries do not exclude them entirely from circulation. They are content to express their disapproval by purchasing a fewer number of the books in question than is customary, and only issuing them by special request. Thus, on their own evidence and judgment, they are guilty of complicity in the circulation of scandalous filth and moral garbage.

If there be any enterprising gentleman, with a spare thousand or so and a taste for legal excitement, who would care to take up a prosecution against the Libraries on these grounds, we can safely promise him a fair amount of sport for his money.

Apart, however, from the absurdity of the whole affair, the action of the C. L. A. is not without a serious aspect. It will undoubtedly militate against the original and unorthodox writer, by keeping his work in the background and rendering it difficult to obtain. Those who know how much the modern writer is dependent upon the purchases of the important libraries will appreciate what this means. The effect will be that the author will either write well within the bourne of orthodox prejudice or run the risk of wasting utterly the months and months of labor and nervous strain which the making of a book involves.

It is worthy of note that neither the Publishers' Association nor even the Society of Authors took any effective steps to frustrate this latest attempt on the part of sexless simpletons and dope-mongering book-lenders to intimidate the unconventional writer. The simple explanation is that the literary rajahs who control these organisations have nothing to lose by the censorship. They tread the well-worn paths of mediocrity, orthodoxy, and affluence. The assumption of moral responsibility on the part of the Libraries towards their subscribers is entirely gratuitous and offensive. In the first place, it is an assumption of moral superiority over those who borrow the books; and, in the second place, it is an intolerable impertinence towards the man who pays his money for the purpose of obtaining and reading the books which *he* wants, and not only those which the Library cares to supply.

The ostensible object of the censorship is to prevent the circulation of any book "which by reason of the personally scandalous, libellous, immoral, or otherwise disagreeable nature of its contents, is likely to prove offensive to any considerable section of subscribers." The obvious answer to this odious amalgam of business and morality is that no subscriber need apply for any book to which he objects, while all have an indefeasible right to read any books they choose if they pay for the privilege of doing so.

And note the commercial basis of the morality! It is not merely that the books are scandalous or immoral. That is of no particular importance to your commercial-minded book-lender. It is the fear that they may prove offensive to a considerable section of subscribers that inspires the lofty morality. That fact alone demonstrates the utter incapacity of such men to act as literary censors to a reading public. These men are business men. They are innocent of literary or artistic culture. They handle a book as a grocer handles a German sausage,—and they are equally ignorant of its contents. If this movement spreads, and other business men are infected with the moral mania, we shall have the local Nonconformist butcher assuring us that the prime dairy-fed pork which he sells is obtained exclusively from the carcasses of highly moral pigs!

If the reading public of this country has any spirit whatever they will not long tolerate this odious and insufferable censorship.

May its end be peace,—and soon.

LIONEL VALDAR.

In Behalf of Decency with Knowledge.

BY GEORGE MACDONALD.

We have seen some page proofs of a forthcoming book on the censorship of that variety of literature which deals with what are known as "sex" questions. The author, Mr. Theodore Schroeder, has kept watch of the manifestations of the suppressive spirit of government officials and others as regards such literature. The history reads for the most part like a story of persecution. The gist of it is that thinkers who have seen the evils arising from the enforced application of a misfit system of morals, and have tried to point out how a modification of the system would inure to the relief and promote the happiness of many persons, have had their writings suppressed and have found themselves behind prison bars. They have felt the grief and indignation of conscious innocence condemned as guilt, and have had many sympathisers. And they have been forced to learn that innocence is no protection against bigotry, and that sympathy opens no prison doors.

That a book or writing might be guaranteed protection in its circulation it should be enough that the author have an acquaintance with his subject, that he be sincere, that his motives be good, and that he criminally libel no man or woman. We would not say that books written otherwise ought to be suppressed, but we are of the opinion that the machinery of government—civil, judicial, and military—could be put to no better use than to guard the liberty of the author, the thinker, the reformer, to utter and to distribute, vend, and circulate the best, or any, thoughts which come to his mind on any subject whatsoever. There is nothing inherent in the subject of sex that should make the writer upon it an exception to this statement.

The Freethinker's idea of a benevolent government is one to which the humblest may look for vindication of his rights under the Constitution; a government that moves at the first indication of any sort of collusion between moralists-for-revenue and patriots-for-revenue, or between parsons and jacks in office, to infringe the liberty of the citizen. Rightly or wrongly, the government we now support not only does not disturb itself in such a case, but is actually the mover, or at best a willing and complaisant tool, to take away guaranteed rights. What is the meaning of the existence of Defence Associations, of which there are two now in New York? It means that the government is not taking care of popular liberties, and, what is worse, is attacking and invading them. These defence associations are organised to protect people against the government. The situation is not new. It existed, or began to develop, as soon as governments were established. No condition is more familiar than that of people getting together to protect themselves from the government they set up for the common defence. And nothing equally obvious seems so completely to have escaped attention. Not even the humor of it appeals to either the people or to the governors, unless it is with the latter as it was with the Roman augurs, that one of them cannot look another in the face without laughing.

In the days when the *Truthseeker* fought out the issue of liberty of the mails, the accused had at least his day in court, and some sort of legal process was needed to throw a publication out of the Post Office. That has changed for the worse. Postal clerks have taken the place of judge and jury, and by their grace alone can any publication whatever be allowed to circulate after it has paid the required postage. The author of the pages under notice mentions a number of books and pamphlets which have been refused transmission, and thereupon avers that "a pee-wee clerk in the government employ is able to decide, and does decide, that this [or that] booklet is degrading to our morals, an advertisement telling us where it may be had is unmailable, and to send any of these through the mails entitles the sender to five years in jail."

President Taft in his message dealt with the Post Office deficit, and recommended an increase of postage to meet it. First, it might be in order to get a Congressional report on the amount the department is wasting in the work of "purifying" the mails by suppressing thought, and how much lucrative business it is turning away on complaint of the element who get their surfeit of obscenity by inspecting the bag that Comstock carries to the meetings of the Vice Society.

In France, a few centuries ago a man named Vanini was put to the torture and death as an Atheist because he did

not believe in the deity who commanded the slaughter of male children and ordered female children into white slavery to priests and soldiers. There is not much improvement when men are jailed for "obscenity" on proof that they have questioned or offered a substitute for the moralism of the present-day mouthpieces of that same deity.

There is a kind of literature that could not be saved though there were no law to extirpate it, just as there are arts and sights and sounds that refinement will not tolerate. Such literature comes under the Nuisance Act and is to be abated. Like the non-resistants, we may know what we ought to do—we ought perhaps to turn away from it and let it alone—but what we actually do is something different. We put it out of circulation. It is not in the class with "sex" literature. Many parents who would take it away from their children would replace it conscientiously and profitably with the kind of literature that Mr. Schroeder's "pee-wee clerk" puts under the ban. Providers of the latter sort, the Free Speech Leagues must defend against the moralistic pietists in the Post Office.

The natural and unsophisticated man, not aware of the close relation of sanctities and obscenities, or of what Dr. James Weir has generalised as "the correlation of religion and lust," falls to wondering sometimes how the discussion of a thing of such everyday observation as the difference in sex, of which the deaf, dumb, and blind cannot remain unconscious, ever came to be regarded as indecent. He sees, if he does not make it a subject of thought and comparison, that three primary instincts are common to all animate things—the instincts of the individual to sustain life, to defend life, to reproduce life. We are licensed without offence to morals to discuss the best way of getting a living, which we call economics; the best way to protect life, or health, which is sanitation; but the other, now named eugenics, we speak of to the peril of those into whose hands our printed words may fall. It looks as if somebody must be interested in suppressing information in that direction, when men are permitted to be no wiser as to it than they may become by observing the habits of beasts. So far as can be discerned, there is no class to profit by such ignorance as the law promotes, or by segregating the third instinct as obscene unless its manifestations are controlled by them, except it be the priests. The priests do certainly make a fair profit out of keeping the people blind on the eugenic side and under the delusion that what is legitimate with priestly supervision is meretricious with any other sanction. We can reach no other conclusion than that the inherent obscenity of all men and women when viewed as members of opposed sexes, and the inexpugnable indecency of saying anything about it, is a dogma for whose formulation we are indebted to the Church. It does not exist in nature; common, secular sense would never have evolved it; reason scorns it. The thing is sacerdotal; that is to say, unsecular and unnatural. Possibly the Church recognises eugenics—the head that sex problems are grouped under—as a science, and opposes it on general principles; but the ingredient the Church is afraid of is knowledge. Give the people knowledge, and obscenity and sanctity fall together. Informed persons will not make the mistake of supposing that sacerdotalism wants obscenity abolished. Were that object not the farthest from the minds of priests the discussions now suppressed would be encouraged. The abhorrence they have for actual indecency they owe to cultivation and refinement; their opposition to agitation of the "sex" question is inspired by fear of losing control of the family—that the people will turn to science for morals as they do for medicine.

A book that will put the situation rightly before the public has a useful purpose to serve and a felt want to fill. The terrorism that prevents men with knowledge from using it for the benefit of mankind is positively detrimental to the public health.

What an indictment it is of the Church that wherever there is a movement for the promotion of ignorance the forces of the Church are found to be pushing it along.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

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KINGSTON-ON-THAMES HUMANITARIAN SOCIETY (Fife Hall, Fife-road): 7.30, Miss K. B. Kough, "Our Duty to the Citizens of To-Morrow."

OUTDOOR.

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

WEST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Marble Arch): 11.30, H. B. Samuels, "Did Christ Rise from the Dead?"

COUNTRY.**INDOOR.**

NEWCASTLE RATIONALIST DEBATING SOCIETY (Vegetarian Café, Nelson-street): 7.30, Mr. Mitchell, "Modern Drama."

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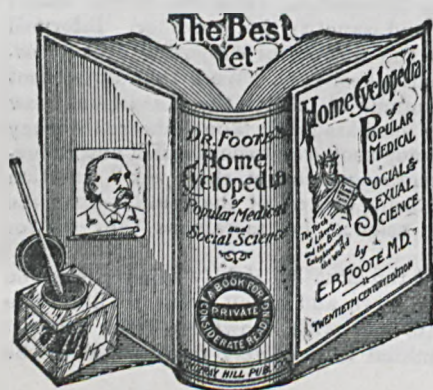
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