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Religion is the opium of the people.—KARL MARX.

Freethinkers and the Elections.

BEING President of the National Secular Society, as well as editor of the *Freethinker*, I think it my duty to address a few special words to Secularists all over the country in view of the present political crisis, which must be followed so soon by a general election.

But I am not speaking in my official capacity; I am only speaking personally. No one is committed to anything I say in this article except myself. Yet I hope I am speaking with the gravest sense of responsibility.

Neither am I going to tread in the slush of party politics, nor even deal with politics at all as politics. My readers may feel perfectly secure in that direction.

Freethinkers have votes, just like Catholics, Anglicans, and Nonconformists. And why should they not use their votes to obtain justice for themselves?

If a Liberal candidate, or any other candidate, comes along, and appeals to me as a man and a voter to listen to him, and support him if possible on the polling day, why should I not plainly tell him that the first thing I want to know is whether he is prepared to grant me the common rights of citizenship, not only *during* elections, but *between* elections? Why should I vote for any man who denies me elementary fair play? If I am fit to vote I am fit to enjoy the same rights as other voters. But at present this is not the case. The Blasphemy Laws still exist as a stick to beat Freethinkers with. When the stick is not being used it is hanging up visibly behind the door. And the fact that it is there, and may be used when a convenient opportunity presents itself, gladdens the hearts of the meaner sort of Christians, and places Freethinkers at a great disadvantage.

This disadvantage is great in many ways. I am perfectly aware that the late Lord Chief Justice Coleridge laid it down at my trial for "blasphemy" in 1888 that, according to the Common Law as it now stands, the very fundamentals of Christianity may be attacked without fear of prosecution. On that rock, indeed, I built the Secular Society, Limited; which, in spite of all the cavillers that surrounded its infancy, has proved itself as solid as the rock of Gibraltar. But Lord Coleridge, while not limiting the *matter* of criticism, did limit its *manner*. He laid it down that attacks on the fundamentals of Christianity, while legitimate in themselves, would be "blasphemous" if carried on in an improper spirit,—if they were likely to give religious people pain by outraging their feelings. This statement of the Common Law was accepted and endorsed

by Mr. Justice Phillimore in the Boulter case, and is now established beyond question. Very well, then, some people will say, if you are only debarred from outraging religious people's feelings, what have you to grumble about? We have *much* to grumble about. In the first place, it is practically the religious people who have to decide whether their feelings are outraged; in the second place, it is only Freethinkers who are called upon to respect other people's feelings in religious controversy,—Christians being allowed to be as vicious and malicious as they please; in the third place, there is no such restriction in political or social controversy. The Blasphemy Laws are aimed exclusively at Freethinkers. And while there may be no danger in ordinary times, one never knows when orthodox bigotry may be worked up to a persecuting fever.

Besides, while the Blasphemy Laws exist, they sanction and encourage the boycott against Free-thought publications and lectures. Destroy the penal laws, and the boycott would largely disappear. Not altogether, of course, for bigotry dies hard, but enough to give us more breathing room and a better chance. The *Freethinker*, for instance, under juster conditions, would be a fairly good property, instead of entailing constant self-sacrifice on the part of its editor, and to a certain extent on the part of its contributors.

There are other disadvantages, too numerous to go into at present. But those already mentioned are enough. Moreover, I want to know why there should be any law bringing me into danger for my opinions, or my method of advocating them, while those who hold other opinions than mine are in no danger whatsoever. I regard it as a personal insult. It offends my dignity. I will not put up with it a day longer than I can help.

We want our disadvantages as Freethinkers removed. But they will never be removed by an effort of Christian goodwill. Rights are never conceded; they are always enforced. "Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow." Let the Freethinkers of Great Britain clearly inform all parties that their votes can only be had at the price of common justice. And the first instalment of the price is the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws. No tinkering, but total abolition. That is what we demand.

It is no use trusting to the Freethinkers who may be in the Ministry or in Parliament. I never knew one of them do anything for Freethought. I make an exception, of course, in the case of Charles Bradlaugh, who carried the Oaths Bill and tried to carry a Bill repealing the Blasphemy Laws. But he was a man quite outside common categories.

Candidates should all be heckled on this subject during the forthcoming elections. And I will return to the matter next week.

G. W. FOOTE.

A Great Illusion.—III.

(Continued from p. 739.)

THE notion that because the capacity of human nature is not exhausted, and all its possibilities realised in the life of every individual, therefore man has a claim to a future life, is both illogical and fallacious. It is illogical because—admitting the statement as true—the conclusion does not follow from the premiss. And it is fallacious because it seeks in the individual what is really characteristic of the race. Granting that one cannot say exactly what degree of development each individual is capable of attaining, this still remains no more than an expression of our ignorance. It does not affect the question that, as an individual, man is not capable of indefinite development. His organisation, the operation of the normal laws of growth and decay, the fact of inevitable death makes the degree of development with each person a definite quantity. Nor is this statement affected by the fact that a poet, a musician, an artist may, through some unfortunate accident in the environment, never manifest all of which they are capable. There is a substantial difference between the prevention of a quality expressing itself in its full strength under given conditions and an indefinite expression of the same quality. A man may, from lack of nutrition, be unable to lift half a hundred-weight; but it does not follow that with increased nutrition he could lift half-a-dozen tons.

The conception of indefinite growth or development is really only applicable to the race. Man, as an individual, does not, and cannot, progress indefinitely. Let his development be ever so great, let it be raised by whatever degree is possible above others, there is a point at which the limit is reached. Progress, while expressed through the individual, is really achieved by the race. It is by a trick of the imagination that we transfer the conception of unlimited progress, achieved and achievable by the race, to the individual. Humanity is not a conception built up from man in his individual aspect, but from *men* in their collective aspect. Individual progress is linked to, and dependent upon, the racial progress that has preceded it, upon the racial life that surrounds it, and upon the racial progress that follows its own activity. And it is surely the most monstrous of egotisms which declares that, unless every individual can exhaust all the good done by all preceding generations, and exhaust, too, all the consequences of any good done by oneself, life here must be considered a failure. To this expression of Christian egotism one may well prefer the old Greek simile of successive generations to a swift runner carrying a torch, whose duty is to receive it from the one who precedes him, and hand it still burning brightly to the one who follows.

Necessarily, then, when Dr. Mellone studies human feelings in relation to the individual alone, he finds an unexhausted residuum which he conveniently hands over to the credit of a future life. But if we study human nature from the proper point of view, no such residuum appears, and no such indication is warranted. Human life has, of necessity, a two-fold reference in its development. On the one side it has reference to the welfare and needs of man as an individual, and on the other side it has an even more potent reference to the individual as a member of a social group or to the human species as a whole. The result is that with each of us there are feelings that point to a wider, a more embracing, and a more permanent life than that given in any individual existence. Upon these feelings Dr. Mellone rests a large part of his case. His argument is that their existence points to the possibility of a life other than that lived on earth. The inference is quite unwarranted. Man has feelings that are directly connected with race preservation as he has feelings that are directly connected with self-preservation. Whether these two are fundamentally identical or

not need not now be discussed. It is enough that they exist. And it follows from their existence that, studying human nature from the one-sided view of the individual, the result is unsatisfactory. We have to supplement this by a consideration of the social side of man's nature; and, when this is done, we find here all that we are seeking. Man derives the conception of continued progress, and the practical impossibility of placing a limit to the development of human capacity, from a contemplation of the story of human progress, from the cave-man down to our own day. No study of the individual alone would yield the conception of indefinite progress.

The significance of the confusion noted thus becomes plain. Religion is simply exploiting here, as in so many other directions, the social qualities of mankind. Instead of seeing in man's desire for a larger life a social force developed by communion with his kind, and finding satisfaction in that communion, religion gives it a supernaturalistic interpretation, and directs attention to an assumed life beyond the grave. And, in doing this, religion marks itself as an essentially anti-social force, obscuring from man the real nature of his desires and the legitimate sphere of their application.

Curiously enough, Dr. Mellone shows some perception of this truth, although he is far from appreciating its full significance. He says:—

"It is not through selfish fear that we tremble on the brink of death, and cling to the severing link of our existence here; it is a clinging to our fellow-creatures. If the immortal life is to be more than a name for a shadow, it must be a life where men are members one of another, not less, but more, than they are here."

Quite so; no one would desire, at any price, an immortality of solitude. It is the social instincts that must be satisfied, and to those who look at life with eyes unclouded by religious prejudice, are satisfied. Men and women work, and live—in a word, they give themselves in the belief that their efforts will yield a benefit to their family or to their kind, and die happy in the thought of having done so. The brightest and best characters the race has produced have been inspired by this social ideal, although a religious terminology may have been used in giving it expression. Poets, artists, statesmen, and men of science have all faced in their turn neglect and misunderstanding in the strength born of a confidence that one day those who followed would recognise their worth. The immortality that man desires is a social immortality; and the only life in which we can reasonably think of this being attained is the life that we are now living.

How little Dr. Mellone appreciates the significance of the passage I have quoted is seen from his remark that "It is not possible for man to live a complete human life in this world." If this were true, it would afford no logical presumption in favor of a future life; although if the statement is made to cover what it ought to cover—the life of the race—it is, to say the least of it, questionable. But a page or two further on the non-logical character of the inference drawn is admitted in the statement that "at bottom the belief in immortality depends on belief in God." Thus a belief sadly in need of evidence to give it a reasonable character is made to rest upon another belief on behalf of which, if possible, even less evidence can be offered. And, presumably, the reason why the belief in God leads to a belief in immortality is that God, having managed things so unsatisfactorily in this life, is expected to create another in which all his blunders shall be repaired. And we are asked to suspend judgment until we see what the next stage is like, or to apply a sort of Theistic First Offenders' Act and refrain from being too severe for a first offence.

On this point the believer is occupying, as usual, a self-contradictory position. When it is pointed out that the conditions are not such as square with the theory of the government of an all-wise and loving Deity, he replies by pointing out that the qualities we admire in human nature are the result

of the conditions we condemn. This does not really meet the objection, which is more concerned with the way in which results are produced than with the results themselves. But when the believer is arguing for a future life, he himself dwells upon the imperfections that have just been ruled out as practically non-existent as one of the chief reasons why there must be another world in which these imperfections are rectified. Clearly one cannot logically defend both positions. If life here is such as is consistent with the belief in a Deity characterised by infinite love and wisdom, there is no ground for the demand for a future life to correct the inequalities of this one. Or if the injustices and the imperfections of this life are admitted, and their existence so far admitted as justifiable reasons for another life, then all that the Freethinker urges against the character of this assumed Deity is admitted, and at the same time expectations of a future life, based upon the assumed love and wisdom of Deity, cancelled. But clearly the conditions of this life cannot be such as remove every objection against the providence of God, and at the same time furnish reasons for believing in another life, the main purpose of which is to remove the imperfections of this one.

Dr. Mellone would probably reply that the sense of imperfection in this world is in itself a foreshadowing of a life to follow, on the ground that all function implies purpose. Personally I fail to see anything in this sense of imperfection, or, what is the same thing under another aspect, a desire for perfection, that a special illustration of the common phenomenon—reaction against an unpleasant stimuli. The fact of the reaction being in one case mental and in another physical makes no difference. When a man steps on my corn, I desire him to remove the pressure of his foot; and I might conceivably throw my desire into the philosophic form of a longing for a society where human relations were so far perfect that no one used another's foot as a temporary platform. And just as it is argued that in the absence of nerves there would be no desire for a passer-by to step off one's foot, so we may argue that in the absence of a sense of dissatisfaction there would be no general reaction against unsatisfactory social conditions. The real distinction, again, is that in the one case the reaction is personal and in the other social. A sense of imperfection is the social stimulus towards progress, but it has no more foreshadowing of a future life than my request to a person to get off my corn is a foreshadowing of a state where wings are used instead of feet or corns are non-existent.

Moreover, and this leads me to an important point with which I will deal in a concluding article; so long as we have development—whether on this earth or elsewhere—so long will the feeling of dissatisfaction persist. A perfect moral character, in the sense in which Dr. Mellone uses that expression, would be one with which the striving for better conditions would be absent. It would be complete equilibrium, which is only another name for stagnation. So that if the future life is to provide conditions for continuous growth—as Dr. Mellone assumes—the sense of imperfection will continue to exist, and nothing is gained by the change. If development does not continue, then, in order to realise a state of *conscious* moral satisfaction, Dr. Mellone is really arguing for the existence of a state where no such consciousness could exist. No sense of imperfection exists; nothing but a complete, spontaneous, or automatic adjustment.

C. COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

“The Christian Ministry.”

THE above is the title of a somewhat remarkable sermon preached by the Rev. Canon Hensley Henson, on the occasion of an Ordination, in Westminster Abbey on Sunday, September 25. The discourse is remarkable for its candid admissions more than for

any positive teaching it contains. Everybody knows that, for a clergyman, Canon Henson is exceptionally liberal-minded. There is no arrogant exclusiveness about him, as there is and must be about all High Church men. He is at once broad and evangelical. He frankly admits the validity of non-Episcopal orders, and, if permitted, would freely fraternise with Catholics, on one side, and with Nonconformists on the other. This is why he is so heartily hated by many in his own communion. His views on the Christian ministry are so broad that they deprive it of all distinctiveness, which, in the eyes of the typical clergyman, is nothing short of a crime. The typical clergyman is a man apart, a superior person, who can stand on his sacerdotal dignity and glory in his sacerdotal functions. At his ordination he received special supernatural gifts, which placed him on an eminence, and which enable him to accomplish things entirely beyond all other orders of men. Such men are bound to dislike Canon Henson, and to do their utmost to discredit his teaching. Speaking of the apostolic age, the Canon says:—

“Assuredly there was nothing which could suggest the notion of an indispensable priesthood vested with sacerdotal functions by ordination, and holding these apart from the sanctions of the Christian congregation by an inherent and inalienable right.”

Then comes a passage eminently worth quoting because of its wonderful implications:—

“If this be the case, then it follows that the historic Christian ministry had its origin not in specific commandment of the Lord or of his Apostles, but in the arrangements made from time to time for the actual necessities of the society. It follows, also, that the character of the ministry is not sacerdotal, in the common sense of the word. How could it be, since the Church is a company of spiritual equals, linked together by the bond of religious brotherhood? Sacerdotalism implies spiritual inequality, and divides men into two grand sections, one priestly, possessed of full religious franchises, the other secular, dependent on the priesthood for all its access to spiritual grace.”

The only legitimate inference from the above utterance is that the ministry is a human institution, that Jesus never had it even in contemplation, and that it possesses no power or gift peculiar to itself. The ministry sprang into being naturally in the circumstances that created the need for it; and it is not too much to say that without it the Church would never have survived. The Canon admits that it was created for the purpose of setting forward the kingdom of their Master and of keeping the brethren “loyal to his discipleship.” It was to be a “witness to the unconverted and a mutual help in Christian living.” Not even the Church itself was instituted by Jesus, for when the Gospel Jesus died he expected to return almost immediately. The apostolic doctrine of the Second Coming is now pronounced to have been an illusion.

Canon Henson declares that “there is no grace in ordination.” When the Bishop lays his hand on the candidate's head no miracle is performed. The candidate is no “fitter,” in any respect, for the functions of his office, a moment after his ordination than he was a moment prior to it. Paul cherished a different opinion. In his second Epistle to Timothy he says: “Stir up the gift of God which is in thee through the laying on of my hands.” Twice he tells the young minister the same thing. Paul was evidently a High Churchman, with whom the Canon does not agree. However, the Canon has the courage of his convictions.

“There is no grace in ordination to remedy the defects of education, or to make amends for the weakness of undisciplined habits. The ministerial commission adds nothing to personal qualifications, and grants no exemption from the Divinely ordained laws under which human effort must proceed. As a teacher the minister's competence will necessarily depend in great part upon his knowledge; as a pastor his success will turn on his courage and wisdom. Only hard work can secure the one; only self-discipline can secure the other. Let him not dream that ecstatic fervor can serve the turn of serious study, or a facile sympathy do duty for thought and trouble.”

That is to say, a clergyman's success or failure is governed by the same laws as that of a lawyer, a physician, or a scientist. The clever man naturally comes to the front, and the stupid one goes to the wall. Brilliant qualifications produce brilliant results, while slender endowments secure but slender achievements. This is strong common sense, of which there is a fair supply in the Canon's sermon. The Canon himself is a bright example of the truth of his teaching. His great position and influence are the outcome of his natural and acquired qualifications. The same thing is true of all clergymen and ministers alike. But Canon Henson is a minister of a supernatural religion and cannot afford to talk common sense all the time. He must mar all that is so profoundly true in his teaching by introducing the Holy Ghost. Speaking of the ordained minister he says:—

"But when he has done his best to make himself efficient, let him remember that he has but prepared the altar. The fire which shall consume the sacrifice must descend from above. Self-dependence here will be a sterilising blunder. It is the hardest of all the lessons which the Christian minister has to learn. God deigns to use men as his instruments, but he will never accept them as his substitutes."

Note the verb "deigns" in the last sentence, which means "condescends," "stoops," "vouchsafes." God need not use men as his instruments, but he condescends to confer that honor upon them. God could do Canon Henson's work himself, if he chose, and do it much more efficiently; but he sacrifices the superior efficiency in order to give the Canon a chance to distinguish himself. The kingdom of heaven would have been an infinitely greater power in the world to-day had it not been for God's affectionate though condescending consideration for the class of people known as preachers and Christian workers generally. Was there ever a greater blasphemy? It is surely the sin against the Holy Ghost which cannot be forgiven. The divines have recourse to such a subterfuge to account for the slowness of the extension of Christianity, and also to surround the office of the ministry with an atmosphere of dignity and reverence. Time was when clergymen were looked upon as semi-supernatural beings, charged with superhuman powers, among them the dread power of the keys. That notion still prevails in the Catholic Church, thought not to the same extent as of yore. In Protestant countries it has practically died out. It is a superstition that arose only in dark and ignorant ages; and now that knowledge is spreading among the people it has received notice to quit. We are finding out at last that a minister never transcends himself. He succeeds or fails in exact proportion to his own abilities. If he lacks the gift of eloquence and an abundantly developed emotionalism he receives frequent hints that his resignation would be warmly welcomed, however full of the Holy Ghost he may be thought to be. On the other hand, if he is a born orator and has an ample supply of pulpit unction, eager throngs will ever hang on his lips, though like the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, in *The Scarlet Letter*, he may be living a life of shame, and allowing some Hester Prynne to suffer on his account. Dimmesdale never preached with so great an effect, never had as many seals to his ministry, never stood so high in the estimation of the Church as during those years of guilt before the confession that he was the father of Hester's illegitimate child. Even the gnawing sense of blameworthiness intensified the efficiency of his ministrations. It was his rich endowments, which in the circumstances the Holy Ghost could not have deigned to use, that accounted for his popular triumphs.

The conclusion to which Canon Henson's argument inevitably leads us is that the Church is an exclusively human organisation, and that all her agencies are of this world alone. When the preacher speaks it is his own thoughts, or the thoughts he has received from his fellow-beings, to which he gives expression; and whatever responses are ever made

to his appeals psychology can adequately explain without dragging in other worldly forces. Canon Henson may be the most sincere man living; but it is quite impossible to harmonise the emotional outburst in the peroration of his address with the rationalistic processes of reasoning to be found in the body of it. After demonstrating that the ministry is a profession for success in which certain natural qualifications are indispensable, to which qualifications ordination adds nothing, he nullifies that demonstration by exclaiming that nothing can be accomplished without the descent of fire from above. The Canon's reasoning lands him in Atheism; but his pietistic fling at the end, though doubtless entirely pleasing to the majority in his congregation, must have disgusted the more thoughtful hearers. The pietistic game is about played out; and Canon Henson is but a poor hand at it, at best. He is not at home in it, nor is he likely ever to be. It is no wonder he confesses that dependence on heaven's grace is "the hardest of all the lessons which the Christian minister has to learn." It is the hardest because it is unnatural and contradicts the testimony of the reason. It is the hardest because the learner is conscious that proficiency in it is unattainable, and because, while doing his best to learn it, he often catches himself laughing in his sleeve.

J. T. LLOYD.

"The Undiscovered Country."

The Newer Spiritualism, by Frank Podmore; Fisher Unwin; 1910.

UNUSUAL interest attaches to the posthumous publication of the late Mr. Frank Podmore: *The Newer Spiritualism*. Few men had such an intimate acquaintance with matters relating to psychical research. Above all, Mr. Podmore had a judicial mind and never descended to unfair criticism or personalities in his dealing with Spiritualists. Like good old Izaak Walton with his worms, he put them on the hook with tenderness.

Mr. Podmore devotes over three hundred pages to the subject of the newer Spiritualism, and discusses immortality, telepathy, clairvoyance, automatic writing, and other cognate subjects. The book is a temperate criticism in scientific language of the familiar arguments of the Spiritualists, and the criticism is the more deadly because of the entire absence of bias. The whole forms an impartial summing up of the existing evidence of man's survival after death.

Mr. Podmore's inquiry is very exhaustive. He must have read hundreds of books and pamphlets and he has overlooked nothing of serious importance. He examines in detail the cases of Home, Count Swedenborg, Stainton Moses, Eusapia Palladino, Mrs. Piper, and other well-known Spiritualists. As the result of his examination, he considers that spirit survival has not been established. It is not Mr. Podmore's fault that though the book is concerned with the question of man's immortality it is full of talk of telepathy; it is about the soul of man and full of chatter of clairvoyance; it is of matters religious, and discusses automatic handwriting. In the last analysis the Spiritualists base their case for the soul's immortality on these things, and Mr. Podmore but follows their lead.

In this volume Spiritualism appears in its best clothes and is seen at its bravest. Yet Mr. Podmore's verdict is "not proven."

As explained by Mr. Podmore, the newer Spiritualism is very like the old. Behind all the verbiage of telepathy, clairvoyance, automatic handwriting, precognition, and the like, there is always "Sludge the medium." This is clearly seen by Mr. Podmore, and it says much for his restraint that he writes dispassionately throughout. His book is the deadliest criticism of Spiritualism that we have seen. He shows that Spiritualism has contributed nothing to

human knowledge. That is the purport of his last book and it is written with absolute fairness.

In spite of Spiritualism, new or old, the riddle remains unanswered, the sphinx is still silent. Couched in scientific language, presented with all the resource of persons who have devoted their lives to the subject, it is yet in the last resort but an appeal to emotionalism. Heine hit the right nail on the head when he smilingly suggested that the idea of immortality may have suggested itself first to a lover in the arms of his mistress or to some Nuremberg burgher sipping his lager in the cool of the evening. It is, in the last analysis, but a desire for personal continuance, to be for ever as we are. In spite of man's importunity "the rest is silence."

The "new" Spiritualism gives no better answer than the old, and the later "messages" from the "other side" are as unconvincing as the earlier. The poor Indian still dreams of his happy hunting grounds, the Mohammedan still pictures his paradise peopled with houris, the Christian dreams of the jewelled streets of the New Jerusalem, and Sir Oliver Lodge and Mr. W. T. Stead are satisfied with "spooks." The world is no nearer a solution than in the days of Lucretius, or in the far earlier time when primitive man cowered in his cave in mortal fear of the lightning. The oracles are contradictory with regard to a next world. All we know for certain is that man is mortal but nature is immortal. This world grows old and we grow old with it; but nature is ever fair and young and eternal. The white flowers of the spring return year by year, lads and maidens are ever wandering at eventide. The love of husband and wife is ever consecrated by the coming into the world of the beautiful new life springing from their own. Though our personality be blotted out by "the popped sleep," our influence will go to swell the volume of human worth, and—

"Join the choir invisible

Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence; live
In pulses stirred to generosity
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end in self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars
And with their mild persistence urge men's search
To vaster issues."

MIMNERMUS.

The Collapse of Christianity; and the Freethought Outlook.

ONE of the surest signs of the decay of Christianity is to be seen in the fact that a certain section of Christians have recently converted their chapels and mission-halls into Picture Palaces. Having failed to attract a congregation by an oral statement of the alleged wonderful doings of their God-man, Jesus, they are now striving to be more successful by putting on the screen animated pictures of the most dramatic episodes in the life and doings of "the Prophet of Nazareth."

These pictures have, first of all, to be produced upon the real stage of life, and in this way they afford an opportunity for actors, who are either too old or too incompetent to earn a living upon the regular stage, to perform in the open air the part of Jesus Christ or Judas Iscariot, or even of Poor Peter, who denied his Master, in the sacred drama that they may be able to earn the mere pittance which is denied them by professional managers, who are said to be always on the look-out for histrionic talent. But once the animated figures, having gone through their pantomimic actions, all the supposed miracles of Jesus may be produced by the cinematograph in such a way as even to amaze and delight the most credulous of Christians, and may be reproduced in all the mission-halls, churches, or chapels throughout the kingdom. When the ordinary Christian, however, is familiarised with this novel acting version of the life of Jesus, he will probably begin to think whether, after all, the life of Jesus, as

given in the Four Gospels, is not as much a concocted drama, the result of the collaboration of its various authors and interpreters, as the drama they have witnessed upon the mimic stage they have seen projected upon the screen.

And, once this train of thought is set in motion, the ordinary Christian will find himself asking the question, which is being put by Freethinkers in all parts of the civilised globe, whether the Jesus of the Gospels ever lived, or whether the character is not of purely mythical origin? Such questions as these go to the root of the whole Christian theory.

Another sign of the collapse of the Christian religion was witnessed a short time ago, when a distinguished French Dramatist, M. Brieux, got Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree to produce at His Majesty's Theatre an English version of his great play, *La Foi*, entitled *False Gods*. In this play, which attracted thousands of people for several weeks to the leading theatre in London, the author, through his characters, struck a fatal blow at all the ancient gods of Egypt, and inferentially at all the Christian gods—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and the most powerful of all the Christian gods, God the Devil. Christians, as well as Freethinkers, flocked to see this play, and there can be no doubt that it produced a very profound impression upon the minds of all the earnest and intelligent persons who witnessed it. Many of them must have reflected that it was, indeed, something novel to find a play put upon the stage, the hero of which was a young priest learned in the origin and development of religious ideas, who, nevertheless, stood forward as the exponent of a purely natural theory of the universe, and despised and rejected belief in any, or all, of the gods, as mere figments of the human imagination. And when religion has reached the point that it is introduced upon the stage of a London theatre as a tragic play, and through the mouths of its leading characters the fundamental doctrines of all religions are attacked, not by the villain of the piece, but by the hero, then it must be acknowledged that what is called religion is in a very bad way indeed, and needs something more than the old methods of defence to keep it alive. Many Christians seem to be aware that something is wrong with the old Faith; that it has lost its power of attraction; that intelligent men and women no longer flock to hear the old, old story; that most of the churches and chapels are well-nigh empty; and that those which are fairly well attended attract, for the most part, only women and children. These Christians, however, attributed their failure to get a congregation to every cause but the right one. The people have become indifferent to all religious appeals; they are attracted in other directions; they prefer to go cycling in the country in the summer, or to listen to the bands in the parks; or in the winter months they prefer to stop at home and read their newspapers at the fireside, or to go to a musical performance at one of the many halls engaged by the various Leagues for promoting pleasant Sunday evenings for the people; but they never by any chance mention the fact that these people are attracted in these directions because they have lost all faith in Christianity, and that they regard its teachings for the most part either as impracticable or harmful. It may be said that only the Dissenting bodies are adopting these theatrical methods, and that the Church of England goes on in the same old sleepy-headed way, notwithstanding the fact that the clergy recognise the painful truth, to them, that their congregations are gradually dwindling away. This, however, is not the fact. Some fashionable churches put forward a strong musical program on Sunday afternoon—with little, if any, religious service—to attract a male congregation, and get as many instrumentalists as they can, whether professional or otherwise, to render assistance; and the poorer churches imitate the more fashionable ones as far as they are able. Let it be understood that I do not blame Christians for taking advantage of every art they can for the furtherance

of what they believe to be true; but now that so many of them *know* perfectly well that the fundamental articles of their faith are demonstrably false they are simply descending to the tricks of the showman when they adopt these expedients for the purpose of bolstering up an old and effete superstition, and trying to give it a fresh lease of life in the minds of the most ignorant and credulous among their followers. Far be it from me to depreciate the value of the theatrical and musical arts; personally I love them, and try and cultivate them as much as possible; and I sometimes deplore the fact that we as Freethinkers do not utilise them so much as we might, as an important auxiliary to our propaganda.

But all this will come in time; our business as pioneers is to prepare the way. The people are now prepared, in larger numbers than they ever were before in my time, to listen to the Gospel of Freethought. On every hand there are signs that the masses are tired of the Bible story of the origin of man, and are eager to know something about the teachings of Darwin and Hæckel; they are tired of the story of "the Fall," and want to know something about the "Rise of Man." The story of the miracles of the Old Testament has ceased to interest the intelligent masses, and the alleged miracles of Jesus are accepted by a gradually diminishing number of Christians; the masses are more concerned in knowing the facts of life, and of utilising their knowledge to advance their prospects of happiness in this life, without regard to any supposed life in the future. Freethinkers, therefore, all over the country should bestir themselves in the interest of this great movement. The Freethought outlook was never brighter. What we need to do is to spread the light. Wealthy Freethinkers should rally to the support of the President of the National Secular Society, and assist him with funds; and young and talented Freethinkers should start at once to qualify themselves as the future lecturers in the great cause of intellectual freedom. There is a great future awaiting them. Every boy and girl, as they leave school, with an elementary knowledge of science and history, will make an apt pupil; and as the old prejudices against the new Gospel disappear, the glorious principles of Freethought will be spread far and wide, and the day for human emancipation from all superstition will be nearer realisation. Who will help in this glorious work? Remember! To all who desire to work, to-day is the day of their emancipation.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

The Hope of Freethought.

TO the orthodox Christian the unbeliever is a being to shun, to flee from, to sedulously avoid. This outrageous creature, who does not share the ideas of heaven and hell and a host of specious matter between the two places, is, in turn, an object to be pitied, to be despised, to be hated, and finally to be feared. It is no freak of the imagination to see the satisfaction that the demise of our famous leaders would give to those dignitaries whose throne is upheld by the ignorance and superstition of their dupes.

An Atheist! The very word conjures up some diabolic monster breathing death and fire and destruction everywhere.

An Agnostic! Something almost as bad, but without the fire—and also not fit to come into contact with children.

That glorious iconoclast, Swinburne, who could whip kings, cow priests, and ruthlessly trample on hypocrisy, could love children and pay homage in the kingdom of the cot. His cradle songs are flowers of sweetest simplicity. The pure fragrance of their lines rises high above the degrading belief that babes are born in sin and shapen in iniquity. A belief so barbarous could only emanate from the distorted brain of a hypochondriacal saint.

It is somewhat difficult, at first, to imagine Swinburne as the writer of cradle songs. After reading his "Hymn to Proserpine" or the "Chorus from Erechtheus"—storm and battle.

Great minds are fed by great hearts; great hearts are willing and responsive to the touch of baby hands. As Swinburne grew older so his love of nature and little children expanded.

The crash of battle, the work of devastation in the plentiful fields of injustice and tyranny, were to be left to younger shoulders than his. He sought repose in the study of nature and childhood, and his writings speak eloquently that he found it.

No tinsel heaven filled his mind when he wrote:—

"Baby, baby dear,
Earth and heaven are near
Now, for heaven is here.

Heaven is every place
Where your flower sweet face
Fills our eyes with grace."

Thus could the destroyer of Gods write; the proud, fearless head held aloft defiant alike to kings and the priestly parasites, could bow to kiss the downy softness of an infant's "dimpling store of smiles that shine from each warm curve and line."

Childhood is helplessness; to take advantage of children's young and plastic minds is the regular game of the clerics. If they cannot net them at this period, it is more difficult, and often hopeless, to endeavor to catch them at a later stage of life.

The mind revolts at the sickly twaddle to be found in hymns written expressly for children. Imagine a child trying to comprehend "The home for little children, above the bright, blue skies." Or, again, the lines, "Where our dear Lord was crucified and died to save us all." Before they are taught anything about life, this sickly vision of death is thrust before their innocent eyes. Before home and its kindred associations is made clear to them, heaven is pointed to by the righteous finger, and hell is still in evidence in the teachings of the God-fearing men.

With the syrup of unctuous piety do they pretend to sweeten this teaching of misery and depression; but that does not atone for the delicate child mind so rudely shaken with tales of blood and war and death. The parent's indifference to the child's religious teaching is frequently the cause of its absorbing these anti-reasonable views, coupled with the fact that the children are out of mischief when at Sunday-school.

The adult Christian, speaking from my personal experience, is a most difficult person to tackle. His hide-bound convictions, the long years behind him saturated with mystic theology, his childhood spent in an atmosphere of terror and deception, are all-powerful forces through which the light of reason cannot penetrate.

The cherished hope of everlasting life are too strongly woven on his more or less selfish life; the threats which were hurled at him when a child still retain most of their former terror.

Mental progress with this type is almost futile; it is to the children that we must look for salvation.

When Secular Education takes its stand, the clerical game will be up, and these sleek, well-fed gentry will have an opportunity of turning their hand to honest labor.

VIVIAN GRAY.

A PLACE OF PERIL.

"By the way," she said, "do you know that there are times when it is dangerous to enter an Episcopal church?"

"What is that, madam?" said the bishop, with great dignity, straightening himself up in his chair.

"I say there are times when it is positively dangerous to enter the church," she replied.

"That cannot be," said the bishop. "Pray explain, madam."

"Why," said she, "it is when there is a canon in the reading-desk, a big gun in the pulpit, when the bishop is charging his clergy, the choir is murdering the anthem, and the organist is trying to drown the choir."

Acid Drops.

Tolstoy died after all at that little railway station where he was taken in a state of collapse. His family were around him at the end, but he did not know them, being practically unconscious. He died without "repenting his heresies" and without "reconciling himself to the Church." But we dare say the Church will invent an edifying story to the contrary.

Tolstoy, being an excommunicated heretic, the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg was naturally anxious to rope him in again before his last breath. "From the first moment of your rupture with the Church," he telegraphed to Tolstoy, "I have prayed uninterruptedly and am still praying that God may lead you back to the Church. It may be that he will soon call you to appear before his judgment seat. I beseech you, a sick man, to reconcile yourself with the Church and the orthodox Russian people. May God bless and protect you." The cream of the joke was that Tolstoy's friends, owing to his serious condition, and his need of repose, would not show him the Metropolitan's message. The matter was therefore left entirely in the hands of God, who appears to have done nothing.

An orthodox poet addressed some verses to the dying Tolstoy in a well-known reactionary journal, styling him "the rejected of God, the Accursed Mocker of Christ, and the shameless and insensate apostate," and reminding him that "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation" (Mark iii. 29). What a sweet loving lot these true-blue Christians are!

Tolstoy's death was sure to elicit a good deal of silliness in certain English papers. "In an age of materialism," the *Daily Chronicle* said, for instance, "he stood out a noble witness to the things of the mind and the spirit." *Materialism!* Is there any word more abused? Does our contemporary really believe that those who entertain the "Materialist" theory of the universe care nothing for the things of the "mind"? Of course it doesn't. It is merely using cant language to tickle the ears of religious groundlings.

Mr. H. W. Nevinson's article in the same paper on Tolstoy was more sensible as well as better written. But why did he call Tolstoy "the one Russian revolutionary" whom the Tsar dared not touch? Tolstoy wrote against the Revolutionaries as well as against the Government. Mr. Nevinson also gives the following sentence as a sample of Tolstoy's positive teaching: "There is only one possible way of serving mankind—by becoming better yourself." There is some truth in this, but it is couched in the language of exaggeration. Surely, too, Mr. Nevinson cannot imagine it to be original. It has been uttered a thousand times. Carlyle's question, at least, should be well known. "Your promised Reformation," he wrote, "is so indispensable; yet it comes not; who will begin it—with himself?" James Thomson, the poet of pessimism, a militant Atheist, in his magnificent satire, the "Proposals for the Speedy Extinction of Evil and Misery," remarked that all reforming societies hitherto had proposed to reform other people, but the society he suggested was to act very differently. "In the scheme I venture to propose," he said, "every man will modestly limit himself to the reform of one person only; which person he knows and loves infinitely better than anyone else; and which person is of exactly the same character, temperature, mind, and body, and always situated in exactly the same circumstances as himself, the reformer." These quotations must suffice. We could multiply them almost *ad infinitum*.

Dr. Crippen's letter, through Miss Le Neve, *via* the enterprising weekly journal called *Lloyd's News*, to the British public, strikes us as being a mere composition. We should not be surprised if the whole of it was "edited" and if some of it was nothing but "editing." The references to Miss Le Neve were terribly overdone. They were also spun out to an inordinate length. Sincere passion is less diffuse. The writing seems to us, from first to last, mere "journalese." Some sentimentalists may be taken in by it. They will profess themselves unable to understand how a man can tell lies with death in front of him and "in the presence of his Maker." Alas, a man can lie as readily in those circumstances as in any others. The worst of men value to some extent the good opinion of their fellow-men. That is why so many prisoners are "perfectly innocent" and the victims of "false evidence" or "misunderstanding." Dr. Crippen's letter abounds in pious expressions. He remains a Roman Catholic, and will no doubt go to the scaffold with a priest by his side. But religion is no security against lying. It is

indeed no security against any vice whatsoever. Shelley noticed this in Italy—and he might have noticed it elsewhere. He observed that religion had "no necessary connection with any one virtue." "The most atrocious villain," Shelley said, "may be rigidly devout, and, without any shock to established faith, confess himself to be so. Religion pervades intensely the whole frame of society, and is, according to the temper of the mind it inhabits, a passion, a persuasion, an excuse, a refuge; never a check." That is it. Religion may be many things. *It is never a check.*

Christians who fancy that a pious person could not lie "in the presence of his Maker" are invited to reflect on a well-known story in the New Testament. It was Peter who is related to have proclaimed Jesus "the Christ, the Son of the living God." It was this same Peter who lied in court at the trial of Jesus. He was twitted with having been one of Jesus's followers. He denied it; he denied it again; he denied it the third time, and took his oath on it. Yet "the Christ, the Son of the living God" was before his very eyes all the time. What is the use, after this, of saying that a Christian wouldn't lie "in the presence of his Maker"?

Dr. Crippen's execution takes place some twelve hours after this number of the *Freethinker* passes through the editorial hands. We are not able, therefore, to make any comment upon his "end," though it will probably be edifying. We see that Thomas Rawcliffe, the Lancaster murderer, made a most exemplary exit from this world. Just before walking to the scaffold he sang from beginning to end, "Jesu, lover of my soul." It was very good of Jesus to love the like. The report concludes with the pious statement that "an appropriate funeral service was conducted over the remains." The prison chaplain seems to have made a respectable job of it.

Christians are always *going* to do wonderful things. Just listen to this from the mouth of Mr. Arthur Mee, editor of the *Children's Encyclopædia*, speaking lately to the Crayford Brotherhood:—

"Asserting that there were a million men in the Brotherhood movement, he showed what those million men could do if united and deadly in earnest. They could stem and destroy the prevailing war spirit. They could wage a successful war against poverty. They could save the waste of the childhood of the nation. They could stamp out the curse of gambling. They could curb and destroy the terrible drink evil that causes so much misery among the poor. They could do something to prevent, if not entirely destroy, the terrible white scourge of consumption. They could prevent to a large extent the waste of life caused by dangerous trades. They could live and work so as to make Christ supreme in the heart of the individual and the life of the nation."

This is what they *could* do. But will they do it? Mr. Mee appears to believe they will. But he was formerly on the *Daily Mail*—which is full of imagination.

Baptists are a diminishing quantity in the more civilised countries, but they seem to be making headway in Russia, Poland, and Roumania. Is it because the hot stuff which is so much drunk in those countries makes cold water a treat? Or is it merely because a religion which people have outgrown in one country may be found very suitable in lower civilisations?

What a funny idea of free speech must have been entertained by the gentleman named Le Tour who went up to M. Briand, the French Premier, and gave him three blows with a walking-stick, as a protest against his occupying that exalted position. The indignant gentleman didn't pause to reflect that if every one of M. Briand's political opponents was entitled to have three blows at him with a walking-stick, his career would be terribly unfortunate and remarkably brief. M. Briand is a Freethinker. M. Le Tour seems to be of the same trade and the same religion as Jesus Christ. Perhaps that explains his folly and ill temper.

"Prayer Day," a legal festival, took place on Wednesday, November 17, throughout Prussia. Even in Berlin they had a high old time. There were all sorts of pious performers in the churches and chapels, with the addition of General Booth at the circus. How appropriate!

Emperor William is said to be writing a Life of his principal ancestor, Frederick the Great, and has naturally something to say about the old king's want of religious faith. Frederick was a Freethinker. William's brain is partly addled with superstition. Frederick grimly said, when he was asked to intervene in a certain quarrel over the doctrine of eternal punishment, that he was determined to uphold complete religious toleration, and that all his subjects should

go to hell in their own way. William wants them all to go his way. Frederick was a very great man, and William is—well, we will leave the rest to be added by historians.

The German Emperor is reported to have presented a crucifix to the Benedictine Monastery at Bewren. The present was accompanied by one of William's little sermons. "I look to you," he said, "to support me in my efforts to preserve the religion of the people." The Benedictines are to support William, and William is to support God. So *that's* all right.

"The restoration of the Bible to the schools of Bridgeport, Pa., prompts the relation of an incident that our London contemporary, the *Freethinker*, might use in its generalisation on "Bible and Beer." Secretary Reichwald, of the American Secular Union, when the school fight was on, made strenuous endeavors to find some person in Bridgeport who would take up the matter for the Union; and, meeting with poor success, he at last resorted to the local brewing company to know if there was a lawyer in town who would argue the case for the Secularists. The answer to his inquiry was written by the secretary of the beer-making concern, who not only declared himself irrevocably committed to the Bible in schools, but gave Mr. Reichwald the worst castigation he ever suffered for suggesting that the word of God should be kept out. A volume of scripture surmounted by a schooner would make an excellent trademark for that brewery."—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Rev. Thomas Sidney Phillips, vicar of Misterton, pleaded guilty at the Notts Assizes, before Mr. Justice Bucknill, to acts of gross indecency with several youths, and was sentenced to fifteen months' hard labor. Another proof of the impossibility of being moral without religion.

Rev. R. J. Campbell is lengthening rather than shortening his addresses to the Almighty. Can he really be foolish enough to suppose that "the ruler of this infinite universe" listens to the sentimental twaddle poured out as "prayer" every time the oracle of the City Temple mounts his pulpit? The reverend gentleman's last printed prayer before his sermon on "The Eternal Self" in the *New Theology* weekly fills 102 lines of the smallest type. We should say that the effort to take up the Almighty's time to that extent by one little "worm" on this very small planet is a very good illustration of the eternal self.

"It is God himself who is seeking utterance in you." Mr. Campbell said that to his congregation. We presume he includes himself in the statement. And what a statement! Fancy a being of infinite wisdom "seeking utterance" for say a hundred thousand years on this earth, and getting no further in that time than—Mr. Campbell's sermons!

We are not surprised at a person of Mr. Campbell's build being frightened by the passage in the *City of Dreadful Night*, in which James Thomson "boldly tells the Almighty in a passage which almost makes one shudder, that he would rather be his wretched self than change places with a Creator, whose creation is such a fearful muddle of sorrow and wickedness." Mr. Campbell's paraphrase of James Thomson is not all that it might be. Let us have the poet's own words:—

"Who is most wretched in this dolorous place?
I think myself; yet I would rather be
My miserable self than He, than He
Who formed such creatures to his own disgrace.
The vilest thing must be less vile than Thou
From whom it had its being, God and Lord!
Creator of all woe and sin! abhorred,
Malignant and implacable! I vow
That not for all Thy power furl'd and unfurl'd,
For all the temples to Thy glory built,
Would I assume the ignominious guilt
Of having made such men in such a world."

So says one voice of misery in that place of doom. But another voice, the voice of a convinced Atheist, swiftly replies:—

"As if a Being, God or Fiend, could reign,
At once so wicked, foolish, and insane,
As to produce men when He might refrain!"

And so on to the end of that grand and terrible section of Thomson's masterpiece. No wonder Mr. Campbell shuddered. And his wordy attempt at answering "the poet of pessimism" is worthy of the shudder.

"A little learning is a dangerous thing." The *New Theology* weekly, having shed its most sceptical contributors, some of whom declared that it didn't matter a straw

whether Jesus ever really lived or not, now asks sneeringly whether it was "reserved for Kalthoff, Jensen, and Drews to expose the universal error" that Jesus was an historical character. Certainly it was *not* reserved for them. Our contemporary doesn't know that this "error" has been exposed by great scholars during the last two hundred years. It appears not to have heard even of the great Dupuis. Why even in England the Rev. Robert Taylor, a Church of England clergyman, threw off his gown and joined Richard Carlile in his Freethought propaganda; his speciality being *Astronomical Discourses* in which he argued that every detail of the Gospel story was legendary and mythological. The Christians answered Taylor by giving him twelve months' imprisonment in 1828 and two years' imprisonment in 1831.

Rev. J. Morgan Jones, writing in the *New Theology* weekly on "The Trial of Jesus," after stating the progress of affairs before the High Priest, says:—

"It is impossible to make these narratives consistent in detail, and they have given rise to a great deal of discussion as to whether the trial of Jesus was carried on in technical accordance with Jewish law or not. As a matter of fact, we do not know enough about the powers and methods of the Sanhedrin to decide the point."

This is simply not true. Rabbi Wise well says that "the whole trial, from the beginning to the end, is contrary to Jewish law and custom as in force at the time of Jesus." To begin with, no court of justice dealing with penal cases ever did or could hold its session in the place of the high priest. "There were," Rabbi Wise says, "three legal bodies in Jerusalem to decide penal cases: the great Sanhedrin, of seventy-one members, and the two minor Sanhedrin, each of twenty-three members. The court of priests had no penal jurisdiction except in the affairs of the temple service, and then over priests and Levites only." This is quite decisive—without saying anything about the monstrous story that the judges walked about the room with the witnesses, the servants, and the crowd, and even spat upon and reviled the prisoner.

The reverend gentleman refers to Jesus having been "convicted of Blasphemy and delivered to death on that charge." Now this is another absurdity. Jerusalem was then in a Roman province, with a Roman governor at the head of affairs. To him was reserved the power of life and death. The Jewish authorities had lost it, according to the policy prevailing throughout the Roman Empire. That part of the trial of Jesus is, therefore, not to be reconciled with what we undoubtedly do know about the laws and customs of the time.

Father Alexius Lepicier, one of the Consultors of the Congregation of Sacraments, published a book in 1908 which has been reissued this year. The Bishop of Chester is our authority for stating that this Catholic dignitary goes the whole hog in a very significant direction. He plainly says that a man who publicly professes an heretical doctrine, or attempts to pervert others by teaching or example, might not only be excommunicated, but might also justly be killed (*sed etiam juste occidi*). The fact is worth noting. But there is nothing new in it. Catholic divines have always taught that. Newman himself endorsed it. Reluctantly, we admit,—but he endorsed it. How, indeed, could any Catholic teacher do otherwise?

James Patten, the ex-"Wheat King," has adopted Rockefeller's form of recreation. He goes in for religious philanthropy, and has already given large sums to the Young Men's Christian Association. He says he wishes to die poor, he ought not to find that difficult. But we guess he'll play the Ananias, and keep back something for a rainy day.

The question of Sunday golf is agitating Glasgow. The Ranfurly Castle Club, by 139 votes to 85, has decided not to prohibit members playing over their course on the Sabbath, but the line is drawn at the employment of caddies. It is said that 50 members had pledged themselves to resign if Sunday golf were permitted. But we guess they won't. If they love the blessed Sabbath, they probably love golf better.

What language is spoken in heaven? Gaelic, apparently; at least in court circles. According to the Rev. William Fraser, Strathpeffer, a well-known Free Churchman, there is "no language in which they could address the Deity as in Gaelic. There seemed to be," he adds, "a heavenliness and fellowship with the Lord in that language." We have heard the same, though, of Welsh. The honor has also been claimed for Low Dutch. It ought to be claimed, perhaps for Double Dutch.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, November 27, Town Hall, Shoreditch: at 7.30, "The God-Man of the Gospels."

January 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, Queen's Hall, London; 10, London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner.

February 5, Glasgow; 26, Birmingham.

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—November 27, Newcastle-on-Tyne; 28, West Stanley. December 4, Manchester; 11, Liverpool; 18, Abertillery.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—November 27, Leicester. December 4, Battersea; 11, Rhondda; 18, West Ham.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1910.—Previously acknowledged: £269 5s. 1d. Received since:—S. Valentine Caunter, £1 1s.; T. Thelwall, £1; A. Smart, 2s. 6d.

R. GIBBON is willing to be one with others to give £5 towards making up the deficit on the President's Honorarium Fund for the present year.

A. SMART (London) writes: "I also have read the *Freethinker* from the first number. It helps to do the only miracle I know of. Every Thursday morning at 7 I jump out of a warm bed, rush down to the front kitchen door all in the perishing cold, collar the *Freethinker*, rush back to bed, and have one hour's perfect enjoyment."

CLARA GUNNING.—Next week.

T. THELWALL.—Sorry you are depressed, but the second half of your letter answers the first. The progress of Freethought is bound to be slower than enthusiasts expect, and it progresses rather by permeation than by an open show of strength. The measure of the advance of our ideas is the difference between the Christianity of to-day and the Christianity of a hundred years ago.

A. H. H.—Under the (Bradlaugh) Oaths Act you have a legal right to claim to affirm instead of swearing, in any court, and in any capacity. If asked to state the ground of your claim, you must say either that you have no religious belief or that the taking of an oath is contrary to your religious belief. State your ground, and do not be drawn from it by any other questions. No one, not even the judge, has a right to ask them.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

R. H. CALLISTER.—Pleased to hear from an Irish reader, and a lady too; a double satisfaction.

W. MCKELVIE.—Glad to hear Mr. Davies had a successful evening meeting at Liverpool on Sunday.

J. V. BABLOW.—We thoroughly endorse all your praise of Mr. Lloyd, and we regret as much as you do that his Manchester audiences were not larger. Perhaps there was not sufficient advertising. People can't come to hear a lecturer if they don't know he is in the town.

H. SMALLWOOD.—Pardon us for saying that you did not read that paragraph carefully enough. You overlook some sentences, lay emphasis on others, and thus misrepresent what we actually said. Anyhow, if you have read this journal for many years, and have only once thought us unfair, you make us appear almost impeccable. Thanks for good wishes.

T. H. WILSON.—Apart from the unwisdom of betting, the particular bet you mention is especially foolish. You will never bring it to an end without a referee. Your opponent has to be satisfied before he "parts," and the game is therefore in his own hands. Nor can the question you ask be answered in the way you require. Besides, if tithes are not derived by the Church from the State, what is the use of discussing other instances?

J. T. JONES.—Thanks for fresh addresses. Kindly write to us direct if there is any further cause of complaint.

A. H. EBNST.—May be able to use it next week. Thanks.

G. J. FINCH.—The matter shall have attention.

R. JOHNSON.—Since the question is travelling round, we prefer to answer it publicly. You ask why there was no reference to Mr. Lloyd's Manchester lectures in the *Freethinker*. There was—in the Lecture Notices; date, place, time, and subjects were all there. Your secretary says a note was added on the postcard containing the Manchester lecture-notice, asking for a paragraph in "Sugar Plums." We never saw it, for the simple reason that we do not see such postcards, which go straight from the shop to the printers upstairs. Besides, such cards usually arrive on Tuesday morning, which we have repeatedly said is too late for paragraphs. Branch secretaries who want paragraphs could generally write a week beforehand, if they only chose; and surely a letter and a penny stamp are not too much expense to incur for a valuable free advertisement.

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.

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 winds up the Shoreditch Town Hall course of lectures this evening (Nov. 27), his subject being "The God-Man of the Gospels." He will do no lecturing after that until the new year, his week-ends being required for urgent literary work, the result of which will be seen in publishing announcements shortly afterwards. He will be lecturing at the Queen's (Minor) Hall during January.

London "saints" will please note that the Queen's (Minor) Hall has been engaged again for Sunday evening Freethought lectures during January, February, and March. Mr. Foote will occupy the platform throughout January, and will be followed by Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, Mr. Cohen, and Mr. Lloyd. Mr. Foote will appear again for one or perhaps two Sundays in March.

Mr. Lloyd lectures this evening (Nov. 27) in the Secular Hall, Leicester. Readers of the *Freethinker* in that district will all wish to hear him.

The London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, takes place, as usual, on the second Tuesday in January at the Holborn Restaurant. Mr. Foote is to preside, and will be supported by most of his active colleagues. There will be the usual supply of music and brief speeches after dinner. The tickets are 4s. each.

Miss Kough pays her second visit to Liverpool to-day, lecturing afternoon and evening in the Alexandra Hall, Islington-square. Reserved seat tickets, 1/- and 6d., are obtainable at the secretary, Mr. W. McKelvie, 49 Penrose-street, Everton, Liverpool; or at the Hall any day before Sunday.

"Arley Lane," in the *Birmingham Weekly Mercury*, devoted a "Pulpit and Pew" column to Miss Kough's recent lectures. He says that her "accent and delivery, as well as her address, bespoke education and refinement, as well as humanity."

We have received the Glasgow Branch's annual report and balance-sheet. Both are healthy documents. The report is more than sanguine; it is jubilant. It shows that the Branch means business; and this is corroborated by the balance-sheet. We might suggest that, as the united documents may (and should) get into the hands of outsiders, the secretary's address, at least, ought to be included. The printer's omission of the second "e" in Shelley's name can be easily corrected. These misprints are annoying, but they will happen.

"I would like," a London reader says, "to add my word of praise and admiration for yourself and your grand work of emancipating men's minds from the superstitions of old. I look for my *Freethinker* every week as a tonic, and should continue to take it if it were sixpence a copy."

An American subscriber, writing from East Chicago, Indiana, writes: "I am only one year a subscriber, but I have become interested, and surely I like all the articles. I could get along minus a coat, but the *Freethinker* and the *Truthseeker* (New York) are indispensable."

The Islington Branch is holding elocution classes every Saturday evening at 8.30, under the direction of Mr. R. J. Foster Markham (elocutionist and bass), at the Branch Committee Room, 46 Dame-street, Islington, N. Members of the N. S. S. are invited to attend. Non-members can obtain particulars from Mr. Sidney Cook, secretary, at the same address. The next "social" will be on Dec. 4 at 7 p.m. Non-members can obtain tickets of Mr. Cook.

Branch secretaries are requested to note that postcards containing lecture-notices must contain *nothing else*. It is a waste of time, energy, and ink to attempt to get communications to Mr. Foote in that way. He does not see the lecture-notice postcards, which go straight into the printers' hands. Besides, how often we have stated that Tuesday morning is too late for paragraphs in the *Freethinker*, unless they relate to something very urgent that we could not have been informed of before.

"Your article about Tolstoy," an old friend writes to us "made me smile. When I read it, the news of his death was on the placards, and I thought he had been too much for you at last. An hour later I read 'Tolstoy not dead,' and felt you had scored after all! Or does he mean to leave us this time? It must make the 'General's' mouth water to read of such deaths and resurrections."

Pseudo-Criticism.—VIII.

(Concluded from p. 742.)

IN bringing this series to a close, I have thought it advisable to run as briefly as possible through all the so-called "Visions" in the book of Daniel, in order that any reader, so disposed, may be able to work out the problem for himself.

NEBUCHADREZZAR'S DREAM (Dan. ii. 31-45).

Nebuchadrezzar is stated to have beheld in a dream an image in the form of a man, the head being of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet of iron and clay (*i.e.*, earthenware). This image, standing erect, was struck on the feet by a stone, which then "became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." According to the interpretation put in the mouth of Daniel, the image symbolised four kingdoms or dynasties which held supreme authority in the east during four successive ages—to be followed by a fifth. These kingdoms were: (1) Babylonian Monarchy (gold); (2) Persian Empire (silver); (3) Empire of Alexander the Great (brass); (4) Syrian and Egyptian Monarchies (iron and clay); (5) New Jewish kingdom (great mountain) which should "stand for ever"—"In the days of those kings [*i.e.*, Syrian and Egyptian] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed," etc (v. 44).

The "stone" that struck the feet of the image was Judas Maccabæus, who "broke in pieces" all the Syrian forces sent against him. The revolt against the authority of Antiochus Epiphanes, commenced by Judas, spread rapidly, so that the stone soon became a mountain; but it did not fill the whole earth, as the author of Daniel hoped. That pious and patriotic writer evidently believed that the ridiculous predictions in Micah iv. 13 and Isaiah lx. 10-14 were on the eve of fulfilment.

VISION OF THE "FOUR BEASTS" (Dan. vii. 2-28).

In this "vision" Daniel beheld four "beasts" come up from the sea. The first "was like a lion," and had eagles' wings; the second was "like to a bear," with "three ribs" between its teeth; the third was "like a leopard," with four wings and four heads; the fourth beast was "terrible and dreadful," and "strong exceedingly" with "iron teeth."

These four beasts, Daniel is told, represented four kingdoms that should arise in succession—*i.e.*, the same dynasties as in Nebuchadrezzar's dream—but that prophet is only interested in the fourth beast, which "devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet." This beast "had ten horns," and, while Daniel was looking, "there came up among them another horn, a little one." These ten horns, he is told, represented kings of the fourth and "divided" kingdom—that is to say, five of Syria and five of Egypt—the eleventh horn, the last to appear, being Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria. Naturally, Daniel "desired to know the truth concerning the fourth beast." As a matter of fact, the first three empires are introduced for the sole purpose of pointing out the period of the Syrian and Egyptian kings, which the writer wished to reach; and, having done so, he bestows all his attention on the eleventh horn—Antiochus Epiphanes. This horn "made war with the saints, and prevailed against them" until "the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" (v. 21). This eleventh horn or king, it is further said, "shall put down three kings. And he shall speak words against the Most High, and wear out the saints of the Most High; and he shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and [two] times and half a time."

Here we are in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. The Jews were "the saints of the Most High." Antiochus was the only king who attempted to "change the times" and the Jewish "law," and "wear out the saints" for "a time, times, and half

a time"—*i.e.*, three and a half years. He had also "put down three kings"—*viz.*, (1) He set aside Demetrius, the rightful heir to the Syrian throne, and took possession himself; (2) He deposed Ptolemy Philometer, the reigning King of Egypt (171 B.C.); (3) He deposed Ptolemy Physcon, brother of Philometer (169 B.C.), who had been placed on the throne by the Alexandrians, and he replaced Philometer. The writer ends the vision with a prophecy of the coming of the new Jewish kingdom. "And the kingdom, and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.....Here is the end of the matter." Of course.

VISION OF THE RAM AND HE-GOAT (Dan. viii. 3-26).

In this vision the Babylonian dynasty is omitted. Daniel beheld a Ram with two horns "pushing westward and northward and southward; and no beast could stand before him"; next, there appeared a He-goat, which "came from the west over the face of the whole earth"; and, seeing the Ram, "ran upon him," and "cast him down to the ground, and trampled upon him." The He-goat then "magnified himself exceedingly" until his horn was broken, and in its place "there came up four notable horns." The Ram with two horns, Daniel is told, represented "the kings of Media and Persia"; the rough He-goat, "the King of Greece"; the "four notable horns" were "four kingdoms" which should take the place of the empire of the King of Greece (viii. 20-22). There can be no mistaking these sovereigns. The He-goat was the great conqueror, Alexander the Great, who defeated Darius Codomanus, the last of the Persian kings, and put an end to that dynasty. The four kingdoms which arose out of Alexander's Empire were: Syria and Babylon, Egypt, Asia Minor, and Thrace. Of these four kingdoms the writer is concerned only with one—that of Syria, over which, a century and a half later, ruled the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes. The last named king is the "little horn" which arose from the first of these four kingdoms:—

"And out of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceedingly great, toward the south and toward the east, and toward the glorious land [Palestine]..... Yea, it magnified itself, even to the Prince of the host [Yahveh], and it took away from him the continual burnt offering, and the place of his Sanctuary was cast down.....and it cast down truth to the ground, and it did its pleasure and prospered" (viii. 9-12).

Thus we arrive at the year 168 B.C., in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. Next, Daniel heard a "holy one" ask another "holy one" how long the daily sacrifices should be unoffered and the Sanctuary desolate; to which the "holy one" addressed replied: "Unto 2,300 evenings and mornings; then shall the Sanctuary be cleansed." This period would be 1,150 days, or 3 years and 54 days; but the figures are corrupt—the writer intended to signify 3½ years.

THE KINGS OF THE NORTH AND THE KINGS OF THE SOUTH.

This pretended revelation occupies two chapters (Dan. xi. and xii.), and professes to have been made by an angel to Daniel "in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia." The "holy one" commences by saying:—

"Behold there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and when he is waxed strong.....he shall stir up against him the realm of Greece. And a mighty king shall stand up that shall rule with great dominion.....And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven: but not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion" (Dan. xi. 2-4).

Here, again, we have the last king of Persia and Alexander the Great; but the writer thought that there were only three Persian kings who reigned after Cyrus, whereas, as a matter of history, there were eleven. Here, also, we have the four kingdoms into which Alexander's empire was divided. Next follow the principal wars between the sovereigns of

two of those kingdoms—Syria and Egypt—the Syrian monarchs being designated “kings of the north,” and those of Egypt “kings of the south.” The writer commences with Antiochus Theos (Syria) and Ptolemy Philadelphus (Egypt), and so makes eleven kings (as in Dan. vii. 23)—the names being those given in the table (last paper). It is unnecessary here to go into the wars and historical events narrated of these eleven kings: sufficient it is to say that the writer comes at last to the tyrant Antiochus—whose appearance was, of course, inevitable. The acts of this king are recorded in Dan. xi. 21-36; but space will only allow the following extract:—

“In time of security shall he come even upon the fattest places of the province; and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathersand shall return, and have indignation against the holy covenant, and shall do his pleasure.....And they shall profane the Sanctuary, even the fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering, and they shall set up the Abomination that maketh desolate..... but the people that know their God shall be strong, and do exploits” (Dan. xi. 24, 30, 31, 62).

The last two words have reference to the patriotic Jews under Judas Maccabæus. Moreover, in Dan. xiii. 7-11 we find that the Abomination of desolation forms both the end of the book and the end and sole object of the vision, as may be seen by the following:—

“It shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished..... And from the time that the continual burnt offering shall be taken away, and the Abomination that maketh desolate set up there shall be 1,290 days.”

The latter figures are also corrupt: the writer intended them to represent the same as “a time, times, and an half”; that is to say, 8½ years.

THE “SEVENTY WEEKS” (Dan. ix. 24-27).

This is the so-called “Messianic prophecy,” which, Sir Robert Anderson says, “not even the subtle ingenuity of the sceptics can get rid of.” In “the first year” of the imaginary king Darius, Daniel is represented as saying that he “understood by the books” that the seventy years’ captivity predicted by Jeremiah had nearly expired; after which we are told that an angel made to him the following prediction:—

“Seventy weeks are decreed upon thy people and upon thy holy city to finish transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place. Know therefore, and discern, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto an anointed one, a prince, shall be seven weeks and three score and two weeks.....And after the three score and two weeks shall the anointed one be cut off, and shall have nothing; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the Sanctuary.And he shall make a firm covenant with many for one week; and for half of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and upon the pinnacle of abominations shall be one that maketh desolate.”

All critics are agreed that the “seventy weeks” were intended to signify 490 years (a day standing for a year)—which period was to be the number of years between the proclamation permitting the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the setting up of a kingdom of “everlasting righteousness.” According to Christian commentators, however, this kingdom was to be that founded by Jesus Christ. Well, the proclamation was issued 538 B.C. (Ezra i. 1-4), and the 490 years ended 48 B.C. The latter date being too early, commentators next say that the proclamation should date from the coming of Ezra or Nehemiah to Jerusalem; namely, from 458 or 444 B.C.: which is a sample of Christian ingenuity, for there was no proclamation at either of the latter dates. But these “seventy weeks” of years must be set aside as worthless and misleading. Before basing any calculation upon them, we must be certain that the writer (or Daniel) possessed an accurate knowledge of the number of years between the reign

of Cyrus and the latest time to which reference is made in the visions. Upon this point we have conclusive evidence from his own pen that he knew neither the number nor names of the kings who reigned during the Babylonian and Persian periods. The “seventy weeks” were simply suggested by the “seventy years” of Jeremiah. The intention of the writer is obvious: he wished to leap at one bound from the reign in which he had placed Daniel to that of Antiochus Epiphanes. And this he has done: all the events referred to are in the latter reign. These are the following:—

175 to 168 B.C.—Antiochus “made a covenant” first with Jason, and afterwards with Menelaus, to whom he sold and re-sold the office of high priest. He also made covenants with other Jews.

171 B.C.—The venerable high priest Onias III.—“an anointed one, a prince”—was treacherously murdered.

168 B.C.—The “prince that shall come” was Antiochus, whose “people” plundered “the city and the Sanctuary.”

168-165 B.C.—This tyrannical prince “caused the sacrifice and the oblation to cease” for “half a week” or 3 years: he also set up the “Abomination that maketh desolate.”

165 B.C.—Restoration of the worship of Yahveh, and purification or “anointing of the holy place” by Judas Maccabæus.

The foregoing events were past when the author of Daniel wrote. His one prediction—a Jewish kingdom of “everlasting righteousness”—was nothing more than a belief and a hope, founded upon predictions in the prophetic writings which he had read and believed. Chief amongst these misleading predictions were the following: Isaiah ii. 2-3; lx. 10-14; lxvi. 18-23; Micah iv. 13; Zech. xiv. 9-16. The visions ascribed to Daniel, which all end in 165 B.C., are stated to be a revelation of the principal events in Jewish history “to the time of the end” (Dan. viii. 17, 19; x. 14; xii. 4, 9, 13).

Readers will now see the reason why unprejudiced critics are “compelled to maintain” that the book of Daniel was written in the year 164 B.C., or shortly after that date. That Sir Robert Anderson cannot see this very obvious fact, but contends that the writer was a prophet of the Babylonian age who predicted the coming of Christ and the founding of the Christian religion—and this in the face of the clearest evidence to the contrary—is the most notable illustration of pseudo-criticism that I have seen for a long time.

ABRACADABRA.

Tales of Our Times.

BY A CYNIC.

I.

THE National Coach, crowded with passengers, was toiling slowly and heavily up the interminable hill of Social Progress.

Though the horses were straining painfully at their traces, and almost sinking from exhaustion, the driver had the brake pressed hard down, making the progress of the Coach almost impossible. Sometimes, indeed, it came to a complete standstill, and then the passengers would alight and push the lumbering vehicle from behind, shouting at the driver to release the brake. The driver, however, seemed very unwilling to do this, and only when the clamorous persuasions of the passengers became very loud, and almost threatening, would he slightly ease the pressure of the brake. But he kept his hand ever on the lever, and when the passengers had resumed their seats he would gradually put the brake on again to its full pressure.

At last one of the passengers, more observant than the rest, said: “This is a very slow and troublesome business. Let us remove the brake.”

“Remove the brake!” shouted the passengers in dismay. “Is the man mad that he would interfere with our Ancient Institutions? Suppose the horses should bolt up the hill and dash us to pieces at the top!”

“Well, let us change the driver,” suggested the observant passenger.

“Change the driver!” shrieked the others. “Does the man dare to suggest any alteration in our Constitutional System? He is a dangerous lunatic. Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out of the Coach.”

So they did. And the National Coach went on straining and creaking up the steep and painful hill of Social Progress.

II.

John Chinaman had a fine, flourishing vegetable garden by the roadside.

One day John Bull came in and began pegging off a corner of it, while a solemn-looking person in a black coat, and carrying a black book in his hand, stood by looking on with approval.

"What game this?" asked John Chinaman suspiciously.

"Oh, I'm demarcating the boundary of a concession," replied John Bull. "This is my Sphere of Influence, you know."

"I no likee this," said Johnny in some excitement. "This damn bobbery game. You clear out slippy."

"Oh dear no," said John Bull. "You quite mistake the situation. I've come to stay. But, to show you there's no ill-feeling, allow me to present you with this book which my reverend friend here has kindly brought. I've ceased to pay much attention to it myself, but I believe it is considered to be admirably suited to the inferior intelligence of the Lower Races. And the reverend gentleman here will be very pleased to expound it to you."

"I no savee this," said Johnny, drawing a sharp little dagger from his waist. "Black coat man no teachee Chinaman black book. Black coat man going up top-side chop chop." And before John Bull could prevent it the dagger was plunged quite deep within the reverend gentleman's fleshly tabernacle.

So the reverend gentleman straightway joined the saints in glory (which was, of course, very nice for him), but the affair turned out rather badly for poor Johnny in the end.

III.

"Where is true happiness to be found?" a child inquired of a priest.

"In the steadfast hope of Immortality, and its realisation in Heaven," replied the priest.

"Do many attain it?" asked the child.

"Alas, no," sighed the priest.

"Why not?"

"Because strait is the way and narrow is the gate —"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the child, "I've heard that before. But who designed the width of the gate and the way?"

"God did," said the priest, "in His mysterious Providence."

"This doctrine seems very incredible," said the child, so he went to a Rationalist Philosopher.

"Where is true happiness to be found?" he asked.

"In the steadfast pursuit of human welfare, and its realisation on earth," answered the Philosopher.

"Do many attain it?" asked the child.

"Nothing of the kind," growled the Philosopher.

"Why not?"

"Because of human selfishness and ignorance," said the Philosopher, bitterly.

"But are not men growing wiser and kinder?" asked the child.

"Perhaps so; but they are taking their time about it," said the Philosopher, turning away to his books once more. "Sometimes one doubts whether they are doing it at all."

So the child went away sorrowful, for true happiness seemed a rather long way off on both theories.

IV.

One day the Managing Director of the Universal Syndicate for running the earth and all that therein is was taking his walks abroad, when he met a Poor Man.

"Hullo!" said the Managing Director, "who may you be?"

"Please, sir, I'm a Poor Man. I'm looking for a work-house."

"Workhouse!" exclaimed the Managing Director. "The only workhouses recognised by the Universal Syndicate are their own factories. Are you on our books?"

"No, sir," said the Poor Man, timidly.

"Then how is it you presume to exist?" demanded the Managing Director, angrily.

"Please, sir, I—I thought I had a right to exist."

"Right to exist! What antiquated nonsense!" blustered the Managing Director. "You can't exist without breathing, and for every breath you draw you are dependent on the Universal Syndicate which has acquired exclusive ownership and control of the entire terrestrial atmosphere."

The Poor Man turned pale and gasped for breath. It was so uncomfortable to feel that every respiration was an act of robbery.

"And besides that," continued the Managing Director, "to exist you must occupy space, and allow me to inform you that the Syndicate has acquired all space for a hundred miles above the surface of the earth. How dare you occupy our space when you are not on our books, eh?"

The Poor Man gathered his rags about him and tried to shrink into a smaller compass, while his hair stood on end from fright. The narrowest of prison cells would have seemed like freedom itself compared with this awful state—deprived of all space whatever."

"Then again," pursued the Managing Director, "you can't possibly exist without occupying time, and I would have you know that the Syndicate has effected a purchase of all time from the instant the agreement was signed by me as Managing Director to the opening blare of the last trump—and I need hardly point out that there appears to be no immediate prospect of the latter event. Now, what right have you to occupy time which has been bought and paid for by others?"

This was too much for the Poor Man. The appalling wonder and terror of his having absolutely no time he could call his own filled him with despair. "God help me!" he cried.

"Oh no, you need not expect any assistance from that source," said the Managing Director. "He was squared long ago through his Ministers. In fact, since the Syndicate started running the earth and all that therein is he has quite retired from the business. We do it so much better, you see."

Thereupon the Poor Man fell down and died of shock—which was perhaps the best way out of the difficulty.

V.

An African King was giving an audience to a Missionary who had just arrived in his dominions.

"I want to preach the Gospel of Salvation to your people," said the Missionary.

"That depends on what sort of a God you have," replied the King. "Is he all-powerful? Does he rule the winds, the clouds, and the rain? Does he fill the rivers and streams with water, and make the fields bear good harvests?"

"Certainly," said the Missionary. "He can do all this and more, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

"Good," said the King; "he'll suit us nicely; and does he listen to the requests of his people and accept sacrifices?"

"Yes," replied the Missionary. "He gives a ready ear to the prayer of faith—which can remove mountains."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the King, "he must be a powerful Spirit indeed, and we'll take him on at once. I don't want any mountains shifted just at present, but I do want rain badly. Fact is, our old Mumbo Jumbo has been neglecting us very much of late, and, as you will have noticed, our land is suffering from a terrible drought. Our streams and wells are nearly dry, our cattle are dying, our crops have failed, and our people are perishing from famine. All my Rain-makers and Medicine-men have failed to move old Mumbo Jumbo, so I burned a dozen of them alive only yesterday. I hope you will be more successful," added the King in a rather unpleasant tone. "I will give you twenty-four hours in which to bring rain."

"Of course," faltered the Missionary, who was getting a little nervous, "I cannot definitely promise —"

"What!" thundered the King. "If your God is all-powerful and listens to prayer, where is the difficulty? There must be no question or doubt about the matter, for if you fail —" and the King's smile was not at all an agreeable one. "Now be off and get to work," he added. "By the way, how many human victims will your God require to supply a really good downpour? I'll write the order for their sacrifice at once."

"None at all," said the Missionary in a faint voice as he turned away. But he thought to himself, "I am very much afraid there is going to be one victim all the same."

And so there was; for shortly afterwards the papers reported another case of a Missionary lost in Central Africa.

The Debate.

THE Cohen-Gun Debate took place on Thursday and Friday evenings, November 17 and 18, in the Kentish Town Baths. The attendance was good each evening, though the large building was by no means full. The first night the opener was Mr. Gun. His duty was to prove that Theism is more reasonable than Atheism. By Theism he understood the doctrine that the Universe owes its existence to a Being infinitely wise, powerful, and good. He trotted out the old, thread-worn argument from design. He saw evidences of adaptation and design everywhere, and these would be impossible if there were no adapter and designer. Apart from a creator the Universe was utterly unintelligible. He discerned law and order on every hand, and these could not be without a law-giver. Mr. Gun's manners were all that could have been desired, and he is a very good speaker; but his

defence of Theism was unconvincing, as Mr. Cohen, in his reply, clearly showed. The latter's contention was that the Universe bears no marks of having been planned. Law and order only mean the way in which things occur. If there were disorder in the Universe it would only show that there was someone outside interfering with it. If God exists he must take responsibility for all there is, for the bad as well as for the good, for waste and loss as well as for preservation and economy. Mr. Gun had insisted that whatever is present in the effect must also exist in the cause—a position which Mr. Cohen shattered by a very happy illustration. Holding a glass of water in his hand, he said water was the effect of the coming together of oxygen and hydrogen; but, he added, there is something in the effect which is not in the cause—*wetness*. So Mr. Gun was certainly wrong in claiming that cause and effect are alike. This was beyond Mr. Gun; or he deliberately refused to look at it. Instead of attempting to refute Mr. Cohen's arguments, he contented himself with repeating what he had advanced in his opening speech, quoting this, that, and the other author whom he thought agreed with him, chief among them being Kelvin and Lodge.

The second night Mr. Cohen led off in a masterly speech on the meaning and mission of Atheism. Theism cannot even be stated, he argued, without involving one in hopeless contradictions. He ridiculed the idea of infinite wisdom, or infinite cause, or infinite goodness. The principle involved in evolution is the production of comparative perfection through a process of imperfection. Natural Selection he defined as the process of elimination. All this would be utterly absurd and wicked if there were an infinitely wise and good designer. To all this Mr. Gun had no reply at hand. He simply blamed his opponent because, after passing the death-sentence on Theism, he had offered them no substitute for it. If Mr. Cohen would only set before them something more reasonable than Theism he, for one, would renounce Theism at once. *But he never faced the issue.* Every time he spoke, Mr. Cohen challenged him to tackle the real point. He made several reckless and erroneous assertions, such as that we have left Charles Darwin a long way behind, that the best biologists of to-day have completely abandoned Natural Selection, that, in fact, the wisest scientists are now distinctly Theistic. He declared that by "the transcendental process of reasoning" we are bound to arrive at the truth that man is a spiritual being, and that belief in a personal God is an innate necessity of his nature.

The Debate, as a debate, was a complete failure, not because Mr. Gun is not an able man, not because he lacks knowledge, but because he undertook to defend the absolutely indefensible. Mansel and Newman were perfectly right in maintaining that Theism is intellectually an absurdity; and so they both fell back upon faith. Mansel admitted that the Absolute was a logical and philosophical impossibility, while Newman held that any honest study of Nature inevitably leads to Atheism. But though the Debate was a failure, it was by no means useless. It enabled people to realise very vividly how essentially weak is the case for Theism, and how irresistibly powerful, when well put, are the arguments for Atheism. Mr. Cohen was cheered to the echo, and at the close of his last speech there was a scene of unforgettable enthusiasm. I am convinced that it will be found that the discussion has been of signal service to the cause of Freethought.

CELTICUS.

THE TRICKY THEOLOGIAN.

Don't think I mean to cast aside the Christian's pure beatitude
 Or cease my vagrant steps to guide with Christian prayer and platitude;
 No, I'm a Christian out and out, and claim the kind appellation
 Because, however much I doubt, my doubts are only relative;
 For this is law, and this I teach, tho' some may think it vanity,
 That whatsoever creed men preach, 'tis essential Christianity.
 In miracles I don't believe, or in man's immortality—
 The Lord was laughing in His sleeve, save when he taught morality:
 He saw that flesh is only grass, and (tho' you grieve to learn it) He
 Knew that the personal soul must pass and never reach eternity;
 In short, the essence of His creed was gentle nebulosity,
 Compounded for a foolish breed who gaped at His verbosity;
 And this is law, and this I teach, tho' you may think it vanity,
 That whatsoever creed men preach, 'tis essential Christianity.

—Robert Buchanan.

Correspondence.

RE "AFFIRMING."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR.—Now that the usual oath is so very decided in its phrasing, Freethinkers should "claim to affirm." Recently I was called on a jury. The judge commented on the fact that "to-day we are using, for the first time, the new form of oath"; and he said he valued it much more than the old method, and trusted its solemnity and sacredness would appeal, and be more binding, to all concerned. When it came to my turn to take the Bible and hold it up, I said: "I beg to affirm." Now, even after the special observations of the judge on the matter, not the slightest difficulty arose. The clerk simply said: "Very well, we will take you last." I was then asked to repeat the form of affirmation. I write only to encourage a stand to be made in this matter.

T. FISHER.

SOME SCHOOLBOY "HOWLERS."

Lord Raleigh was the first man to see the Invisible Armada.

Shakespeare founded "As You Like It" on a book previously written by Sir Oliver Lodge.

Tennyson wrote "In Memorandum."

King Edward IV. had no geological right to the English throne.

George Eliot left a wife and children to mourn his genii.

Louis XVI. was gelatined during the French Revolution.

An angle is a triangle with only two sides.

Algebraical symbols are used when you don't know what you are talking about.

Geometry teaches us how to bisex angels.

The whale is an amphibious animal because it lives on land and dies in the water.

A parallelogram is a figure made of four parallel straight lines.

Horse power is the distance one horse can carry a pound of water in an hour.

A vacuum is a large empty space where the Pope lives.

FRANKLIN'S TRIBUTE TO HERETICS.

The following letter written by Benjamin Franklin to Benjamin Vaughan is copied for the *Truthseeker* (New York by Mr. John I. Riegel):—

"Philadelphia, 24 October, 1788.

Remember me affectionately to the good Dr. Price, and to the honest heretic, Dr. Priestley. I do not call him *honest* by way of distinction, for I think all the heretics I have known have been virtuous men. They have the virtue of fortitude, or they would not venture to own their heresy; and they cannot afford to be deficient in any of the other virtues, as that would give advantage to their many enemies; and they have not, like orthodox sinners, such a number of friends to excuse or justify them. Do not, however, mistake me. It is not to my good friend's heresy that I impute this honesty. On the contrary, it is his honesty that has brought upon him the character of heretic.

I am ever, my dear friend, yours sincerely,

B. FRANKLIN."

Immortality.

WHEN these tired eyes are closed in that long sleep
 Which is the deepest and the last of all,
 Shroud not my limbs with purple funeral pall,
 Nor mock my rest with vainest prayers, nor weep;
 But take my ashes where the sunshine plays
 In dewy meadows splashed with gold and white,
 And there, when stars peep from black pools at night,
 Let the wind scatter them. And on the days
 You wander by those meadow pools again
 Think of me as I then shall be, a part
 Of earth—naught else. And if you see the red
 Of western skies, or feel the clean soft rain,
 Or smell the flowers I loved, then let your heart
 Beat fast for me, and I shall not be dead.

THOMAS MOULT.

Obituary.

WE regret to record the death of Mr. Charles Goodwin, son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Goodwin, of 159 Well-street, Hackney, which occurred on November 5, in his 29th year. The funeral took place on the following Friday at Chingford Public Cemetery, when a Secular Service was read at the graveside. The deceased had been a life-long Freethinker, and he died, after a long illness, in the faith in which he had lived. His parents and brothers and sisters have, likewise, always been staunch Secularists. It was gratifying to learn that the deceased was held in high esteem by all who knew him.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.**INDOOR.**

SHOREDITCH TOWN HALL: 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The God-Man of the Gospels."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Public (Minor) Hall, Canning Town): 7.30 W. Heaford, "Ferrer and International Free-thought."

OUTDOOR.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (The Green, Edmonton): 7, J. Hecht, "Creation or Evolution"

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Highbury Corner): 12 noon, S. J. Cook, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.**INDOOR.**

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street) Mrs H. Bradlaugh Bonner, 12 noon, "The International Freethought Congress"; 6.30, "Paganism and Christianity."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, J. T. Lloyd, "The Law of Liberty in Morals"

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): Miss K. B. Kough, 3, "Christianity and Progress"; 7, "What Has Become of Hell?"

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, Sidney Wollen, "The Credentials of Satan."

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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.

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

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