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The hope in the bosom of a man whose fixed star is Humanity becomes a part of his blood, and is extinguished when his blood flows no more.—GEORGE MEREDITH.

Agnosticism and Beer and Skittles.

MR. EDWARD CLODD has been telling us of Meredith's opinion that Robert Louis Stevenson's essays, good as they are, will hardly carry him amongst the immortals. Reading those essays again lately, I must (humbly, of course) endorse Meredith's judgment. They *are* good essays, but they do not abound in "bright shoots of everlastingness." They display keen observation, within certain limits—a rather too studied felicity, sometimes falling into mere cleverness, of phrasing—and undoubted powers of reflection; yet the perception and reflection are not sufficient to place Stevenson near Hazlitt, and the phrasing—to say nothing of the humor—is not fine and instinctive enough to place him near Lamb. One has only to read Meredith's superb essay on the Comic Spirit to see what a vast interval there was, after all, between the Master and his disciple.

Meredith was a thinker, and, in spite of the talk about beauty being everything in the artist, it is necessary to be a thinker in order to belong to the really great writers. Not to go abroad, or to ancient times, Milton, Wordsworth, and Shelley were thinkers—Fielding was a thinker, and Thomas Hardy is a thinker—and Shakespeare was the greatest thinker of all. There is in him what Lamb called a perfect superfœtation of thought; it is true of all his work, as Coleridge finely said of his first poem, that the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a war embrace. Now I do not think that Stevenson's warmest admirers will claim that he *was* a thinker in the fullest sense of the word; and I maintain that the absence of this special quality is, not momentarily, but in the long run, fatal. It is a truth of all existence that nature only honors strength. Every other quality finally inheres in that.

It is fair to add that Stevenson struggled, and with splendid courage, against bodily frailty. It must be reckoned to his honor that he did so much work and did it so well. But the case of Keats was far worse, yet he did some great work of almost absolute perfection, which justifies the magnificent praise and prophecy of *Adonais*. Bodily frailty, in short, affects our estimate of the man, but not our criticism of his achievements. The ultimate standards of literary judgment are impersonal and absolute.

I am not surprised, then, in reading Stevenson's essays again to notice his want of trenchancy and decisiveness on the highest subjects of thought; and it is peculiar that the longer he wrote the more vaguely, and even dubiously, he expressed himself on those topics.

Stevenson was from first to last what the clergy call an "unbeliever." His unbelief was plainly disclosed in his *Travels With A Donkey*. In the deeply interesting chapter on his stay at the Trappist monastery he describes a good father's efforts to bring him to God, and refers to himself as "one who feels very similarly to all sects of religion, and who has never been able, even for a moment, to weigh seriously the merit of this or that creed on the eternal side of things, however much he may see to praise or blame upon the secular and temporal side." "The good father asked me," he says again, "if I were a Christian; and when he found I was not, or not after his way, he glossed it over with great goodwill." In a much later, and unusually outspoken essay, "Pulvis et Umbra," included in the *Across the Plains* volume, Stevenson burst forth in a sterner fashion. "Our religion and moralities," he said, "have been trimmed to flatter us, till they are all emasculate and sentimentalised, and only please and weaken. Truth is of a rougher strain."

What a pity Stevenson did not always bear in mind that *Truth is of a rougher strain!* The words are his own—and they are profoundly true. Renan meant the same thing when he said that truth is higher than politeness. We do well to be polite and considerate in social intercourse, in all mixed companies, and especially in companies of our own seeking; but when we write to the reader who seeks *us*—for, from the nature of the case, we cannot seek *him*—we should brush mere conventions aside as superfluous, and let the communication flow direct from brain to brain and heart to heart.

Stevenson's scepticism brought him into trouble with his family when he was twenty-three. It gave sad pain to his mother, and his father appears to have taxed him with being a "horrible atheist." The situation was so painful that he almost found it in his heart to retract. "But," he said in a letter to Charles Baxter, "it is too late; and again, am I to live my whole life as one falsehood?" Sidney Colvin, commenting on this, in the Introduction to the collected *Letters*, remarks that Stevenson's study had released him from the bonds of Calvinistic Christianity and "even of dogmatic Christianity in general, and had taught him to respect all creeds alike as expressions of the cravings and conjectures of the human spirit in face of the unsolved mystery of things, rather than cling to any one of them as a revelation of ultimate truth. This, in the main, was his attitude throughout life towards religion, though as time went on he grew more ready, in daily life, to use language and fall in with the observances of the faith in which he had been brought up."

It was not only in daily life that Stevenson (so unlike Meredith!) made those weak concessions to Christianity. In the capital essay on "Beggars" he fairly went out of his way to question the morality of people who shared his own opinions—which is the very lowest form of flattery. With regard to a somewhat literate tramp who rather warned him against "atheistical opinions," Stevenson wrote: "For (perhaps with a deeper wisdom than we are inclined in these days to admit) he plainly bracketed agnosticism with beer and skittles."

What is the explanation of that miserable descent? Was it a desire to please the readers of the magazine in which the essay first appeared? In any case, it was utterly unworthy of Stevenson. He knew better. He sinned against the light. He was perfectly aware that it is those who take the trouble to think who are the least likely to be sensualists.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Religious Sanction.

The question of the Moral Sanction is one that always has, and always will occupy, a prominent place in ethical speculation, although continuous discussion seems to do little towards uniting the various schools of thought. And, in view of this fact, it may be taken as a fortunate circumstance that inability to agree upon this question no more prevents mankind manifesting a workable degree of uniformity in their conduct than disputes as to the nutritive value of certain foods prevents their maintaining a passable degree of physical health. For conduct, however much it may be inspired to special effort by the acceptance of this or that particular theory, does not, in its fundamental aspects, depend upon any. Normal humanity is no more conscious of the high philosophic theories it illustrates in its daily actions than a man is aware that in throwing a stone across the road he changes the centre of gravity of the universe. Those who express fears of what *may* happen if a particular "sanction" be attacked are thus largely tilting at windmills. Those who are sufficiently developed to interest themselves in discussions on the nature of morals usually possess enough intelligence and balance to prevent their speculations seriously affecting their conduct, while the less developed show neither interest in, nor appreciation of, the points in dispute.

Broadly, it may be said that any "sanction" or "standard" of morality that may be proposed breaks down, or is ineffective as a conscious force, with someone. The religious sanction does not appeal to the Freethinker, and the sanction favored by the Freethinker appears to the religious person to lack compelling power. It is useless telling a man who believes neither in a God or a future life that God wishes him to act in this or that particular manner. You might as well deliver a moral exordium in ancient Greek to an English peasant. And to a religious person, convinced that, apart from religion, no sanction of morals is possible, it is equally useless telling him to find a sufficient guide in the conception of general happiness or temporal welfare. Each will assert that the other's sanction is defective because it fails to appeal to *him*. And, so far, each will be justified in his assertion. Whether the failure of each is inevitable or not, or whether one might reasonably assert that development, individual and social, would strengthen one sanction and weaken the other, are wider and more important questions.

So far as the religious sanction is concerned, its failure has been unmistakable. It has not only failed to coerce the conduct of those who did not accept the Theistic postulate on which it is based, but it has failed to coerce those who did accept it. Its failure has formed one of the stock themes of even religious preachers, although they have never ceased to emphasise its value. From St. Paul down to the most recent evangelist there has been the complaint that religious people are not as they should be, accompanied with the affirmation that nothing but religion can develop in human nature the required degree of excellence. Why it has failed, and why it was foredoomed to failure, are considerations worthy of a little attention.

A man is obliged to do something, said a once-eminent authority in the religious world (Archdeacon Paley), "when he is urged by a violent motive resulting from the command of another"; and he proceeds to argue that, as we should not be obliged to obey the laws unless rewards and punishments, pleasure or pain, depended upon our obedience, so neither should we, but for a similar reason, be obliged to obey the command of God. Therefore, he concludes, private happiness is our (the Christians') motive, and the will of God our rule. This finding a reason for morality in an external authority, with the reduction of moral rules to so many criminal regulations, is a properly theological conception; but, however faulty it may be, it will serve to illustrate the point under discussion To commence with, one may confidently say that the admitted failure of the theological sanction is not due to people *not* desiring happiness. This is an inexpugnable element of conscious action. Nor can it be because the will of God—granting certain conditions—could not play the part of Paley's "violent motive." If people believed in the existence of God with the same degree of certainty that they believe in the existence of, say, a policeman, and in a heaven and a hell with the same strength of conviction that they believe in Paris or Berlin, then we may assume that religious belief would supply a motive "violent" enough to secure all that is required of it.

But this is a pretty big "if," and in stating it one goes to the heart of the question. People believe in a God, true; but between this and their belief in the possibility of their contracting a disease there is a world of difference. The latter is constant, and, most of the time, active. The former, save in very rare cases, is fluctuating and, except under special circumstances, dormant. The belief in God has no more influence over average men and women than has their belief in the existence of Julius Cæsar, or than the fact that one day our coal supply will be exhausted, influences them in replenishing the kitchen fire. At certain moments of their lives, individuals here and there may be brought to the point of giving this belief in Deity an actuality as real as that of their next-door neighbor; but persons of this description are, of necessity, the exception. The overwhelming majority require something of a more concrete and realisable character if it is to exert a strong and conscious influence on their lives. And if a religious belief is to act as Paley believed it should act, it must present two characteristics that no religious belief the world has yet seen has ever possessed. It must be sufficiently strong in the mind to exert a constant force, never falling below a given point, while the punishments and rewards promised must be certain in their action.

Now the belief in God is one that, even with the most religious, assumes widely different degrees of intensity. The despairing cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" whether historically true in the one particular instance or not, does represent a true state of the religious mind under stress of unexpected circumstances. There is a doubt; and this doubt suggests itself to all, sensitive and brutal, cultured and uncultured. In more civilised times the doubt is suggested and strengthened in a thousand different ways, while little or nothing occurs to lend the belief renewed strength. All is *not* right with the world, whether God's in his heaven or not. Punishments and rewards do not follow in a manner that commends itself to the most rudimentary moral intelligence, while from the purely intellectual side doubts are suggested by every fresh scientific discovery. Thus, instead of the basis of the religious moral sanction being strengthened by time and experience, its force wavers at times even with the most devout, its efficacy becomes weaker with all professors of religion, while multitudes reject it with a contempt arising from a conviction of its profound falsity and inutility.

But even though the existence of God were unquestioned and unquestionable, the religious sanction would still be one of very doubtful force. One of Beccaria's most fruitful generalisations in his dealing with the problem of crime was that the certainty of punishment was of more consequence, because of greater efficacy, than its severity. A slight punishment may deter if it is inevitable; a much severer one will fail if its operation be doubtful. And the extent of its failure will be exactly proportionate to the doubtfulness of its operation. Remoteness of punishment or reward would, in a similar manner, frustrate their object. A punishment that is to take effect forty or fifty years hence has but a small effect in preventing wrongdoing to-day. Present inducements easily outweigh the influence of so remote a contingency. This principle, the workings of which may easily be seen in everyday life, applies with special strength to religion. For here the object,

God, is at least open to doubt; the consummation of the act as distant as any event can be. People who, in order to gratify particular desires, will chance what may happen a few years hence, will certainly not be more inclined to check present desires when the fruits are to be realised on the other side of the grave. All the probabilities are against such a sanction exercising a steady influence on human nature; and the facts support the probabilities. It is for this reason that with normal people some special circumstance—a disaster or a death, an attack of disease or the influence of a powerful personality—is needed to rouse religious feelings into activity, and even then resume a state of quiescence as soon as the exciting cause is removed.

To such criticism as the above the religious advocate usually makes the reply that virtue would lose all, or nearly all, its value if it were made too easy of accomplishment. To that the reply is that the whole tendency of moral discipline is to produce what is declared to be undesirable. Moral practice gives the foundation of moral habits, that is, desirable actions which are performed without the troublesome and wasteful operations of deliberation, decision, and struggle. Moreover, as perfection of character is the ideal end of moral discipline, nothing seems to be gained by making that either difficult or impossible of realisation. Whether the good character appears at the beginning or end of the process makes no conceivable difference. And again, the aim of education is to do exactly what the religious person says God is justified in not doing. It aims, that is, at so developing the general intelligence that the consequences of actions may be more easily perceived, and thus exert a surer influence on conduct.

Finally, a very obvious comment upon the religious sanction is that it has most effect upon those who least need its influence. The brutal, the callous, the unthinking are not seriously affected by it. The kindly, the sensitive, the thoughtful are. It does not prevent the thief stealing, or the liar lying; but it does trouble those who are striving to do their best apart from its influence, and who consequently develop a more or less morbid frame of mind. The biographies of the best men in Christian history offer many melancholy examples of the extent to which they have falsely accused themselves of sins during their "unconverted" state, and the manner in which harmless actions are magnified into deadly offences. Indeed, one of Christianity's chief offences is, not that it has enlisted the services of bad men, but that it has monopolised the energies of good ones. The state of society at any period during its history is adequate proof that Christianity has not succeeded in seriously diminishing the volume of vice and crime. But it has succeeded in influencing in a morbid and anti-social manner many who, left alone, might have developed a sanely-balanced intelligence, and have applied their energies to the work of profitable social development.

C. Cohen.

A Theologian in a Rage.

Now, as always, the theologians are calling one another unparliamentary names, and furiously cursing one another's teaching. They never did dwell together in unison, and never will. It is only in an atmosphere of contention that theology can live at all; and of all controversies the theological ones have been the bitterest and most cruel. And they are to-day as true to their historic character as ever. An illustration of this was afforded at the recent meeting of the Free Church Council at Hull. The subject under discussion was very suggestive: "The Attitude of the Church to the Present Unrest." The present unrest, of course, is the result of the New Theology agitation under the leadership of Mr. Campbell. The most ferocious opponent of that movement, from the first, has been Principal Forsyth, of Hackney College; and it was he who thundered out against it at Hull. This gentleman's command of vituperative language is one of the chief wonders of the age. His invectives are always perfect gems; and on the occasion under consideration he surpassed even himself. A correspondent characterises his performance as "the outstanding feature of the day." The Principal himself thought he was at his fighting best. People who heard him usually called him "an epigrammatist," and those who read him said he was "an obscure theologian"; but that morning he did his level best to be simple and clear. In its report of his address, the *Christian World* said that "it was long, dazzling in its phraseology, and peculiarly Forsythian in the showers of darts it cast into the camp of the theologians who differ from Dr. Forsyth."

His two central contentions were, "first, that theological orthodoxy as an ideal, mere correctness of belief as the object of the Church, is practically gone; and, second, that theological liberalism has notice to quit." This means, if it means anything, that in the Free Churches of England and Wales, for the future, no theology shall be tolerated save that which issues from the subtle brain of the Principal of Hackney College. Every other form of doctrine "has got its death sentence; its bankruptcy has begun, and its shareholders begin to know it." He was extremely severe on some Churches. "They are more concerned," he averred, "to have a popular preacher than a pure evangel. Some people are indifferent what is taught if the place be filled. There are some Churches that have sold their evangelical birthright for a preacher more savory than solid. That is the way of treason and death. Such Churches have no weight, and they fade when their star sets." The long and the short of it is, that the Churches in which the Forsythian theology is not installed are foredoomed to speedy extinction. If any man dares to introduce any other dogmas let him be anathematised, and let his light be quickly snuffed out. Says the *Christian World* report:—

> "It was part of their attitude as a competent Church that there should be no countenance, but only contempt, for adventurers who set up violently to discredit and revolutionise belief, not only without mastering the subject, but without having mastered a single theological classic, or studied thoroughly and critically a single book of the Greek Testament. They ought to repel with warmth the claims to teach of men who inhaled their theology out of their age, as orchids grew with their roots in the air, instead of planting it in the historic revelation, like the tree of life. This was not the scorn of orthodoxy for heresy, but of the competent for the smatterer who sets up as an authority. It was scorn for amateur guides who offered short cuts to certainty which all the labor and science of the saints had missed; and who undertook to get New Testament apostles out of the way by old-age pensions."

Thus spake the self-constituted Pope of the Free Churches. He is the "competent" theologian, while all who refuse to pronounce his shibboleths are "smatterers," "amateurs," "quacks." Let us examine these beautiful terms applied to the New Theologians. "Smatterers" are persons who have only a slight, superficial knowledge of the subject in question; "amateurs," non-professionals who study a subject from the love of it; and "quacks," vain pretenders, empty-headed boasters, charlatans. It is certain that the leaders of the New Theology are not amateurs, but regular professionals. Who are the smatterers in theology? It is possible that Dr. Forsyth is better informed as to the contents of different theological systems than, say, Mr. Campbell or Dr. Anderson, although there are those who doubt even that; but of what earthly use to anybody is the most intimate acquaintance with what different men, in different ages, have thought and said about God and Christ and the plan of salvation? Take any "theological classic" you like, and after thoroughly mastering it you will find that it is nothing more than a cleverly arranged collection of some man's opinions, speculations, and hypothesis on subjects that lie outside the scope of human knowledge. Or

study "thoroughly and critically a single book of the Greek Testament," and you will make precisely the same discovery. Paul may have been a perfectly sincere man, but he was the victim of many hallucinations and illusions. He prophesied, "by the word of the Lord," that a certain wonderful event would happen in his own lifetime, and the prediction is still unfulfilled. Now, if Mr. Campbell or Dr. Anderson is a quack, so was Paul, so was Augustine, or Aquinas, or Calvin, and so is Principal Forsyth himself. "Attacks on Christian belief, based on ignorance or hatred, are quackery," the Principal is reported as saying; but the New Theologians have a distinct Christian belief of their own, and are no more quacks in attacking his than he is a quack in assailing theirs. All theologians must be placed in the same category. Consciously or unconsciously, they are all quacks, pretenders to a knowledge they do not possess.

Dr. Forsyth's position is an impossible one. The new orthodoxy, as interpreted by the reverend gentleman, differs from the old only in that it has thrown over a few absurdities, such as the absolute infallibility of the Bible "at every point." That is to say, the new orthodoxy makes one or two surrenders to Rationalism; but to surrender at all is to admit the thin end of a wedge that is calculated to shatter the whole Christian faith. Dr. Forsyth pins his faith in what he calls "the infallibility of *the Gospel* which was there before there was a Bible, and which produced the Bible and the Church both"; and the Gospel proves its infallibility by producing a fallible Bible and a fallible Church. It is impossible to conceive of a more irrational position. Our divine would never have heard of the Gospel apart from the Bible and the Church, which are its only products; and yet, judging the Gospel by its two fallible products, which are its only witnesses, he pronounces it infallible. What has the Gospel ever done to establish its claim to infallibility? What proof has it ever supplied that it is the power of God unto the world's salvation? Why the Free Churches themselves are deserting it in favor of admittedly human agencies. Some two or three decadent London Churches have recently been revived by the introduction of extraneous elements, which attract the people after the Gospel had failed to do so. Despite this notorious fact, Principal Forsyth has the temerity to say that what he is "concerned about is the infallibility of the Gospel."

The function of the Gospel, according to the Principal, is to save souls. "An evangelical Church rests," he says, "on the New Testament fact of final redemption from guilt in Christ's Cross; that the matter of sin and its forgiveness, guilt and its removal, is the marrow of Christianity." The fact of the redeeming efficacy of Christ's Cross constitutes, or is, the infallible Gospel. Now, observe, the word of this apostolic Gospel is "trusted with the Church"; but the souls of men God has in his own trust. However, God is powerless to save the souls of men unless the Church takes proper care of the word of the infallible Gospel entrusted to its custody. Here are the very words employed: "He [God] will see to the souls if we see to the Gospel he gave us for souls." No God worth having would so condition himself; and an infallible Gospel so woefully handicapped is a howling contradiction in terms. Is it any wonder that the world is turning its back upon all theologies and supernatural gospels? Is it in any sense surprising that churches and chapels are steadily emptying, and the ministrations of the pulpit losing their influence even over the diminishing numbers that still listen to them? The real marvel is that there are so many who continue to close their eyes against the advancing light of knowledge. There is not the slightest fear, however, that the so-called new orthodoxy, so valiantly championed by the Hackney College Principal, will ever succeed in commending itself to the widening intelligence of the present age. Science has this time come to stay, never again to be suppressed by a dominant superstition. Never again shall any form of supernaturalism put the world's intellect in chains. The divines will doubtless continue, as long as any of them remain, to assert that, though some systems of theology have been discredited and left behind, there is still a very simple way of finding God, "the way of our spiritual instinct, the way which proves God to us from the fact that we cannot do without him." But this "spiritual instinct," so much insisted upon by the clergy, is a pure figment. Belief in God is not an instinct which everybody is obliged to follow, but a habit acquired with difficulty and always in danger of being lost. If neither its parents nor its teachers tell a child anything about God and another world, or about sin and guilt and the atonement to deal with them, it will grow up in total ignorance of such things, and a complete unbeliever in them. This is a fact to which thousands of living witnesses are ready to testify. Because they had no religious training in their youth they are without a single shred of religion in their prime. Of a religious instinct they have had no experience whatever, and surely this proves its non-existence. Hence the appeals of any theology are made to a faculty which every healthily and naturally educated person lacks.

J. T. Lloyd.

The Chronology of Easter.

Easter is upon us again, and it may interest many readers to inquire what that feast really is, how and when it originated. Is it not remarkable that in an age when we pay so little heed to the movements of the heavenly bodies, one of the chief holidays of the year is regulated entirely by the phases of the Moon? By Act of Parliament, Easter Sunday is the first Sunday after the full moon upon or following March 21—the Spring Equinox. If the full moon falls on a Sunday, Easter Day is the Sunday after. The words of the Act should have been, not "full moon," but "fourteenth day of the moon," for the full moon, reckoning the new moon as the first, is the fifteenth.

During the first three centuries of our era, there was much dispute as to whether this feast was or was not a Christianised version of the Jewish Passover; and even as late as the sixteenth century, when Pope Gregory reformed the calendar, the Jesuit, Clavius, to whom a great part of the readjustment was entrusted, deliberately contrived that the moon of the calendar should *not* correspond with the moon of the heavens, in order that the feast of Easter might not be kept on the same day as the Jewish Passover. Whether our Spring feast was first observed about 30 A.D., or whether it was a mere survival of the Jewish feast, which is said to have had its inception some fifteen centuries earlier, is still a much-debated question. My present object is to inquire whether the feast is not one, the observance of which, has been handed down from a far higher antiquity. Had the early Christians attempted to sweep aside all the popular customs and feasts of the period, they would indeed have met with resistless opposition. But we know that they did nothing of the sort. Just as conquering nations used to add the gods of subjugated races to their own pantheon, partly to propitiate those gods, and partly to pacify the vanquished, so the Christians adopted most of the customs, ceremonials, observances, and feasts of those whom they tried to convert.

Traditional customs and superstitions are deeply rooted in the hearts of all half civilised men; and even when Julius Cæsar brought in his reformed calendar in 46 B.C., wishing to begin the year on the shortest day (the Winter Solstice) he was compelled to yield to popular clamor and to begin it at the following new moon, which, in that year, happened to fall about a week later. Had the new moon fallen on the shortest day, our present New Year's Day would be a less meaningless date than it now is. It is, therefore, far from improbable that when the Christians first established their Feast of Easter (no

matter for what purpose) they chose a day on which, from time immemorial, some feast had always been observed and eagerly looked forward to. This view receives support from the fact that the feast chosen was one which was dependent on the phases of the moon. There had been a tradition for thousands of years that the chief feasts of the year should be celebrated at the time of the full moon. But for the strength of this tradition it is probable that the Nicene Council (325 A.D.) would have chosen a fixed day of the year for Easter. The fury with which this controversy raged for several centuries seems to show that the masses could not, or would not, give way on this point either to Cæsarism or to Christianity. What that ancient tradition was, and how universal its sway, we shall see presently. Meantime, the Nicene Council seems to have effected a compromise. What was this great feast? Antiquarian research has established the fact that such a festival was kept, not only by the Christians, not only by the Jews, but by *every civilised nation on the earth.* And it had been kept so anciently that "the memory of man ran not to the contrary thereof." The precise day of this great festival (the originally 6,000 B.C. coinciding with the Winter Solstice) was determined by the conjunction of the sun and the moon in some constellation. In other words, it was a siderial feast. But, at the time of the early Christian era, this conjunction happened to coincide with the Spring Equinox. It was not always so.

The astronomer-priests of Egypt, Babylon, and Persia, and later of Europe, were learned mathematicians, who, in ability and even knowledge, were hardly inferior to scientists of our own day. But the truths they discovered were too complicated for the simple minds of the people; and in order to popularise them, they were revealed in myths and stories of the doings of the sun, moon, and stars, who, for the purpose, were described as gods and goddesses, and believed to be real persons.

The enthusiasm for star-study began to wane after a practically perfect calendar had been devised and time-measuring instruments had been invented. The ancient clock of the people was the sky. But, although the truths of astronomy were forgotten all through the Dark Ages, the myths and fables in which they had been clothed continued to live. The stories of Amen-Ra, of Ormuzd, of Aphrodite, of Mars, of Arthur, survived for centuries the truths they were intended to convey.

The preparation of a correct calendar was the work of ages. The position of the fixed stars in relation to the seasons, changes so gradually as to be almost imperceptible in the course of two or three hundred years. How few of us know, or care to know, in which sign of the zodiac the sun rises in any month of the year? Copernicus, Kepler, and others did much to rediscover and restate laws that had been known thousands of years before, and utterly forgotten. It is appalling to reflect that men like Galileo, Bruno, Servetus, were tortured and even burnt alive for maintaining beliefs which, had they lived 6,000 years earlier, they would have been punished, or at least despised, for denying. The earliest calendar was based on the observed fact that the four important seasons of the year (the two solstices and two equinoxes) coincided with certain stars at sunrise. At about 6,000 B.C. it was observed that on the day of the winter solstice—the beginning of the year—the sun rose in the constellation of the Ram (Aries); and after the completion of twelve months he again rose in the same constellation, and this happened again and again for years and centuries. When the sun and the moon both rose together in the sign of the Ram, the new year began; and a fortnight later, when the moon was *full*, a great festival was held to welcome in the new year, and a young ram, as earthly representative of the Ram in which the year began, was sacrificed. This feast was called the Passover, probably long before the Exodus, because at that season of the year the sun *passed over* the colure of the solstice. The Egyptian god honored at this season was Amen-Ra; and the word "amen" is Egyptian for Ram. The echo of his great name may still be heard at the end of the Christian prayers. The Easter egg is symbolical of the birth of the new year.

This ancient Calendar would probably have continued in force to the present day, but for the fact that the priest-astronomers overlooked one slow movement of the heavens—or of the seasons, according as you regard it. This motion is known as the Procession of the Equinoxes. Without entering into the cause of this movement, it is easy to explain its effect. Although the Winter Solstice did, about 6,000 B.C., coincide with the entry of the sun into Aries, every following year it arrived a little before its time: but *so little* that the change was hardly noticeable even in three or four hundred years—as a fact, was not observed by the astronomers. Roughly speaking, it takes about 2,000 years for the sun to glide through a single sign. Several minor reforms were then made in the vain attempt to keep the seasons true to the star-marked year. The months, of course, followed the stars, from which they took their names: the month, as of old, being the period of time taken by the sun to traverse one sign—one-twelfth of the ecliptic. About 3,800 B.C. it became obvious that the Winter Solstice no longer coincided with the entry of the sun into the constellation Aries: and the fact had to be admitted that that season occurred when the sun entered Aquarius. Such, however, was the strength of tradition that the reform met with great opposition. In some countries the priests, though fully aware of the impossibility of binding the seasons to the stars, nevertheless remained true to the zodiacal year, and continued to celebrate the great Feast on the fifteenth day of the month (the full moon), when the sun was in Aries. And to this day the Hindoos begin their year when the sun enters the sign of the Ram.

It is interesting, in this connection, to note that the name of the first month, Abib (the Nisan of the Babylonians), signifies "ears of corn"; and the month was so named from the corn, marked by the bright star Spica, held in the hand of Virgo, the constellation which presides over the nights when the sun is in the Ram. It was customary, in many places—*e.g.*, in India, to name the months after the stars visible during the whole of the night—in other words, after the signs of the Zodiac *in opposition* to the sun. The constellation Virgo is opposite to Aries: and Virgo is also known as Astraea, a name which can be identified with that of the Teutonic goddess Eostre: whence our word "Easter."

Just as Virgo or Astraea, with the ears of corn in her hand, gave a name to the month Abib, in which the Feast of the Passover was held, so did Eostre give her name to the great Feast of the Western nations.

Whatever difference there may now be as to the occasion of the Jewish Passover and the Christian Easter, the Feast was originally established about 6000 B.C. to commemorate and welcome in the New Year, and was held at the full moon following the Winter Solstice, when the sun and moon were together in the sign of Aries, the Ram.

As the centuries rolled by, the first day of Abib or Nisan,—the sidereal or star-marked month,—receded further and further from the Winter Solstice, until about the beginning of our era it coincided approximately with the Spring Equinox, when the Feasts were made Seasonal. They ceased to be, as they originally were, Sidereal.

E. G. D.

THE RABBI HAD THE BEST OF IT.

A prominent rabbi of Pittsburg met recently at a dinner a priest, whom he had known intimately years before. During the meal the conversation took a bantering turn, and the father, turning to the rabbi, inquired: "My friend, when are you going to begin eating pork?" Instantly the rabbi replied, "At your wedding, sir."

Acid Drops.

Mr. Robert Blatchford appears to be losing his head. He seems to regard all who do not agree with him about the German invasion idea as wicked and malicious people. He says that nobody has met him with argument:—

> "They treated it as a partisan attack on the Liberal management of the Navy. They said—the Liberal, Radical, Secularist, and Socialist speakers and journals—that I had basely sold myself to the Tory party and the Tory press, to lead a mercenary attack upon the Government."

Now there are not many "Secularist journals" in England, and we invite Mr. Blatchford to speak more precisely. What are the names of the Secularist journals that have acted as he alleges? The *Freethinker* is the oldest and the best-known Secularist journal in this country, and it has never made a suggestion against Mr. Blatchford's honesty and sincerity. It has not even criticised Mr. Blatchford's pamphlet, for it does not deal with politics at all. Mr. Foote has dealt with the pamphlet in one of his lectures, but he has been careful to state—generally in reply to questions, mostly put by Socialists—that he is not concerned with Mr. Blatchford's motives, and does not question them. There is quite enough to question in Mr. Blatchford's views without questioning his *bonâ fides*. We might suggest, however, that as he himself questions "the common honesty" of nearly every politician in Great Britain, he really ought not to be surprised, and still less excited, if the compliment is returned. This is rather off our special line in the *Freethinker*, but Mr. Blatchford invited it by his reference to "Secularist journals."

We see that Mr. Campbell, in his latest published sermon, entitled "With Christ upon the Water," argues that no one has a right to dismiss the story of Christ's pedestrian trip on the sad sea waves "with a shrug of the shoulders." The Oracle of the City Temple says:—

> "Mr. Matthew Arnold's dictum that 'miracles do not happen' is not strictly true, if by miracles we mean the apparent temporary supersession of natural law; miracles *do* happen, and are happening every day—in fact I am not at all prepared to say that this ancient story is not literally and actually true. To close one's mind to the possibility of such a thing is dogmatism of a most irrational kind."

This shows a characteristic action of what Mr. Campbell calls his mind. He takes particular care not to state that he *does* believe that wave-treading story; at the same time, he denies the right of anybody else to *disbelieve* it; which shows a most pappy mental condition, even for the occupant of a pulpit. It is evident also to anyone who takes the trouble to think that Mr. Campbell is juggling with the word "miracle." A miracle cannot be a natural occurrence; it is a supernatural occurrence, or it is nothing. Walking on the water as a natural performance is *not* a miracle. But *is* it a natural performance? That question cannot be answered in the affirmative until somebody comes along who is able to do it—without apparatus or trickery. While we are waiting for that somebody to put in an appearance we venture to ask Mr. Campbell why it is irrational dogmatism to close one's mind to the "possibility" of anything? Is not the business of life conducted on that very plan? Men treat certain things as impossible, not metaphysically but practically, in order to save time and get on with their affairs. Their attention might be demanded to the proposition that some heavenly body, if not the moon, is made of green cheese. They cannot deny the possibility of such a phenomenon; all they can say is that the probabilities are all against it. But is that any reason why they should listen? And we hope Mr. Campbell will forgive us for saying that violating the law of gravitation is on all fours with discovering a gorgonzola planet.

Mr. Campbell's knowledge of history is not excessive. He says that "Peter walked upon the waters of martyrdom to go to Jesus," and "died for his Lord." We invite the reverend gentleman to tell us where and when. Gibbon, speaking as an historian, not as a theologian, said that there was no reason to believe that a single disciple of Jesus sealed his faith with his blood. Nothing could be more ridiculously legendary than the story of Peter's martyrdom at Rome. To put it forward as history is an insult to human intelligence.

"Let no one think he can retain Christianity while eliminating the supernatural." So says the Rev. Newton H. Marshall in the *British Weekly*. Mr. Campbell seems to be coming round to the same opinion.

Mr. Bernard Shaw took Mr. Campbell's place at a Luton meeting, the latter being prevented by illness from attending. Mr. Shaw did not know what the subject was until he entered the hall, but he talked on it in "an interesting fashion for over an hour." The Christian paper which reports the fact does not draw the moral. It is this,—that Mr. Campbell's subjects are very easily treated.

Mr. Richard Whiteing, the novelist, declares that the Rev. R. J. Campbell is "a herald of democracy" and "an apostle of God." That settles it. God's own certificate could hardly be more convincing.

Sir Walter Gilby, the founder of the famous wine business, addresses the public through *London Opinion*. One of his utterances is worth noting in our columns. "Live and let live" is a good working notion for this world—I don't know much about the next."

Mrs. Bramwell Booth believes that "men and women are equally religious." Rev. C. Silvester Horne agrees with Dr. Johnson that "men are more religious, more deeply, genuinely religious than women." Is that the reason why the pulpits are nearly all filled by men? Is it the reason why all the Churches, except the Christian Science Church, have been established and conducted by men? Is it also the reason why all the Bibles of the world have been written by men? We pause for a reply.

Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Silvester Horne went to Paris for their Easter holiday. Oh!

John D. Rockefeller's scheme for using his wealth for the abolition of poverty—which is the craziest idea that even America has yet produced, besides being anti-Christian, for Jesus taught that poverty was the greatest of blessings—this scheme, we say, has found a ready applauder in the Rev. Dr. Aked, who welcomes it as coming from a member of his own church, and declares that it not only shows "a lovely nobility of character" but inaugurates a "new epoch." Fancy a lovely nobility of character being displayed by John D. Rockefeller! Look at his stony face, and then imagine it—if you can. As for the "new epoch," that sort of thing comes along thousands of times in every generation.

Rev. R. J. Horton says that man is the only being on earth that has a forehead, and a name is needed on it—*Jesus*. Mr. Horton hopes it is on his own brow. Well, we hope it is not; it would be a great disfigurement. He says it is "stamped upon the brows of many—and they are the best and brightest of the human race." Christian "cheek" again! The vanity of these people is immeasurable. They *are* the people, and goodness and wisdom die with them.

Is the editor of the *British Weekly* a teetotaler? If not, he must have taken an extra mouthful before writing his last week's front article. Look at this (third) sentence: "We cannot penetrate the incommunicable silences of Christ." Can anybody understand it? The only way to give it any meaning at all is to use "incommunicable" illegitimately.

A London morning paper, suddenly recollecting piety in the midst of its description of the general merry-making on Good Friday, thought it wise to refer to the people who went to church, who "remembered the meaning of the first Good Friday, and coming home again ate their hot-cross buns in a Christian spirit." How does a person eat a hot-cross bun in a Christian spirit? Is it done with a sad face to slow music? Is the dry bun—they soon get dry—moistened with tears? Or does the eater look forward to an attack of indigestion, and sing "Nearer, my God, to Thee"?

Hot-cross buns were eaten as usual on Good Friday. We plead guilty to having eaten one ourselves—cross and all. Christians think the cross refers to Christ. It was an ancient symbol before J. C. was born—if he *was* born; at any rate, before the Christian era. People were eating hot-cross buns in Babylon four thousand years ago. As the old book itself says, there is nothing new under the sun. Christianity is a patchwork quilt on the bed in which man's intellect sleeps.

Mr. Belfort Bax returns to the subject of his letter which we criticised recently. We regret to say that he is still unable to see the most critical point. Listen to this:—

> "Can you blame Socialists and Freethinkers who regard the 'morality taught by religion,' understanding by 'religion' Christian dogma, as fundamentally rotten, for seeking to shield, not adult persons—there the principle of toleration may expediently come in, I admit—but young and immature minds from being infected with such dogma?"

Now the point—at least the *chief* point—that Mr. Bax overlooks is that the Secular State should take no more interest

in Mr. Bax's opinion of Catholics than in Catholics' opinion of Mr. Bax. He talks about the "infection" of Christian doctrines, and Christians talk about the "poison" of scepticism. Mr. Bax wants to stop the "infection" but objects to the stoppage of his "poison." He denies to his opponents the rights which he claims for himself. What he calls "the dastardly murder of Francesco Ferrer" is but a development of his own principles. It is idle to say that you do not want to kill Catholics. Persecution is persecution; all the rest is merely a question of degree. Whether you rob a mental opponent of his liberty, his property, or his life, makes not the slightest difference to the principle at issue. Mr. Bax advocates intolerance, and has therefore no right to complain of intolerance.

According to the Paris correspondent of the *Daily News* the French statesman whose reputation has most risen in the present Parliament is M. Aristide Briand, the Prime Minister. Not many years ago, when he was not as distinguished as he is now, the *Daily News*, like other English papers, Liberal as well as Conservative, used to lecture M. Briand for the aggressive Freethought of his public speeches. But the new and more prudent policy is not even to whisper that the French Premier is an Atheist. Such a fact must, of course, be kept as dark as possible.

Church and Theatre are always rivals until one or the other capitulates; which, by the way, the Church is rapidly doing in England. Naturally it is different in Holy Russia. We see that the Archbishop of Saratoff, who recently forbade the saying of masses for the repose of the soul of a famous Russian actress, has issued a pastoral forbidding his flock to visit theatres, which he describes as "the place of iniquity and the seat of Satan." He threatens to refuse Absolution and the Communion to those who disobey.

Easter eggs, reported to be fresh from the country, as it is to be hoped they were, figured in the performance at St. Mary Woolnoth, in the City of London, on Sunday morning. The rector's daughter handed one out of a basket to each member of the congregation on leaving the "sacred edifice." Probably she had not the least idea of what the eggs symbolised.—namely, the spring outburst of nature's fecundity. It is difficult to see what connection there is between colored eggs and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection that eggs symbolise is the resurrection of nature, and especially of the sun, after the dormancy of winter.

Clerical fatuity is always conspicuous at Easter. Preaching at Wesley's Chapel on Easter Sunday, the Rev. Dimsdale T. Young had the assurance to say that "There was absolutely no doubt about the Resurrection, and it would be difficult to find in history any event more amply and widely proved." Absolutely no doubt! when the Rev. R. J. Campbell and half the New Theologians don't believe it. To use the word "proved" of the Resurrection, at this time of day, is to invite the contemptuous laughter of every scholarly critic. Men like this preacher are either grossly behind date in their information or they are grossly practising on the credulity of their hearers.

Dr. Clifford went one better still, unless the *Daily News* report misrepresents him. He declared that "the resurrection of Jesus Christ had never been disputed." That takes the cake. Dr. Clifford also referred to John as the author of the fourth gospel and as "an eyewitness." We can hardly believe that Dr. Clifford doesn't know the falsity and absurdity of these statements.

John Cory, the "Coal King," left £2,000 to the Association for the Free Distribution of the Word of God. If he knew that the book in question is the Word of God he should have left the bulk of his fortune to promote its circulation. But the idea of John Cory being an authority on what is, or what is not, the Word of God is irresistibly funny.

Claremont, a suburb of Cape Town, has a Congregational Church, and outside that church, on Sunday, February 20, the notice board contained the following:—

Morning Subject:
WATCH
Evening Subject:
THE RACE.

We hear that the people who saw the announcement didn't want any such incitement. They were fond enough of sport already.

The correspondent who sends us the foregoing item says he remembers an amusing notice that appeared outside a church in Bristo-place, Edinburgh, some years ago: "Subject: 'Banished to Hell.' The Choir will sing: 'Sweet Strains of Mercy.'"

Was there ever a greater piece of humbug in the world than Christianity? Christians call Christ the Prince of Peace; they say he came to bring peace and goodwill on earth—though it is perfectly clear that he never did it; and they quote such words of his as "Blessed are the peacemakers," "whoso draweth the sword shall perish by the sword," and "love your enemies." But you hardly ever catch them paying the smallest practical attention to all this. We were by no means astonished, therefore, to find the following sample of Jingo Christianity in an article in the *Daily Chronicle* on "Australian Patriotism":—

> "But the new militarism has even invaded the hallowed atmosphere of the sanctuary. Last Sunday I listened to a sermon in a big Methodist church. The preacher was a Canadian. The subject was 'The Empire,' and the text a quotation from Cecil Rhodes's Imperial creed. In moving language the triumphs of the flag were delineated, and the doctrine proclaimed that the Creator had brought the Empire of islands into being for a great purpose. He recalled the story of the night when a European Ambassador called on Lord Palmerston and asked, 'What part of Australia do you consider belongs to Great Britain?' The memorable answer, 'The whole of it,' settled once and for ever, cried the statesman preacher, your trust, and then the holy concourse rose and sang with emotion 'God Save the King.'"

"Holy concourse" is good, though perhaps unintentionally. The incident shows what a blazing success Christianity is after nearly two thousand years.

The *Daily Chronicle's* "own correspondent" at Milan, reporting incidents of the eruption of Mount Etna, wrote as follows:—"The lava is fast flowing towards the populous district of Belpasso. The helpless inhabitants are in tears, and are abandoning their homes and seizing sacred relics and images of saints from the churches to place in front of the oncoming peril in the hope of frightening away the devastating streams." What a piteous and humiliating picture!

A few days later the same correspondent had the following paragraph in his long letter:—

> "Mgr. Francica Nava, the Archbishop of Catania, after visiting the threatened districts, has sent a report to the Pope describing the desolation already wrought and the terror of the population. He concludes with a reference to the comfort the people are finding in their strong and fervid faith, which is manifesting itself in public prayers and processions."

These priests with their trumpery "comfort" in the midst of disaster are becoming contemptible.

Signor Grasso, the famous Sicilian actor now in London, being interviewed by a *Daily News* representative, said that he remembered the earthquake and eruption of 1886, and how terrible an experience it was. Signor Musco, another member of the Sicilian company, said: "But we do not fear for our homes. Nicolosi has been miraculously saved again and again, and we believe the lava stream will be stayed before it reaches the villages." "Yet," said Signor Padaro, "Messina was not spared. I lost much treasure more precious than money or houses when Messina perished." Signor Grasso's piety was proof against this criticism. "May it be put into the hearts of the English," he concluded, "to pray to the saints this Eastertide for the preservation of our dear Sicily." Signor Grasso seems to have a good share of the superstition of his profession.

The great Hindu festival "Holi" and the Mohammedan celebration of the Bari Wafat, or fast of the Prophet's death, occurring this year together, there was a collision and a riot in Peshawur City. Several of both sides were killed and scores injured. Troops had to occupy the city in order to restore peace, and numerous arrests were made. Such are the benefits of an acute attack of religion.

"Love one another" is the internal rule of most religions, and it is seldom obeyed. The external rule, "Hate one another," is seldom neglected.

Professor Elliot Smith, of Manchester University, claims that a mummy in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons is older than any other known. It was found by Dr. Flinders Petrie at Medum, Egypt, in 1892. It is the mummy of Ra-Nefer, a high court official of about 3,000 B.C. According to Bible chronology this was not long after the Flood. What absurdity that Bible chronology is, to be sure!

Nottingham is a very pious town, and its Watch Committee is puritanic to the last degree. *The Girl Who Went Astray* was to be played at the Grand Theatre, but the Watch Committee couldn't stand the word "Astray," and refused to let it appear on the posters; so "Astray" went astray by being pasted over, and the bills read *The Girl Who Went* ——. No doubt thousands went to the theatre to see *where* she went. It must have been a capital advertisement.

About fifty young men belonging to the Theological Faculty of King's College recently assembled, in high spirits, immediately in front of St. Paul's Cathedral, of all places, rigged out in old dressing gowns, battered hats, and false hair, "to celebrate, in a public way, the formal installation of the new senior student of the faculty." The *Daily Chronicle* calls this "an amusing rag." Well, in a sense, it is "amusing" that a number of theological students should deliberately play the fool in front of a great sacred edifice, thereby demonstrating "in a public way" the fatal decadence of theology.

How *can* the wicked "infidels" say that God doesn't answer prayer. Look at the following extract from Easter Monday's *Daily News*:—

"FROZEN TO DEATH WHILE PRAYING.

Geneva, Sunday.

After being buried up to the waist in snow for seventy-five days, the body of a Swiss cobbler, aged 50, was found yesterday on a mountain above the town of Rapperswil, near St. Gall. The position of the body showed that the old man died praying, for his knees were bent and his hands clasped. He had wandered some distance from the ordinary path during the terrible snowstorm of January 19, which covered the valleys with a metre of snow. The frozen body was transported to Rapperswil for burial on a stretcher."

If that doesn't silence the "infidel" nothing will.

The Bishop of Ripon, addressing 3,000 workingmen (of a sort) in the Leeds Town Hall, according to the *Daily Telegraph* report, gave a curious illustration of "the influence of Jesus Christ in daily life":—

"The Bishop mentioned that during the past week a young man in Leeds about to be confirmed, was told that, having taken the name of Christ, he must not tell a lie. He replied that he would not be confirmed, for in business he must tell lies."

We might add that the Bishop of Ripon himself has to tell lies in business. If he denies it, we beg him to look at his salary and then at the Sermon on the Mount which he has undertaken to teach, and then stick to the denial if he can. He might also consider, while he is about it, why Christianity has produced, and is always boasting of, a civilisation in which men must lie for a living. Paganism did better than that. Anyhow, it couldn't possibly do worse.

Two Sonnets.

Faith and Doubt.

The faith is worthless that hath ne'er known doubt:
Who never doubts has real faith in nought;
Belief with no significance is fraught
Till with severest logic reasoned out.
Nature at times her own existence doubts,
And, melancholy as a mourning ghost,
In haggard thoughts of hopelessness engrossed
Laments, till laughter the sick fancy routs.
Only believe that at the core of things
A deep reality exists and reigns,
From which all issues, and which all sustains,
Whose endless circle all that is enrings,—
All else from centre to circumference you
May with a bold and questioning spirit view.

Belief *versus* Disbelief.

Believe! believe! the sectaries exclaim,
Ours is the faith of faiths, the creed of creeds,
And then, though evil may have been your deeds,
Christ's blood shall wash you free from sin and shame.
But disbelieve! I say, for in belief
The soul is but a still and stagnant pond
Whose weed-choked waters cannot stray beyond
Their mud-restricted bounds, however lief:
The flowing stream goes sparkling on its way,
Rejoicing in its free unfettered life,
In haste to join the elemental strife
Of the wild ocean in its mighty play:
Better the conflict of the waters wide
Than in a safe supineness to abide.

Bertram Dobell.

The Value of Bluff.

[From Stanley Hyatt's latest novel, *Black Sheep*.]

"Been hard up?" he [Douglas Kelly] asked [Jimmy Grierson] with a smile. "Why didn't you come up to me, as I told you to do? Of course, you'll find it an uphill game, and I would advise you to leave it now, at the start, if I were not sure you would succeed in the end. You'll have a hard fight, because you've got ability and experience of the world, and those will tell against you at first."

"Why?" Jimmy asked.

Kelly gave a cynical little laugh. "Because there's not much demand for either in Fleet-street. You've only got to study the press to see that—dailies, weeklies, magazines, the whole lot. They want writers who are just on the level of the mob, because then the mob can understand them. All your travel won't help you to get a job; but if you could go into a newspaper office and say, 'I know more about Upper Clapton, or Stockwell, or some such beastly place than any man living,' or, 'I'm a crime expert, and I can give the names, and dates of execution, of every man hanged in London for the last twenty years,' then they'd welcome you as a long lost brother, and give you about ten pounds a week."

Jimmy laughed, not quite believing him. "Then, how did you yourself get on?"

Kelly finished his drink, and ordered some more before answering the question, then, "I bluffed," he said. "There was a coal strike coming on, and I swore I was an expert on coal mining, so the *Evening Guardian* gave me a job. I picked up a little knowledge locally, just a few technical terms, and so on; and, as for the rest, neither the editor nor the public knew that half my stuff was utter rot. It read well, and lent itself to good headlines."

"And then, after that?" Jimmy asked.

"After that? Oh, well, I had got my foot in, and it was easy. I advertised myself, and made the ruck get out of my way, as I told you before. I'm not loved, but then I'm not in Fleet-street for the sake of earning the regard of its population" (pp. 137-8).

E. B.

STICK TO THE FARM.

"Stick to the farm," says the President
To the wide-eyed farmer boy,
Then he hies him back to his White House home,
With its air of rustic joy.

"Stick to the farm," says the railroad king
To the lad who looks afar,
Then hikes him back on the double-quick
To his rustic private car.

"Stick to the farm," says the clergyman
To the youth on the worm-fence perch,
Then lays his ear to the ground to hear
A call to a city church.

"Stick to the farm," says the doctor wise
To those who would break the rut,
Then hies him where the appendix grows
In bountiful crops to cut.

A PROMISE.

The New England farm had been worn out, so the New Englander and his wife took up a homestead in Oklahoma. The soil was kindly, and their native thrift was great, so they prospered. At last, however, age came heavily upon the wife, and knowing that her time was not long, she called her husband to her side.

"Reuben," she said, "I want you to send me back to New Hampshire, when I'm passed away."

Reuben pulled his whiskers reflectively. "That would cost a lot, Mary—could buy that windmill for what that would cost," he said.

"But I couldn't lie still in a grave this far away from the old folks," she protested.

"Well, now, I'll tell you," he compromised. "Suppose we just try ye here, and if you don't lie still, why I'll ship ye back to old New Hampshy."

CONDITIONS HOSTILE.

Pat—We sure do need rain, parson.

Priest—That's what we do. I'll remember it in my prayer to-night at the meetin'.

Pat—'T won't do no good, parson, so long as th' wind is in the west.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, April 3, Secular Hall, Brunswick-street, Glasgow; at 12 (noon), "Christ and the Democracy"; at 6.30, "The Silence of God."

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

To Correspondents.

J. T. Lloyd's Lecture Engagements.—April 10, Glasgow; 11, Falkirk.

President's Honorarium Fund: 1910.—Previously acknowledged, £185 7s. Received since:—Henry Spence, £1 1s.; W. H. Deakin, £5.

Miller.—The Church of England was created by Parliament, and is controlled by Parliament—witness the Clergy Discipline Act. All its benefices are held subject to Act of Parliament. Tithes are collectable by process of law. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners who, amongst other things, actually pay the Bishops' salaries, are appointed by the State. We cannot give a longer reply in this column.

John Williams.—Glad you have found the *Freethinker* "profitable." Never mind what Christian bigots say; what they do is the real trouble.

K. C. Clarkson.—Much obliged. We will first see if it is in Conway's Life of Paine, which is not at hand where we are writing, and then decide what to do with it.

N. Richardson.—Your generous wish that we may receive "a million shillings" doesn't seem on the way to realisation. But it isn't *your* fault.

H. B. Dodds.—Postcard to hand. We await result of enquiries.

A. Harvey.—We note it is "a thankoffering for the removal of superstition" and your hope that we may "long retain the energy to help others who have similar afflictions."

F. Thelwall.—We hope so too.

John Sumner.—We believe we always have your "best wishes."

M. J. Charter hopes our Easter Fund will be a great success.

J. de B.—Always pleased to hear from you. See "Acid Drops."

C. Deane.—See paragraph. Thanks.

F. Smallman writes: "Surely it should be an easy matter to realise your expectation that 3,000 shillings should—and, in my opinion, *ought*—to be contributed to the Easter Fund this year. Anyway, here is my cheque for 100, and I trust that others equally able will do the same, and even exceed the amount before the 'days of grace' expire."

H. W. Jackson.—We omitted to thank you for your useful report.

W. H. Deakin, writing from India, with remittance for the President's Honorarium Fund, says: "I shall endeavor to send another contribution later on. I must say I feel somewhat disappointed. I feel sure that much more might be done to relieve you of the terrible strain your constant struggle against adverse odds involves."

Agnes Goodwin.—You could address your letter in care of his publisher.

David Watt.—Glad the Paisley Branch is doing well. An "able president" counts for much.

S. Taylor.—Book has not arrived yet; will look into it when it does.

W. P. Adamson.—Much obliged; it will be useful.

E. B.—Thanks for cutting.

G. R. Ballard.—A will can be written on any piece of paper. It must be signed by yourself in the presence of two witnesses who must sign to that effect. If you care to send your draft to us we will look through it for you.

W. P. Ball.—Thanks for welcome cuttings.

A. M. B.—Glad you have read this journal for years with pleasure.

G. D.—Thanks for your cheerful letter and good wishes. We will write you about the manuscript.

Kathleen Weldon.—Many thanks for your interesting letter—all the more interesting for being written by a woman and from Ireland. Delighted to find you value the *Freethinker* so highly, and to hear you say: "I find Freethought so refreshing after years of priestly rule."

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.

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote wound up the St. James's Hall lectures on Sunday evening. In spite of the Easter Sunday there was a much improved audience. Mr. Silverstein acted as chairman, and was left in charge of the meeting after Mr. Foote departed in order to catch (for once) his last train home instead of sleeping in London. Mr. A. B. Moss kindly answered the questions arising out of Mr. Foote's lecture.

Mr. Foote makes to-day (April 3) his second visit to Glasgow this winter season, and delivers two lectures in the Secular Hall, Brunswick-street. His subjects are likely to prove attractive. District "saints" will please note that in the course of the first lecture Mr. Foote will refer to the Blatchford-*Daily Mail* German Bogey and the question of the House of Lords from a mystical, superstitious point of view—and he will recite Shelley's great Song on that subject.

East and North-East London "saints" will make a note of the new course of special Sunday evening lectures (under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd.) at Shoreditch Town Hall on April 10, 17, and 24. The chair will be taken at 7.30, and the admission to all but the front reserved seats (1s.) is free. Mr. Foote starts the program, and finishes it. Mr. Cohen takes the middle Sunday. We trust the "saints" will make an effort to advertise these lectures. Neat waistcoat pocket announcements, as well as window bills, can be obtained from Miss Vance at 2 Newcastle-street, E.C., either by personal application or by postcard.

The Bethnal Green Branch begins open-air work in Victoria Park a month earlier than usual, partly in order to advertise the Shoreditch Town Hall lectures. Afternoon lectures only during April. Mr. Marshall leads off to-day (April 3) at 3 p.m.

Thursday evening next, April 7, is the date of the next "social" under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, which takes place at Anderton's Hotel, Fleet-street. A start will be made at 8 o'clock. This time a little dancing will be added to the usual program of songs, readings, conversation, and "a few words" from the President. Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Moss, Heaford, and other well-known Freethinkers are expected to be present as well as Mr. Foote. Members of the N. S. S. are free to attend and introduce a friend. Non-members, unable to get introduced in that way, can apply for free admission tickets to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, 2 Newcastle-street, E.C.

The Independent Religious Society, Rationalist, held its tenth annual banquet recently at La Salle Hotel, Chicago. Four hundred and fifty-eight sat down to the tables. When the toastmaster introduced Mr. Mangasarian the whole company rose, cheering and waving handkerchiefs.

We see by an American exchange that Mrs. Ingersoll's action against the administrator of the Davis estate, which has been dragged through state and federal courts for so many years, is at last terminated. The claim was for legal services rendered by Colonel Ingersoll in connection with the contest over the will of Andrew J. Davis, the millionaire miner of Montana. Mr. J. H. Layson, administrator of the Davis estate, has handed Mrs. Ingersoll a certified cheque for 195,551 dollars and 98 cents. This includes Ingersoll's fee and interest to date. It is a large sum of money, nearly £40,000, and we are glad it has got into Mrs. Ingersoll's hands. Money is never safer than in the hands of a good woman, and seldom likely to be more useful. Besides, it is pleasant to know that the first lady in America—for such Mrs. Ingersoll will always be to us—is free from all financial anxiety.

Easter Eggs for Freethought.

(*The Figures mean the number of Shillings.*)

F. Smallman, 100; John Sumner, 10½; M. J. Charter, 5; Andrew Harvey, 2½; W. T. Newman, 1; Knowsley, 1; N. Richardson, 1; T. Nisbit, 1; W. Shipley, 1; A. P. (Westcliff), 5; Miller, 1; John Williams and Fred Cox, 3; F. Thelwall, 4; T. A. Matthews, 2; Wimbledon, 2; Easter Egg, 1; David Watt, 3; Miss Power, per J. Neate, 1; Agnes Goodwin, 2; H. Silverstein, 5; Kathleen Weldon, 2; Mechanic, 1; G. D., 5; J. D. D., 4; A. M. B., 1; H. L. Fisher, 3; G. R. Ballard, 1; R. Carroll, 2; C. Heaton, 2.

Bible Stories Retold.

Jacob in Search of a Wife (Gen. xxviii., xxix.).

And it came to pass, when Jacob was twenty years old, that Rebekah, his mother, said unto him, "My son, thou has now reached an age when the even current of a man's life is liable to be violently disturbed by any chit of a girl that may happen to cross his path. And I observe that the daughters of Heth, our neighbors, are already casting their sheep's eyes in thy direction, and may prove a snare unto thee. But thy father and I liketh them not. Go, therefore, while thou art fancy free, to Padan-aram, my native place, and peradventure thou mayst there find a damsel as comely as thy mother was in her youth. And may she prove as good a wife to thee as I have been to thy father Isaac." This timely speech of his mother's seemed to focus into more definite consciousness certain vague longings that had lately appeared on the horizon of Jacob's emotions. "Mother," he said, "I have been stirred with strange feelings of late, the significance of which I could not clearly divine. But now I perceive, from thy gentle hint, that they tend womanwards. Verily, thou readest the heart of youth like a book. Let my father bless me, and I depart."

And so, on a bright May morning long ago, when the lark was singing in the sky, and the flowers were bursting into bloom, and Nature wore a joyous smile, Jacob set out with a light and buoyant heart on the road to Padan-aram. His father and mother wished him a safe journey and a speedy return, watching his diminishing figure as it went towards Haran, leaving the old home at Beersheba gradually behind. His mother longed with yearning heart to see the partner of his choice; to behold the happy couple of her motherly dreams. But many moons and many winters first had come, and then had vanished, ere he came again to see them; ere the youthful errant bridegroom his old father's heart astonished by a sight o' wives and children from the land of Padan-aram. Fully twenty years elapsed before he returned to his native place, and then, it would appear, that Rebekah, weary of waiting her son's return, had given up the ghost and peacefully slept with her fathers.

The journey to Padan-aram was uneventful except for a remarkable dream experienced by our hero on the second night. It was a dream strangely out of harmony with the usual fancies of youth and the amorous errand upon which he was bent; but, then, dreams were ever wayward chiels, pursuing their erratic course contrary to all rational procedure. The loneliness of his surroundings—for he slept in the open with a stone for a pillow—and the dream together, must have had a disturbing effect upon his youthful brain; because after he awoke, and had rubbed his eyes, he exclaimed: "This is a *dreadful* place, and the very gate of heaven!" This shows, of course, that the dream must have interfered with the harmonious working of his mental machinery. If he had said that such a "dreadful" place was the gate of hell, one could have understood the expression; but otherwise it is inexplicable, except on the assumption of a disordered digestion or a mind diseased. The pious ears of St. Peter must have been terribly shocked at such a slanderous utterance, casting reflection on the entrance of that abode of which he had the honor to be the gatekeeper.

Jacob's later experiences on the road were, fortunately, of a more pleasing character. By-and-bye he came to a well which was protected by a great stone, where several flocks of sheep were waiting to be watered. Drawing near to the herdsmen, he asked, "Whence be ye, brethren?" And they said, from Haran. "Know ye, then, one Laban thereabouts?" "Stranger," said a youthful herdman, "thou hast struck oil. We be but waiting for his daughter Rachel to bring in her flock to be watered." Rachel, it appeared, was her father's shepherdess; and, while they were talking, she presently made her appearance with a flock of sheep at a bend in the meadow. It was a fascinating Arcadian picture that presented itself to the dazzled senses of Jacob as his cousin Rachel came blithely on the meadow, singing a merry tune. He thought she was certainly the sweetest little Bo-peep that had ever handled a crook or tended a flock, and he was intoxicated with a delight that he had never before experienced. Jacob made himself known, and then he rolled away the great stone from the mouth of the well, assisting her to water the flocks, while she looked on with admiring approval. After all the sheep had been tended, Rachel drew near and thanked her cousin for his kindly assistance. There was such a sweet frankness about her speech, and such an irresistible charm about her youthful maidenly figure, that, on the impulse of the moment, Jacob took her in his arms and passionately kissed her, exclaiming in an undertone, "My darling—cousin." Rachel was then just nineteen years of age, and, of course, had never been kissed before—not in the way Jacob had kissed her in that passionate embrace. She felt the delightful sensation down to the very tips of her toes, and was transported into a new world of strange and exalted feeling. Of course, she knew that it was an amorous kiss, and that she ought, rightly, to be angry with the liberty thus taken with her youthful person. But the word "cousin" had completely disarmed her; besides, she was not at all displeased. With a heart light as air, she flew home to tell her father Laban of the arrival of her cousin. And the old man came out to meet him, and welcome him to the home of his forefathers. When they reached Laban's abode, Jacob was introduced to another daughter, an elder sister named Leah. Leah had large, tender eyes, although her other features would scarcely, perhaps, have satisfied a lofty ideal of artistic taste. But "Rachel was beautiful and well favored" in all her parts.

That evening they had a family gathering, and talked long into the night, as there was much to tell on both sides. The girls were delighted to hear of their auntie Rebekah, and of the hairy man, Jacob's brother Esau. Of course, the story of the mess of pottage and the stolen birthright were among the things that our hero discreetly kept to himself. Leah was curious to know if her uncle Isaac was also a hairy man, and what kind of game Esau used to hunt; with other minor details of interest to the feminine mind. After the girls had retired for the night, and the two men were left alone, Jacob told his uncle of his father's and mother's wish, and the object of his visit. "Ah, you sly dog," said Laban, "and so it was not your old uncle you came to see? Never mind; I was young myself once, and know the feelings of youth." The girls—as girls will—discussed their cousin with some freedom in their own apartments; but Rachel did not tell her sister what had transpired at the well. After sleep eventually closed their eyelids, and dream-consciousness took the place of waking thoughts, they both saw themselves in vision as the mistress of Beersheba Manor.

Jacob soon made himself quite at home in the family, and proved a useful man among the sheep and goats. He lightened the arduous labors of the girls considerably, working indeed more like a hired servant than as a guest. He loved the exhilarating exercise of outdoor labor, and many a surprise visit did he pay Rachel as she was tending the flock among the distant hills. And, needless to say, the little episode of the well was often and often re-enacted in those lovely pastures. After a month had passed Laban proposed that Jacob should be paid wages for his services. In place of wages, however, Jacob preferred to be given Rachel to wife; a transaction in accord with the custom of the times. And, according to the narrative, he agreed to serve seven years for Rachel; and these long years, it says, "seemed unto him only as a few days, so great was the love that he bear to her." But this period of

years is evidently a mistake, and finds no confirmation in the wife-hunting stories of the other patriarchs, who certainly believed that brevity was the soul of courtship. It may be true, given a certain refinement of feeling where the higher aspirations predominate, that the period of courtship, as the Vicar of Wakefield says, is the happiest time of a man's life. But to a person of the amorous temperament of Jacob such a long probation would represent seven years of purgatory. Seven weeks, or seven days, would probably be nearer the actual truth.

However, the appointed time for the wedding drew near, and Laban made a great feast. It was the first wedding in the family, and the young couple were the recipients of many congratulations. The eventful day saw Jacob a happy man; and happier still as evening shades drew on. Rachel was a perfect vision of loveliness, and as the departing guests left their blessing and their benediction upon the nuptial couch, the felicity of the happy pair almost reached the limits of human feeling. But, with the descent of the veil of night, we leave the wedded couple until the morrow's sun calls them again to wakefulness and new-found happiness.

But in the morning,—ah, in the morning! What scurvy trick was this that a villainous father-in-law had played upon the innocent and unsuspecting Jacob?—in the morning, behold, *it was Leah!* (chap. xxix., ver. 25). What demon jugglery was this that had secreted the wrong woman into the bridal chamber. There could be no mistake. There were the large tender eyes of Leah gazing at him from the pillow as if beseeching the duped husband not to murder her on the spot. The feelings of Jacob would be difficult to describe. His first impulse was to plunge a dagger into her bosom; but he knew that she was not the real culprit, if a willing and consenting partner to the nuptial fraud. It was his uncle who was responsible for the outrage, and the account must be settled with him.

Laban was just finishing a breakfast of ham and eggs when Jacob burst in upon him, and treated him to a lengthy flow of choice specimens of the flowery language of the East. The visit was evidently not unexpected, as Laban listened to the fiery outburst with an amused nonchalance. "My dear boy," he said, "keep your wool on. You are not the only man who has found himself married to the wrong woman. The fact is that in this part of the country it is not the custom to give the younger before the elder." But Jacob refused to be comforted. "You'll break poor Rachel's heart," he said, "and bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. The sudden shock of this morning has already been productive of some silver streaks." It was not necessary in those days to wait until a wife's decease in order to marry her sister. If custom gave the precedence to the elder daughter, yet there were compensations which relieved a man of a lifetime of misery. So Laban proposed that if Jacob would serve him for another term he might have Rachel as well, without further waiting. Only, he said, let Leah have the full week's honeymoon, and after that take Rachel to wife. And so it came to pass that Jacob married two sisters in a week; the one marriage ceremony serving, so to speak, to kill two birds with one stone. But this double matrimonial event did not bring to Jacob that measure of bliss and contentment which might have been expected. The sisters were exceedingly jealous of each other, and were constantly quarreling. Jacob's lot was not an enviable one, but he again found consolation in the accommodating customs of the times. And it was not long before, acting doubtless upon the suggestion of Dr. Johnson, he left the mistresses for their maids. Laban, upon their marriage, had given to Laban and Rachel each a maid to assist them in their domestic duties; and Jacob was able to extend his conjugal affections to the two maids as well. Bilhah, the maid of Rachel, was the mother of Jacob's two sons, Dan and Napthali; while Zilpah, the maid of Leah, bore him Gad and Asher. There was no attempt to conceal the fatherhood of these children, either on the part of the girls or on that of Jacob. Indeed, he was as proud of these little Syrian piccaninnies as was the Rev. Mr. Pigott of his little daughter "Glory." The twelve tribes of Israel—the chosen people of God—have every reason to be proud of their origin, for their advent necessitated the co-operation, along with the divinely-appointed Jacob, of four virtuous Syrian women—two wives and two concubines.

What Rebekah his mother would have thought had she lived to see this happy family, this incestuous and polygamic household of her favorite son, approaching the maternal abode, we can only conjecture. Whether she would have treated the ladies as "hussies" who had led her virtuous son astray, or blackguarded her offspring for his weakness and his lust, we shall never know. Perhaps it was as well that she died beforehand with only "the promise of his coming" to cheer her latter end. Jacob had gone forth in all the innocence of youth in search of a wife, and he returned, after twenty long years, the owner of—a harem.

Joseph Bryce.

"This is True—Because I Think it is so!"

—Dr. Beveridge, Bishop of St. Asaph.

Dr. Beveridge, when sojourning in this vale of tears, was an Anglican priest, and served the office of bishop in the diocese of St. Asaph. He was a man of mark—which is more than can be said of every bishop—and, of course, he spake as one having authority. His utterances were esteemed so highly that his *Essay on the Truth of the Holy Scriptures* was printed as an introduction to an edition of the Bible that was published in the early part of last century, and dedicated to a royal nonenity, one Prince Augustus Frederic, Duke of Sussex. This essay, therefore, is an authoritative statement of the Anglican dogmas, even if it be not of the faith once delivered to the saints, and, as such, is deserving of serious consideration. Bishops, of course, are to be accepted as truthful exponents of the doctrines of the church to which *they belong*—in this instance, the Church of England as established by law—*and* for teaching which they are so handsomely paid.

Now, the object of the bishop is to prove, not only that Christianity is the *best* religion in the world, but that it is the *only true* religion; and, to do so, he undertakes to "make diligent and impartial inquiry into *all* religions," so that, by comparing them with each other, he may "be sure to find out the best." This, of course, is a wise and prudent resolve; but he nullifies it utterly by saying that he is not "in the least dissatisfied with the religion he had already embraced," and that he "does not in the least question but that he shall find the Christian religion to be the only true religion in the world." Such a statement is crisp and candid, and enables us at once to appraise at its true value the "diligent and impartial inquiry" with which he favors us.

The introductory sentence of the essay is so important that I transcribe it in its integrity. It runs thus:—

> "When, in my serious thoughts, and more retired meditations, I am got into the closet of my heart, and there begin to look within myself, and consider what I am, I presently find myself to be a reasonable creature; for, were it not so, it would be impossible for me thus to reason and reflect."

Now, a "reasonable creature" is one who "acts rationally—that is, in accordance with the dictates of reason"—so, at least the dictionaries say. The admission, therefore, whether made consciously or unconsciously, is a most startling one, for professional Christians aver that they "walk by faith and not by sight"; nevertheless, I accept it readily, because it embraces a truth. And I say "consciously or unconsciously" because the Bishop proceeds to

speak of his soul as being a spirit—as being something absolutely distinct from, and independent of, his natural body.

"My soul," says he,—

> "is a being of a spiritual nature, quite distinct from matter, and therefore could not be the product of any natural or material agent; for that a bodily substance could give being to a spiritual one implies a contradiction. It is a pure spiritual substance infused into me by God, to whom, after a short abode in the body, it is to return, and to live and continue for ever, either in a state of happiness or misery, in another life."

Of the soul's separate existence, therefore,—even here on earth, and whilst it is joined to, or simply inhabits, a corporeal body,—he has not the least doubt. Here some pertinent questions may be asked, such as:—At what period of gestation is this "pure spiritual substance infused into the fœtus by God"? For surely the Bishop never imagined that God waits, lackey-like, upon his lustful creatures. Why does it lie dormant until the child, after a lapse of years, learns by experience that it lives, and occupies a certain position in the world? What becomes of it whilst the body it inhabits is asleep? What of it when the body is that of a jabbering idiot, or of a being absolutely, or periodically, insane? Finally, when does it leave the body of one who has arrived at the age of second childishness? These are "reasonable" questions, and are asked by a "reasonable creature"; and though the dead Bishop cannot answer them, those who believe in his teaching should be able to do so.

The Bishop, to prove that his soul is "of a spiritual nature, quite distinct from matter," writes as follows:—

> "My soul can, in a moment, mount from earth to heaven, fly from pole to pole, and view all the courses and motions of the celestial bodies—the sun, moon, and stars—and then, the next moment, returning to myself again, I can consider where I have been"—mark the change of pronoun, "where I have been," not "where *it* has been"—"what glorious objects have been presented to my view"—not "its" view—"and wonder at the nimbleness and activity of my soul, that can run over so many millions of miles and finish so great a work in so small a space of time."

Now, this doctrine is simply a Pagan fable; it has no foundation in scripture, and is not taught by Jesus Christ. When, according to the Bible, "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Genesis ii. 7), that "soul" was not "of a spiritual nature quite distinct from matter." The Hebrew word *nishmet*, which in the text quoted is translated "soul," in the twentieth verse of the first chapter of Genesis is translated "creature." Elsewhere in scripture the same word is translated "mind" and "reason." The celebrated Dr. Dodd, and other eminent orthodox commentators, say that the words "living soul" undoubtedly refer only to animal life. Abram, in Genesis xii. 13, speaks of his "soul" as being his natural body. Addressing his wife, he said: "Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister; that it may be well with me for thy sake, and my *soul* shall live because of thee." The preacher of vanities taught thus: "That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts, even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast" (Eccle. iii. 19). Christ took the same view, for he makes the rich man in the parable to say: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke xii. 19). Soul, then, means life—the only life we know of—and nothing more. Adam possessed no immortal spirit that could fly away from, and return to, his natural body, as a bird flies to and from its nest; and what Adam did not possess we may be sure was not possessed by the Bishop.

If what the Bishop wrote were true, we should long ago have been told by sky-pilots exactly where heaven is—for do they not assert that "it is the duty of the clergy to pilot those who come under their influence to heaven"? I am not surprised at their silence because they know no more about heaven, if there be such a place—where it is situated, what it is like, and who are its inhabitants—than any other human being does. Their assertion in this respect is one of those meaningless nothings to which sky-pilots are so fond of giving utterance. For when did any one of their number ever make a voyage into the unknown regions of which they talk so glibly, and, returning to earth, tell us all about the new and heavenly Jerusalem? Meaningless nothings are simply bills of Superstition, drawn by Ignorance upon Credulity and Co., and made payable in another world—which is, by the way, a survival of a Druidical sacerdotal practice—and no "reasonable creature" ever discounts them, or treats them as current coin in the realm of thought. The Bishop's talk, therefore, about his "soul" means nothing more than, if indeed so much as, Shakespeare meant when he wrote those exquisite lines:—

> "The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
> And, as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation, and a name."

Having explained his belief respecting his soul, the Bishop proceeds to set forth his belief in "one God, the being of all beings." And he proves this statement to be true—that is, to his own satisfaction—in the following words: "The other articles of my faith *I think to be true, because they are so; this is true, because I think it is so!*"

Such impudent assertions did very well in lieu of sound argument in my young days, when railways were not in existence, and even lucifer matches were unknown; but now that reason can, and does, employ the searchlight of science in her quest after truth, such priestly bombast is treated by all thinking men with contempt. And rightly so! For the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the Pope of Rome, knows no more of the Whence-we-came and the Whither-we-go than do you and I. As Whateley says in his book on "Logic," in language that is unanswerable,—"On those mysterious points which are inscrutable to man, the learned can have no advantage over the ignorant and the simple, for *in utter darkness the strongest sight and the weakest are on a level.*"

Now, no one knew better, or ought to have known better, than the Bishop, that, according to St. John (iv. 24), "God is a spirit"; and, if that be so, how, according to his own argument, could God have made man? For if it be true, as the Bishop says it is, that "it implies a contradiction for a bodily substance to give being to a spiritual one," it must be equally true, according to the law that "like produces like," that "it implies a contradiction for a spiritual substance to give being to a bodily one." Nevertheless, he could not but indulge in the following piece of very tall writing:—

> "God is the glory of might and power, who did but speak the word, and there presently went out that commanding power from him by which this stately fabric of the world was formed and fashioned. And as he created all things by the word of his power, so I believe he preserves and governs all things by the power of the same word; yea, so great is his power and sovereignty, that he can as easily throw my soul from my body into hell, or nothing, as I can throw this book out of my hand to the ground; nay, he needs not throw me into nothing; but as, if I should let go my hold, the book would presently fall, so, should God but take away his supporting hand from under me, I should of myself immediately fall down to nothing."

Now, in the light of science, this is mere rhodomontade. A "being of beings" did not *speak* into existence this world and all that is therein. Eternal punishment for an imaginary sin committed some six thousand years ago by two mythical personages is now believed in by few, even of those who are pledged and paid to teach it; whilst heaven is no longer looked upon simply as a place where the redeemed will be occupied for ever and ever in sing-

ing hymns and crying out "Amen! Alleluia!" There is not the slightest ground for believing that the *forces*, miscalled "laws," by which nature works in her endless building-up and destroying, have been dictated by some law-giver outside and above nature. An uncaused cause which is unseen, unless it be identified with nature, must, to reason, be *non-existent*. No "reasonable creature" can believe in a "being of beings" who, having created a universe in the twinkling of an eye, at once mysteriously and for ever disappeared.

Moreover, the Bishop tells us that this "being of beings" is not only "all-wise" and "all-mighty," but that he is also "all-goodness," "all-mercy," and "all-justice." But what "reasonable creature" will believe him? If this "being of beings" be the creator and controller of nature, where, and in what way are his "goodness," his "mercy," and his "justice" displayed? Why does he permit nature to inflict upon her creatures such frightful cruelties and horrors as she daily and hourly does? Why is the existence of millions of her creatures only possible by their destroying millions of millions of other of her creatures? Was it divine "goodness" and "mercy" which imparted cruelty to the cat, and made man himself capable of practising the most dastardly brutality on members of his own race? Where is the evidence of an omnipotent and all-merciful being who, having the power to make men happy, yet makes them to live on in such misery, which, imperfect creatures as we are, we would gladly stop if we could? This earth, instead of being a place of love and beauty, is but a charnel-house where Life survives, but where Death reigns supreme. And yet the Bishop proudly asserts that a "being of beings," who is "all-mercy" and "all-justice," made it by "the word of his power."

J. W. de Caux.

(*To be concluded.*)

Literature at Nurse.

An Open Letter to Mr. H. G. Wells.

Concerning "Anne Veronica."

Dear Sir,—How pleasant it is for the cultured clergy to have a resident scapegoat on hand to be "damned for the sins they're not inclined to." Whether the victim enjoys it so much is no matter. But when the shocked virtue of one of the most low varlets of the Most High God utters squeaks of prudery on the perusal of your novel of *Anne Veronica*, the feeling of hopelessness that must follow any attempt to instil one drop of fact into such muddled-brain matter leaves one again defeated by the outcry of Philistine pruriency.

To hear such open allusion to yourself as if you were a noisome danger to society is not pleasant. When such insults come from a priest, who thrusts the open Bible into the hands of innocent childhood, one's sense of justice is outraged. For there are things in the sacred volume which are eminently calculated to bring the blush of modesty on any face except that of a priest. Raw, naked filth, which cannot be read aloud to a mixed congregation, is compulsorily forced into the hands of every child and every maiden; but a master of fiction, who would fain present his puppets as sentient beings, must emasculate and etherealise them until they are the mere shadows of shades of men and women, swayed by motives and temptations that would be held blameless by the Rev. Mr. Stiggins and gain approval of Mr. Pecksniff himself. For a writer must not even suggest with Shakespeare that man is, in sober truth, "the paragon of animals," and that man is no more able to cast off his body than he could sprout the legendary wings which are the recognised attributes of an angel. To say that *Anne Veronica* is a serious book is an assertion hardly strong enough. As a powerful study of a series of events evolved legitimately and consistently from the character of the heroine, it seems almost didactic in its seriousness. That it would be permissible for people who dislike realism to vote the book dull, is quite likely. Some people find Anatole France unreadable, and scorn M. Rostaud because they think him "too Parisian." Others cannot read Flaubert and put aside Rabelais, not because he is gross, but, as they think, dreary. But that a priest should consider your book an "immoral" one can only be explained by the extremely loose meaning people attach to the words they fling about recklessly. How such a man can glare and gloat over the account of Ezekiel's banquet, or the story of Onan, and the adventures of Lot, without remark, and exhaust the vocabulary of vituperation with regard to your *Anne Veronica* is inexplicable, except on the hypothesis that he is a rank humbug.

Your novel is boycotted in excellent company, for the modern Index Expurgatorius includes the names of most writers worth reading from Bernard Shaw to Boccaccio. Such petty spite would seem proof that the clergy dread your success, and shudder lest the milk-and-water decoctions of the Brothers Hocking, George R. Sims, and Marie Corelli should be found undrinkable beside the stronger and more generous wine brewed by yourself and by a few novelists who recognise an art in fiction.

This sentence of banishment is proof of the potency of your art. Dreamers and creators must ever break with tradition, and in enforced solitude restate truth in all its stately simplicity of expression. You will have your revenge in the hearts of the democracy of to-day; your lessons have sunk deep. If priests sneer and their dupes affect ignorance of your claims, it is something to have helped the people to grasp a few elemental facts which may assist their wayward energy in the coming upheaval of society.

Yours faithfully,

C. E. S.

For centuries, mankind has, in a measure, lived in a half-way house. A thousand prejudices, and, above all, the enormous prejudices of religion, hid from it the summits of its reason and of its feelings. Now that the greater number of the artificial mountains that rose between its eyes and the real horizon of its mind have, in a marked manner, subsided, it takes stock at once of itself, of its position in the midst of the worlds, and of the aim which it wishes to attain. It is beginning to understand that all that does not go as far as the logical conclusions of its intelligence is but a useless game by the way-side. It says to itself that it will have to cover to-morrow the road which it did not travel to-day, and that in the meantime, by thus wasting its time between every stage, it has nothing to gain but a little delusive peace.—*Maeterlinck.*

Obituary.

Mr. Edward Calvert, known for many years as a Secularist lecturer, died on March 22, 1910, at St. George's-road, Pimlico. Mr. Calvert drove a cab in London for over forty years; but in spite of this, he managed to acquire a remarkable knowledge of English literature, being assisted by his remarkable memory. He could repeat by heart several of the plays of Shakespeare, and most of the works of Byron, who was a great favorite. He also possessed a close acquaintance with the writings of Burns and Shelley. At the age of sixty-five he retired upon a pension from the Cabdrivers' Benevolent Association, and for the past fifteen years devoted himself to his studies and gave lectures upon literary and secular subjects. His many friends in the National Secular Society will be gratified to learn that he met his end without pain, death being due to senile decay. He had become increasingly feeble during the last twelve or eighteen months, but his mind remained bright, and he was a confirmed and cheerful Secularist to the last moment of his existence. The interment took place at Finchley on March 26, Mr. William Heaford reading the Secular Burial Service over the grave and making a short speech describing Mr. Calvert's services to Freethought during his long and busy life of eighty years.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

Outdoor.

Bethnal Green Branch N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 3, Mr. Marshall, a Lecture.

Islington Branch N. S. S. (Highbury Corner): 12 (noon), Walter Bradford and Sidney Cook. Finsbury Park: 3.30, Walter Bradford and Sidney Cook.

West Ham Branch N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford): 7, W. J. Ramsey, "Secularism and Christianity: A Review of the Debate between the Rev. Allpress and Mr. Ramsey."

COUNTRY.

Indoor.

Glasgow Secular Society (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): G. W. Foote, 12 (noon), "Christ and the Democracy"; 6.30, "The Silence of God."

Liverpool Branch N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, Stanley Concert Party; 8, Annual Meeting—Election of Officers, etc.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.

President: G. W. FOOTE.

Secretary: Miss E M. Vance, 2 Newcastle-st., London, E.C.

Principles and Objects.

Secularism teaches that conduct should be based on reason and knowledge. It knows nothing of divine guidance or interference; it excludes supernatural hopes and fears; it regards happiness as man's proper aim, and utility as his moral guide.

Secularism affirms that Progress is only possible through Liberty, which is at once a right and a duty; and therefore seeks to remove every barrier to the fullest equal freedom of thought, action, and speech.

Secularism declares that theology is condemned by reason as superstitious, and by experience as mischievous, and assails it as the historic enemy of Progress.

Secularism accordingly seeks to dispel superstition; to spread education; to disestablish religion; to rationalise morality; to promote peace; to dignify labor; to extend material well-being; and to realise the self-government of the people.

Membership.

Any person is eligible as a member on signing the following declaration:—

"I desire to join the National Secular Society, and I pledge myself, if admitted as a member, to co-operate in promoting its objects."

Name.....

Address.....

Occupation.....

Dated this.....*day of*.....*190*.....

This Declaration should be transmitted to the Secretary with a subscription.

P.S.—Beyond a minimum of Two Shillings per year, every member is left to fix his own subscription according to his means and interest in the cause.

Immediate Practical Objects.

The Legitimation of Bequests to Secular or other Freethought Societies, for the maintenance and propagation of heterodox opinions on matters of religion, on the same conditions as apply to Christian or Theistic churches or organisations.

The Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, in order that Religion may be canvassed as freely as other subjects, without fear of fine or imprisonment.

The Disestablishment and Disendowment of the State Churches in England, Scotland, and Wales.

The Abolition of all Religious Teaching and Bible Reading in Schools, or other educational establishments supported by the State.

The Opening of all endowed educational institutions to the children and youth of all classes alike.

The Abrogation of all laws interfering with the free use of Sunday for the purpose of culture and recreation; and the Sunday opening of State and Municipal Museums, Libraries, and Art Galleries.

A Reform of the Marriage Laws, especially to secure equal justice for husband and wife, and a reasonable liberty and facility of divorce.

The Equalisation of the legal status of men and women, so that all rights may be independent of sexual distinctions.

The Protection of children from all forms of violence, and from the greed of those who would make a profit out of their premature labor.

The Abolition of all hereditary distinctions and privileges, fostering a spirit antagonistic to justice and human brotherhood.

The Improvement by all just and wise means of the conditions of daily life for the masses of the people, especially in towns and cities, where insanitary and incommodious dwellings, and the want of open spaces, cause physical weakness and disease, and the deterioration of family life.

The Promotion of the right and duty of Labor to organise itself for its moral and economical advancement, and of its claim to legal protection in such combinations.

The Substitution of the idea of Reform for that of Punishment in the treatment of criminals, so that gaols may no longer be places of brutalisation, or even of mere detention, but places of physical, intellectual, and moral elevation for those who are afflicted with anti-social tendencies.

An Extension of the moral law to animals, so as to secure them humane treatment and legal protection against cruelty.

The Promotion of Peace between nations, and the substitution of Arbitration for War in the settlement of international disputes

SUNDAY EVENING FREETHOUGHT LECTURES

(Under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd.)

AT

SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL.

APRIL 10.—Mr. G. W. FOOTE: "Christ and the Democracy."

APRIL 17.—Mr. C. COHEN: "What the World Owes to Unbelief."

APRIL 24.—Mr. G. W. FOOTE: "The Silence of God."

Doors Open at 7. Chair taken at 7.30.

Reserved Seat Tickets, 1s. Free Admission to all other Seats.

THE SECULAR SOCIETY

(LIMITED)

Company Limited by Guarantee.

Registered Office—2 NEWCASTLE STREET, LONDON. E.C.

Chairman of Board of Directors—Mr. G. W. FOOTE.

Secretary—Miss E. M. VANCE.

This Society was formed in 1898 to afford legal security to the acquisition and application of funds for Secular purposes.

The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of inquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularisation of the State, etc., etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

The liability of members is limited to £1, in case the Society should ever be wound up and the assets were insufficient to cover liabilities—a most unlikely contingency.

Members pay an entrance fee of ten shillings, and a subsequent yearly subscription of five shillings.

The Society has a considerable number of members, but a much larger number is desirable, and it is hoped that some will be gained amongst those who read this announcement. All who join it participate in the control of its business and the trusteeship of its resources. It is expressly provided in the Articles of Association that no member, as such, shall derive any sort of profit from the Society, either by way of dividend, bonus, or interest, or in any way whatever.

The Society's affairs are managed by an elected Board of Directors, consisting of not less than five and not more than twelve members, one-third of whom retire (by ballot) each year, but are capable of re-election. An Annual General Meeting of members must be held in London, to receive the Report, elect new Directors, and transact any other business that may arise.

Being a duly registered body, the Secular Society, Limited, can receive donations and bequests with absolute security. Those who are in a position to do so are invited to make donations, or to insert a bequest in the Society's favor in their wills. On this point there need not be the slightest apprehension. It is quite impossible to set aside such bequests. The executors have no option but to pay them over in the ordinary course of administration. No objection of any kind has been raised in connection with any of the wills by which the Society has already been benefited.

The Society's solicitors are Messrs. Harper and Battcock, 23 Rood-lane, Fenchurch-street, London, E.C.

A Form of Bequest.—The following is a sufficient form of bequest for insertion in the wills of testators:—"I give and "bequeath to the Secular Society, Limited, the sum of £—— "free from Legacy Duty, and I direct that a receipt signed by "two members of the Board of the said Society and the Secretary "thereof shall be a good discharge to my Executors for the "said Legacy."

Friends of the Society who have remembered it in their wills, or who intend to do so, should formally notify the Secretary of the fact, or send a private intimation to the Chairman, who will (if desired) treat it as strictly confidential. This is not necessary, but it is advisable, as wills sometimes get lost or mislaid, and their contents have to be established by competent testimony.

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