

# THE Freethinker

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PRICE TWOPENCE

*O poor mortals, how ye make this earth bitter for each other!*—CARLYLE.

## Heckling Candidates.

WE have already called upon Freethinkers to press their grievances upon the attention of parliamentary candidates during the elections which will shortly take place all over the kingdom. We are aware that the one overwhelming issue on this occasion is the question of the House of Lords. But other issues will be talked about, and there is no special reason why Freethinkers should remain in the background. By coming to the front they will at least advertise their grievances, and that is a great gain in itself.

Some candidates pretend to be ignorant of the Blasphemy Laws; others are really ignorant of them,—as they are ignorant of so many other things; and in order that the matter may be put fairly and squarely before these gentlemen we pen the following explanation, which our readers may keep by them for private or public use when the necessity arises.

Under the old English law the Ecclesiastical Courts tried heresy, blasphemy, schism, and other such offences; and by the writ *de heretico comburendo* atheists, heretics, blasphemers, and schismatics could be burnt to death. This penalty was abolished in 1677 by the Act 29 Charles II., cap. 9, which did not, however, take away the power of the Ecclesiastical Courts to deal with such offenders by "censures not extending to death." But in the course of time the Ecclesiastical Courts lost actual jurisdiction except over clergymen of the Church of England.

As *heresy* dropped out of sight more attention was paid to *blasphemy*. A special Act was passed against it in the reign of William III. It was entitled "An Act for the more effectual suppressing of Blasphemy and Profaneness." It declares that—

"any person or persons having been educated in, or at any time having made profession of, the Christian religion within this realm, who shall, by writing, printing, teaching, or advised speaking, deny any one of the persons in the Holy Trinity to be God, or shall assert or maintain that there are more gods than one, or shall deny the Christian doctrine to be true, or the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be of divine authority,"

shall upon conviction be disabled from holding any ecclesiastical, civil, or military employment, and on a second conviction be imprisoned for three years and deprived for ever of all civil rights.

This Act (9 & 10 William III., cap. 32) was drawn so tightly as to defeat its object. No prosecution ever took place under it. But it still disgraces the Statute Book (except so far as the Unitarians were covered by the 53 George III., cap. 160), and both the late Lord Coleridge and the late Sir James Stephen called it "ferocious." Even as late as 1867, it was held by Chief Baron Kelley and Lord Bramwell, in a civil action, that a lecture on "The Character and Teachings of Christ; the former Defective, the latter Misleading," was an offence against this Statute.

All prosecutions for blasphemy have been under the Common Law. Judges felt justified in declaring that Christianity was part and parcel of the law of

the land. In Woolston's case (1730) the Court "would not suffer it to be debated whether to write against Christianity in general was not an offence at Common Law." In Carlile's case (1819) the Court "was bound not to hear the truth of the Christian religion questioned." In the case of Hetherington (1841) it was decided by Lord Chief Justice Denman that "an attack upon the Old Testament is clearly indictable." When the late Charles Bradlaugh was illegally arrested at Devonport, in 1861, for *intending* to lecture against the Bible, he brought an action for false imprisonment, and obtained *one farthing* damages; Lord Justice Erle laying it down that, although the policeman acted illegally, he thereby prevented Bradlaugh from illegally disseminating infidel opinions.

Sir James Stephen defined Blasphemy in his *Digest of the Criminal Law* as—"A denial of the truth of Christianity in general, or of the existence of God, whether the terms of such publication are decent or otherwise." This view was borne out by the language of Indictments. The editor of the *Freethinker*, so late as 1883, was indicted for attempting to "bring the Holy Scriptures and the Christian Religion into disbelief and contempt."

While the editor of the *Freethinker* was suffering imprisonment under that indictment, by the sentence of Mr. Justice North, he was brought up again for another trial under a precisely similar indictment. Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, who presided at that trial, laid down a new version of the Common Law of Blasphemy. He eliminated bringing Christianity into "disbelief" as a crime, and made the crime of "blasphemy" consist entirely in bringing Christianity into "contempt." "If the decencies of controversy are observed," he said, "even the fundamentals of religion may be attacked without a person being guilty of blasphemous libel." This drew a sharp distinction between *matter* and *manner* in religious controversy. Discussion was legitimate, but it had to be carried on in a "proper spirit." Such was Lord Chief Justice Coleridge's judgment in 1883, and it was endorsed by Mr. Justice Phillimore in the Boulter case in 1908. We may confidently say, therefore, that it finally holds the field.

Lord Coleridge's judgment liberalised the Common Law of Blasphemy, but it left Freethinkers still in danger. For how was such a law to be operated? Practically twelve Christians are put into a jury-box and asked to decide whether a Freethinker (in the dock) has attacked Christianity in a "becoming" manner. Nobody but the dullest of Freethought advocates would be safe in such a position.

An effort to abolish the Blasphemy Laws was made by the late Charles Bradlaugh, but the Bill he introduced in the House of Commons was only supported by forty-seven members. Some day or other it may be introduced again and find a better fate.

In the meantime, the following questions should be put to Parliamentary Candidates:—

- (1) Are you in favor of equal rights and liberties for all forms of belief in matters of religion?
- (2) Are you prepared to vote for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, under which Freethinkers are liable—as Christians are not—to prosecution, fine, and imprisonment for disseminating their opinions?

We should like to know what replies our readers receive to these questions.

G. W. FOOTE.



## A Great Illusion.—IV.

(Concluded from p. 755.)

THE question to which I referred in my last article is connected with Dr. Mellone's statement that "It is not possible for man to live a complete human life in this world." Assent with or dissent from this proposition will be determined by what one regards as a complete human life; but, in either case, it affords no logical basis for belief in another life. For if a complete human life is not possible here, then it is certainly not possible anywhere else. Or, to put the same thing in another way, human life is only possible here, or elsewhere, so long as the conditions of life remain substantially unchanged. From a physical or biological point of view this statement is a truism. Transport man to a planet a thousand times the mass of the earth and he would be crushed by his own weight. Place living beings on a planet deficient in oxygen and they cease to exist. Human life, as a mere biological fact, implies always the existence of certain physical, thermal, and chemical conditions; and in whatever other state we assume it may exist, we are always bound to assume that these conditions remain substantially unaltered.

The same reasoning holds with equal force of character. The statement that the existence of conditions on earth do not admit of the complete development of individual characters is, at least, an intelligible statement. But such as it is, and whatever it may be worth, it has been developed by and for intercourse with these conditions, and can only be conceived as expressing itself satisfactorily so long as those conditions remain unchanged to any serious degree. Love and hatred, fear and courage, pugnacity and amiability, curiosity, imitation, all the varied qualities of human nature have their meaning and value so long as we think of man continuing to exist with his fellows and amid such conditions as will allow room for their expression. But if we go on to assume some other stage of existence where a good half of these human qualities must be cancelled owing to the great dissimilarity to present conditions, and where, as a consequence, the remaining qualities would lose a deal of their value, instead of providing for a development and perfecting of human character, we are practically abolishing its meaning and value.

Thus, if we think of the next life as providing opportunity for the development of character, we must think of present conditions being perpetuated. In that case, the argument for the next life breaks down. All that is needed is a longer or better life here. If, on the other hand, the conditions are vitally different, human character cannot undergo development for the simple reason that there will not be provided the conditions suitable to its expression and growth.

The dependence of the value of human character, as a whole, upon the conditions of this life, is even more intimate than appears at first sight. Advocates of the doctrine of immortality often speak of the mockery of human affection if life ends with the grave. Dr. Mellone says that the man who desires a future life is not wholly selfish in his desire. "He only wants to be allowed to go on loving those whom he has loved here." Such expressions might be multiplied indefinitely, and they all labor under the fatal error of mistaking the nature of the conditions that generate and sustain human affection. I may put the matter by way of illustration. Assume that one has two friends alike in all respects but this: one is, by some miracle, assured of immortality. He is also protected against disaster in the shape of disease or accident. Practically, he is in the position that the bulk of Christians assume we shall be in when we reach the next world. The other friend is more normally conditioned. His death, come it sooner or later, is certain. He may at any moment be stricken down with disease or overtaken by an accident. Under such conditions, with whom and around whom

would one's affections centre? Concern for the well being of the first could never arise. His health would be uniformly excellent, his safety assured, his existence certain. Inevitably our interest, our concern, our affection would gather round the one exposed to all the normal disasters of human life. And by an equally inevitable reaction the supernaturally endowed and protected individual would come to concern us no more than the welfare of a tree in our garden.

Or let any parent seriously consider, in the case of his love for his children, whether it is not the fact of their liability to the accidents and catastrophes of life that is largely responsible for the affection he feels towards them. And from these and hosts of similar facts follow the conclusion that it is not immortality, but mortality, that provides the essential condition of all human love and affection. Life is, in fact, and in unexpressed imagination, set in a veritable framework of death. It is death that forms a framework for the future; nay, more than a framework, it defines it, conditions it, and alone gives it meaning and significance. To ask for immortality, in order to give life meaning and value, is to ask for the removal of the one condition that makes existence valuable to any, or intelligible to all.

Dr. Mellone raises a question in connection with the desire for a future life on which I may fitly say something before concluding. First of all, however, even though there existed a clear and unmistakable desire for a future life, it would carry with it no clear ground for a belief in immortality. Is there any reason whatever for assuming that all our desires shall receive gratification? Men and women desire all sorts of things without ever realising them in fact. One man desires an income of £10,000 a year and never gets more than a couple of pounds a week. Another desires fame and dies unknown. Another desires a wife and family and dies a bachelor. Or, closer still to our own subject, nearly all people desire to reach a good and healthy old age, while the average age reached stands at about forty years. Illustrations may be multiplied indefinitely, but if desires are not gratified in every case, what reasons have we for assuming that they shall receive gratification in any special direction? If the desire to live to be seventy years old carries with it no guarantee that we shall not die before that age—as a matter of fact, where the desire is felt strongly it is more likely to be an indication of an early demise—why should we assume that a desire to live for ever carries with it a sure promise of gratification? All that a desire proves is the existence of the desire. It *may* lead us to form certain conclusions as to the past conditions that originated it, but it carries no sure prophecy of the future.

Dr. Mellone admits it to be possible that "inquiries made more or less systematically among intelligent people might suggest that the strength of the desire for another life is over-rated, that a vast number do not care, while many would prefer annihilation." This is a statement the truth of which will be questioned only by those who are determined to square their theories with facts by the simple method of eliminating all that are antagonistic. For my own part I go further, and deny that there is with people any real desire for a future life. I do not deny that there are a great many who believe they desire a future life, but I am certain that analysis will show this to be due to a misunderstanding—or to systematic miseducation—of what their desires really are.

That there is a popular superstition to the contrary may be admitted. Death is a too obvious and a too important fact with all for it not to play a large part in human imagination. But, on the other hand, a people obsessed with the thought of death, and filled with the desire for a life beyond the grave, would be a people whose desire for life here, and whose struggle to maintain it, would be proportionately weakened. Literature for artistic reasons, and religion for interested ones, may emphasise death and the possibilities of a beyond, but the settled forces of life



will be all the time making for a strengthening of the desire for life here. The result has been, both in the animal and human world, that the course of evolution continuously strengthened the "will to live" by weeding out such as possessed this only in a weak form. The organism struggles in proportion to its impulse and desires, and the impulse of self-preservation is the essential condition for the maintenance of life in any and in all forms.

What we have, then, is the desire for life, or, negatively, a dislike of death. Professor Metchnikoff has given a purely physiological explanation of this, and has explained the clinging to life in the vast majority of people when on the point of death as the product of pathological conditions. He has also suggested that as science conquers disease, and when death results from sheer physical exhaustion, the clinging to life manifested by the dying, and upon which religion builds, will then disappear. But without entering further into this speculation, the point to be noted is that what religionists are building on is, not the desire for a *future* life, but the desire for *life*. Their argument is: You desire to live, but as you cannot live as long as you would like here, therefore you desire to live somewhere else. I admit the first portion of the statement; I entirely deny the truth or relevancy of the second portion. And the justification of this denial is furnished by the fact that, could people live on indefinitely here, none would desire to live elsewhere.

What has been done, therefore, is to take the desire for life and interpret it as a desire to live on the other side of the grave. And, in noting this, we are brought back to the point previously indicated in these articles—namely, that religion is all the time exploiting qualities of human nature that have their application and explanation in the social life of man. Thus the desire for life is translated as a desire for immortality. The social feelings which lead each individual to look beyond himself to the existence and well-being of others is made to bear the meaning of a longing for a fuller life in some future state of existence. The socially generated reaction against defective social conditions is interpreted as an indication of a more perfect state hereafter. In all directions religion first misinterprets, and then exploits, the social nature of man, and in the very act of exploitation obstructs its fuller development. For man cannot permit himself to become obsessed with the idea that a thoroughly desirable human life can only be lived on the other side of the grave, and at the same time devote his full energies to realising that life here. One will sink exactly as the other grows in importance. That the claims of this life have been continually growing in importance is a circumstance for which religion can claim no credit. It is due to the fact that the essential forces of life cannot be permanently denied. They may be hidden, but they cannot be suppressed. And with increased knowledge and more developed sympathies the problems of this life assume their proper significance and character—a conviction that brings with it a sense of the folly of postponing their solution or directing their application to some highly questionable future existence.

C. COHEN.

### A Fatal Admission.

PROTESTANT theologians, with the exception of the few ultra-orthodox ones, are perpetually giving their whole case away. Were they but logical, or had they the courage to face the facts, they would join the army of Freethought forthwith, and resolve to slay the superstition which now they help to keep alive. In their attempt to hold with the hare of theology and yet run with the hounds of science they do the cause of the former the direst disservice conceivable. It is impossible to accept the conclusions of modern science and remain an orthodox believer. As soon

as the late Dr. George Matheson, the poet-preacher of Scotland, realised that, he had the honesty to renounce science in order to retain the faith. The majority of Protestant divines to-day, however, maintain that science and Christianity can dwell together, in perfect unity, in the same personality. But they are radically mistaken. Whatever may be the case with their science, it is a certainty that their Christianity is a woefully attenuated and emasculated affair. The acceptance of evolution necessitates the rejection of the Biblical doctrine of the Fall. A modern astronomer cannot regard the earth as the centre of the Universe, as the Bible and orthodox theology do. To welcome the results of literary and historical criticism renders it impracticable to cherish the old views of Inspiration and Revelation. Consequently we find published sermons with such titles as "Modern Thought and the New Bible," "Christianity Adapted to Modern Knowledge," etc. Mr. R. J. Campbell has made it his special mission to adapt and readapt his theology to present-day conditions. "J. B.," of the *Christian World*, is occupied with the same task. What his exact theological position really is no reader of his ingenious essays can tell. The only clear fact is his hatred of creeds and confessions, or his contempt for what he calls the schools. But his devotion to Christianity is fully as strong as his dislike of theology.

It is very curious that these despisers of creeds and confessions do not seem to discern the utter absurdity of their attitude. Christianity itself, in whatever shape or form it may be held, is a creed. Any believer in God is a theologian, however strongly he may object to the term. "J. B." and his friends condemn, not theology as such, but the theologies from which they differ. They are as much theologians as were Martin Luther and John Calvin, from most of whose doctrines they so vehemently dissent. But they make admissions, in response to the demands of their scientific knowledge, which are positively fatal to any honest belief in the Divine origin of the Christian religion. In the *Christian World* for November 17 "J. B." says:—

"Never has collective humanity been in such a condition for discussing vital questions; never before has it possessed such an intellectual equipment, such a store of knowledge and experience, such an apparatus for intellectual analysis. And this cultivated insight, directed upon the Christian origins, has now opened up an entirely new set of difficulties for Church orthodoxy. The startling thing is the revelation which modern criticism offers of the mental poverty of early Christianity. It began on a most limited stock of ideas, many of which were wrong. As the German, Eucken, one of the most spiritual of thinkers, puts it: 'In many ways we are out of sympathy, not only with the ideas and dogmas of early Christianity, but also with its contemporary feelings and tone.' We have an entirely different, and infinitely wider conception of the Universe from that which the early believers held, and we cannot help bringing that conception into play in judging of their beliefs."

One could conceive of such an admission being consistently made by a New Theologian of the stamp of the Rev. Dr. K. C. Anderson, who holds that "the origin of Christianity was not with a historical Jesus, but with a Christ or Jesus conceived as a god, who died and rose again and ascended to heaven, after the fashion of the Divine men or gods of the secret clubs or cults which were ubiquitous in the Græco-Roman world in the first century of our era and before"; but coming from one who believes that Christianity was founded by a historical Jesus, it is the most damaging admission that could be made. It involves the complete discrediting of both Jesus and Paul, as well as of Peter and John. The Gospel Jesus describes himself as coming down from heaven on purpose to give his life as a ransom, and as being in himself "the way, the truth, and the life," while Paul speaks of him as the second man who is from heaven, whose mission it was to undo the dreadful damage caused by the first man, who was of the earth, earthy. According to Paul, all our sufferings



and sorrows, all our griefs and pains, even physical death itself, are traceable to the Edenic catastrophe. We know that Paul was wrong; but when the advocates of the proposition that Christianity is founded on historical facts agree with Freethinkers in disbelieving the Apostle, they rob Christianity of its only claim to divinity. Paul declares, in the strongest possible terms, that he received his Christianity, religion, or Gospel by a direct communication from God. As it came to him, it was perfect and complete and absolutely infallible. Here are his very words:—

"I make known to you, brethren, as touching the Gospel which was preached by me, that it was not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it; but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ.....But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema. As we have said before, so say I now again: If any man preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema."

In a nutshell Paul's gospel was this: "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." Science teaches us that the first clause in that sentence is wholly false; and the first clause having been discredited, the second loses all its meaning. But if Paul was under a delusion when he so confidently claimed a Divine origin for his Gospel, on what ground can anybody afford to treat Christianity as a Divinely given religion?

It is true that the New Theologians assert that God reveals the Gospel anew to every age; but the value of that assertion is utterly destroyed by the multiplicity of discrepant gospels. Are we expected to be fools enough to believe that they are all from God? Of course, the champions of each one do their best to persuade us that *it* alone is the genuine article, and that all the rest are spurious. Not long ago the newspapers reported that a minister of one of them characterised the brand in vogue at the City Temple as "a damnable heresy." There are at least two emphatically contradictory gospels before the British public just now, and the preachers of each are continually cursing, in God's name, those of the other. Now, the question is not, which of the two is from God, but, how is it that so many people are so foolish as to believe that God has anything to do with either? The very multiplicity of gospels, or versions of Christianity, is a conclusive evidence that they are all alike, humanly manufactured articles. Christianity, in its endless variety of forms, is a creation of the human mind.

Now, the theologians who pretend to have cast theology to the winds, or, at any rate, who forswear every theology save their own, maintain that doctrines are non-essential, and can be put on or off as circumstances may suggest. "The Church's mental systems, we say, have been largely provisional. Its strength has not lain there. It has changed its ideas from age to age." "J. B." continues in the following graphic manner:—

"The early Christians began with the notion of an immediate advent. That view disappeared. For some centuries the doctrine of Atonement was that of a ransom price paid to the Devil. Nobody holds that now. Let anyone compare the theology of the Church during the period of the Greek fathers, the theology of Clement of Alexandria, of Origen, of Theodore of Mopsuestia, of the great Basil, with that of the Latin fathers which succeeded it, with that of Augustine and his followers, and he finds two completely opposing views of God, the world and man. What a break between the views of Protestantism and those of mediæval Catholicism. In later times, in the very bosom of Evangelicalism, read the controversies between Wesley and Fletcher on one side, and Whitefield, Hill, and Toplady on the other; what a chasm between these men and their ideas as to God's will and his purposes towards men! And in our own lifetime, what a revolution in orthodoxy itself in its doctrines of creation, of inspiration, of future punishment, of the state of the Heathen, from what obtained forty years ago!"

With every word in that extract we are in perfect agreement, and find in its undoubted truth an unanswerable argument against the truth of Chris-

tianity. Every promise made by the Gospel Jesus has been broken. No Holy Spirit has ever been resident in the Church, infallibly guiding her into all truth. The Church has always been, and is, full of strife and rancor and malice and hatred and murder. Go over the list of her forced conversions, compulsory baptisms, persecutions by torture and by death. It is estimated that altogether, from first to last, no fewer than a hundred millions of persons have been put to death in her wars and persecutions. And yet, in face of such ugly facts, "J. B." has the audacity to affirm that the ideas of Christianity, though—on his own admission—often the very opposite of true, have yet been "always a rind enclosing a precious fruit; a channel along which has flowed a stream of power, other and greater than the ideas themselves." What empty rhetoric! If you compare Roman society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius, as described so minutely by Dr. Dill, with Christian society, say, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, you will be able to estimate what the ever-flowing stream of Christian power accomplished during the intervening centuries. It would not be difficult to bring undoubted evidence to show that, morally, the world stood lower in the sixteenth century than it did in the second and the third under the Antonines. Both intellectually and morally Christianity stands condemned as equally devoid of truth and of beneficent power.

J. T. LLOYD.

### Priestcraft and Crime.

M. ANATOLE FRANCE has told us in one of his recently translated volumes of *La Vie Littéraire* how, when he had finished an eager perusal of a novel by M. Paul Bourget, he immediately turned to his *De Imitatione Christi* and read the eighth chapter of the first book as a kind of corrective or, at any rate, contrast. The other day I came across a book which in its turn may serve a similar purpose, and prove a healthy corrective for any rhapsodising Roman Catholic; that is, if he can be persuaded to read it, which will probably be not very difficult. For one might term *Traffic*, by E. Temple Thurston, a sheep in wolf's clothing, or a sugar-coated pill, or, indeed, call it by any of the names one uses for the things which are more than they appear to be; it is a novel, and one of those novels that ought to find a place on every Freethinker's "fighting" shelf, among the volumes of fiction which are often more effective propaganda than a score of scientific treatises or philosophical tomes.

I am afraid that those who have enlisted in the militant Freethought campaign sadly underestimate the importance to their work of that branch of literature called fiction. Several Freethinkers of my acquaintance barely touch a novel from one year's end to another, unless it be a classic, and then only as a diversion from harder reading. As propagandist literature modern fiction has never suggested itself to them. In other circles, of course, the novelist can no longer complain, as Sir Walter Besant was moved to do a score of years ago, that his art is not taken seriously. On the contrary, since Grant Allen's pamphlet-novel, *The Woman Who Did*—a magnificent pamphlet, but a very bad novel—was published, the fiction writer has been in some danger of being made self-conscious by the unceasing public controversy about the things he may or may not put into his novel, whether he ought to idealise his facts or photograph them, and, generally, what the mission of a novelist should be, if he dare to have a mission at all. That this is not entirely good for him we see in the ridiculous poses with which one or two tenth-rate novelists feel it necessary to support their newly granted importance. It is hardly surprising that they should come to regard themselves as reincarnations of Æschylus or Shakespeare. But there is as much error in belittling the influence of the modern novel as there is in the exaggeration of it. Some



day it might be interesting to discover how deep is the influence of Freethought upon contemporary novelists and their work. In the hands of Freethinkers I am certain that many recently published novels would be valuable ammunition, for in our attack upon established and unestablished superstition the class of novel written by Thomas Hardy and Eden Phillpotts ought not to be ignored.

*Traffic* is an admirable example of this class. It is a story of the consequences arising out of the criminal irresponsibility and ignorance of Roman Catholic priests. The earlier scenes are laid in a part of Ireland where the population is almost wholly illiterate—and consequently most priest-ridden—and the central figure is a girl, Nanno Troy, who at the age of nineteen is forced into a marriage with a disreputable farmer. Marriage is a mercenary matter in Ireland. Occasionally, as the author points out, "a man's feelings get the better of him, and he marries with his heart"; but it is not often the case. To the majority of the men, a girl's dowry and her physical attractions are the only factors. One can imagine the consequences of this; the woman who drowns herself in drink makes the best of things.

Nanno is a pathetic figure; almost an Irish Tess of the D'Urbervilles. The illegitimate daughter of an English artist and an Irish peasant woman, her thoughts and yearnings soar far beyond the understanding of the half-witted creatures among whom she lives. Her pure white soul sickens at the idea of her coming marriage, but she is helpless. It requires some knowledge of Irish peasant life to understand what a refusal to marry the man her parents and the priest had chosen would have meant. She would not only have been turned out of her home, but the Church would have banned her. For a moment, in her terror, she contemplated running away; "but the whole breadth of the world, with all that was unknown in it, rose up and faced her." It took poor Nanno's breath away. To choose the uncertainty of life and do as she was required was surely better than facing the uncertainty of desolation. It seemed to her that there was no way out of the marriage, and the author describes her feelings as the realisation came to her:—

"A few months would go by, until next Shrove-tide, and then she would be Jamesy Ryan's wife. The thought terrified her; she felt her lips cold again. A thousand scenes of her married life conjured themselves up in her mind; each one was more terrible than another. She remembered the taint of his breath, as it reached her nostrils, when they were in the swings on the Pattern night. Vividly she saw his face in close proximity to her own; unsparingly she imagined the strength of his body and thought of the violence of his arms. It was as though she had been brought face to face with some street horror and, from morbid compulsion, felt driven to gaze at its nauseating details."

The marriage, with all its shameful indecorousness, glossed over with "holiness," is equally well described by Mr. Thurston. Religion requires a young girl to be dragged before the insolent gaze of all the world during the most sacred and private event of her life, and of all those who were present at the sacrifice of Nanno Troy to the loathsome Jamesy Ryan in the little Irish church, there was probably no one to whom the matter appealed in its serious aspect, excepting Nanno herself.

"There was merriment; there were jests. Ripples of suppressed laughter ran along the occupants of the long forms. Jamesy Ryan, while they were waiting for Father Mehan's arrival, turned frequently and winked lasciviously at those of his friends who were present. Bridget [Nanno's mother] was in the best of spirits."

To Nanno, however, it was horrible. The man who is supposed to "shepherd" his flock, the priest, was obviously too intent on his fee and the ceremony to be aware of the shocking nature of the whole affair. When the ceremony is over we are quickly made to realise the crime which Father Mehan has committed. The wedding feast proves all too long for the eager husband, and he drags his young wife away from the dancing and merry-making.

"'God blast 'em,' he said, when they were alone outside in the yard. 'Shure, 't'll be marnin' before they'll be thinkin' o' goin'."

He stumbled heavily, and she caught at his arm involuntarily to save him. The jolting of it brought on a feeling of sickness, and, for a moment, he stood there, swaying uncertainly. Then it overcame him. He vomited. Nanno shuddered, and shut her eyes. But she stood by him until it had passed; praying that no one would come out and see him."

For nearly a year Nanno submits to the worst treatment a woman can receive at the hands of a man. Mr. Thurston does not spare his readers, and the story is only redeemed from sheer ugliness by the beautiful, suffering figure of Nanno. Life becomes unbearable to her at last, and in her desperation she goes to the priest and pours out all her soul. He expresses his surprise and sympathy. He tells her that he knew her husband was "a bold fellow"—what an admission for a Christian priest to make!—but he "never thought it was as bad as that." When Nanno informs him, however, that she has resolved to run away he is a sympathetic man no longer, but a priest jealous of the honor and dignity of his Church, and his voice becomes the voice of Roman Catholicism:—

"'Is it by putting one sin on the top of another that ye think ye're going to get at the right way of doin' things?' he asked quietly.

'Sin?' she said. 'What sin is there in me goin' away? Shure, I can't live with him. God never meant a mortal being to live such a life as I am.'

'God means us to do a power o' things that seem to have no reason in them at all,' he replied.....' Whom God hath joined together—d'ye mind that?—let no man put asunder. Shure, ye took him for better or for worse, an' faith, I know it's bad enough ye're gettin', but I've come across many that were worse.'

.....Nanno did not reply. 'The Church'll forgive many sins,' he said; 'shure, 'twill absolve a man from murder, if he gives himself up to the authorities,—but there's no forgiveness for that. I'm tellin' ye plainly, mind ye; ye'd be excommunicated if ye married again, that's what ud happen to ye. No Church would let ye inside its doors, an' the hand o' God would be taken off ye for ever.'

The words chilled Nanno. She shuddered.....

'Nanno!'

'Yes, father?'

'Go back to yeer husband, Nanno,—an' God'll show ye some way to do the right thing the first moment ye enter the door.'

But something happened that same day which drove Nanno away from her husband and the village. Reaching London, she endeavored to commence a new life, but the sanctified union with a blackguard blights all her days. Her faith in the Church is unshaken, and when she makes the acquaintance of a man whom she can admire and respect, she realises that she loves him, and it is to a priest that she goes for advice in her dilemma. To him she tells her history, and asks what she had better do. His answer will not surprise a Freethinker:—

"'You ask my advice?' he said plainly. 'Then go back to your husband. Without her husband, however bad he may be, a woman cannot fight against the world and its temptations.....Bring him over here.....It may be doing the greatest good in the world. No man is incapable of reformation. You think of the life hereafter; then make your life here such that it will merit reward. I don't suggest that it will be easy. I don't suggest that, if you do it, it will be bound to succeed. If I were to say so it would be giving you false hope. But there is good in the worst of us. God may help you to find it in him, and at least you will have done your duty.....That is the answer of the Church. It can offer no other answer.'

A man who can speak like that to a poor, ignorant, superstitious girl deserves the hangman's rope, if any man ever deserved it. The Roman Catholic priesthood is truly a despicable thing. It makes poor Nanno's life a tragedy, and keeps it a tragedy. The story is deeply moving, and its poignancy strikes painfully into a Freethinker's soul.

*Traffic* has just been reprinted in a sixpenny edition by Messrs. Stanley Paul & Co. Mr. Thurston may be congratulated upon a fine, artistic achieve-



ment; artistic because, although I have quoted passages which reveal the holy fathers in a most unfavorable light, the author's sympathies and hates are skilfully concealed from beginning to end. Indeed, my acquaintance with his other work leads me to suspect that he is a warm admirer of the Roman Catholic Church. Freethinkers will read every word of *Traffic* before they pass it on to a Roman Catholic friend. And as they read they will realise that the same Demon who gathered poor Tess of the D'Urbervilles in his cruel arms, and offered her up for the sport of his brethren gods, is toying with Nanno Troy. This Demon is the Christian Deity, and in *Traffic* his agents are the two Roman Catholic priests, individuals—I will not call them men—absolutely devoid of any knowledge of the world, and criminally incapable of guiding human beings through any period of their lives. The misery described in this book is not, however, caused solely by the Roman Catholic priesthood. When the power of Rome has been completely destroyed such tragedies as Nanno's will still be known. Every other religion which interferes with the lives of men and women has committed crimes incalculable—crimes that a reading of *Traffic* makes one but dimly understand; and, compared with them, the torturing of witches and the burning of Freethinkers are but as a drop of blood in a crimson sea.

THOMAS MOULT.

### Acid Drops.

Tolstoy was far from being an orthodox Christian. The orthodox Christian, indeed, would reckon him no Christian at all. He rejected all the miracles of the New Testament as well as those of the Old Testament. Such of the teachings of Jesus as he accepted himself he considered authentic; all the rest he gaily dismissed as unauthentic. Instead of Tolstoy being a Christite, it was Christ who was a Tolstoyite. Nevertheless, the great Russian writer was enough of a Christian to practise a common Christian juggle with the word "Freethinker." Some of the most orthodox Christians have said to Atheists, "Oh, we are as much Freethinkers as you are. We think as freely as you do, although we do not reach your conclusions, and we have as good a claim as you have to be called Freethinkers." There is a certain superficial plausibility about this, but it is perceived to be great nonsense when examined closely. Nor is it any the less nonsense for being patronised by a great writer like Tolstoy,—as we shall see.

Writing on Tolstoy in the *Daily Mail*, Mr. Aylmer Maude said:—

"He once said to me that there are two kinds of people—those with whom it is worth discussing, and those with whom it is not. Those with whom it is worth discussing are, he said, the 'freethinkers'—by which he did not mean Secularists, but people who think freely without being tied to foregone conclusions. As he put it, 'A man may be a Churchman or an atheist, a Russian or an Englishman, a capitalist, laborite, or what you will, and yet he may be a freethinker; but if he puts his sect, his nationality, or his position first, and admits only as much truth as fits in with his prejudices on those matters, then it becomes impossible for anyone who values truth above everything else to discuss matters profitably with him.' That remark shows the attitude of mind with which Tolstoy has gone through life."

Now if Tolstoy said all that he was very absurd in saying it. In the first place, no person can think freely if he is tied to foregone conclusions. On the other hand, a person who thinks freely without having any foregone conclusions has yet to be discovered on this planet. Nor does the word "Freethinker" merely indicate a person who thinks, or professes to think, freely. Words, like human beings, or lower species of animated nature, are only to be understood through their history. You may say, for instance, that etymologically a "Conservative" means this, and a "Liberal" means that. But the etymology in either case is of very little importance. The really important thing is what the words mean in the light of history as well as in the light of current politics. So with "Freethinker." It is absurd to say that Christians, Theists, and Atheists—to say nothing of Brahmins, Buddhists, and Mohammedans—may all be Freethinkers. They cannot. The word "Freethinker" has come to denote certain people and to connote their general opinions. It was first used by the English Deists. Afterwards it was used on the Continent. "Libre-Penseur," the French term for Freethinker, is now used

throughout Europe. It meant at first a person who was opposed to Christianity as a revealed religion; it means now a person who is opposed to theology altogether. It is for those who wear the label to say what it means; not for those who put it on new and then to see how they look in it.

Dr. Newton H. Marshall is delivering a course of lectures on "Jesus and Modern Thought." The third lecture deals with "Jesus and Social Problems," the object being to prove that social reform without Jesus is useless. To support this, Dr. Marshall gives two illustrations—one from Russia and one from France. The Russian people, we are told, owe nothing to their revolutionaries, because these men disregarded Christ. We would advise Dr. Marshall to consult some eminent Russian who knows the revolutionary movement—Prince Kropotkin, for instance—before he again gives vent to such nonsense as this. The truth is that the Russian people owe everything to their revolutionaries, ill-advised as some of their efforts may have been. Dr. Marshall's real complaint, we imagine, is that in Russia the reform movement has not been made ridiculous by hypocritical and stupid talk about Christ and Christianity. And if one were to take the Jewish intellectuals and the Freethinking reformers out of the revolutionary movement Russia would easily sink back to what it was a century ago.

Concerning France, Dr. Marshall volunteers the information that the lot of the people was not bettered by the Revolution of 1789 until decades of war and tyranny had been submitted to. "There was more starvation and hate and wickedness under the Republic than there had been under the Monarchy,.....because the principles of Christ had not been observed." Ignorant misrepresentation could hardly go farther than this. No one claims that hatred, or wickedness, or want was non-existent under the Republic; but no one, with any reputation worth losing, would say that the state of France was worse at any period between 1789 and to-day than it was under Louis XV. and Louis XVI. The Republic made at least the attempt to feed and educate the people, nor does one read of such grinding injustice and starvation under the Republic as are depicted in pre-revolutionary France by all reputable historians. We imagine that Dr. Marshall has been getting his French history from such novels as *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, or from such religious tracts as once delighted in attacking "infidelity" by piling up the horrors of the Revolution. Speaking of the worst period of the Revolution, Carlyle says:—

"History confesses mournfully that there is no period to be met with in which the general Twenty-five Millions of France suffered less than in this period which they name Reign of Terror! But it was not the Dumb Millions that suffered here; it was the speaking thousands, and hundreds and units; who shrieked and published, and made the world ring with their wail, as they could and should; that is the grand peculiarity."

The hundreds were killed—we are neither defending or accusing the killing—in the name of humanity, and that is an inexcusable crime, to be denounced with all the fervor of religious malignancy. The thousands may be killed in the name of God, and that is to be extenuated with all the sophistical insincerity of enraged piety.

According to the newspapers Haeckel has formally severed his connection with the Prussian State Church. We do not quite understand it, but it seems that a public formality is requisite before a citizen who has been a member of that Church can be reckoned as not belonging to it. Yet the great Professor has for several years been the President of the Monist Society, and his attacks on Christianity in *The Riddle of the Universe* and other writings are famous throughout the world. Altogether, what may be called Haeckel's renunciation, is something of a comedy, calculated to add to the gaiety of nations.

Seventy-five Passive Resisters have had their goods distrained at Bristol. The total cost to them was £55 5s. 5½d. They declare that they would rather go to prison than pay for Catholic or Anglican religious teaching in public schools. Nevertheless they are quite prepared to make Freethinkers as well as Catholics and Anglicans pay for Nonconformist religious teaching in public schools.

Mr. Lloyd George has been telling that facile interviewer, Mr. Harold Begbie, that "Anatole France, and men of science like Sir Oliver Lodge, think that humanity has not yet perceived the real Christ—think that we are moving to a truer and profounder apprehension of Christianity." The reference to Sir Oliver Lodge seems all right, but Anatole France's name is taken in vain. Either Mr. Lloyd George



or Mr. Harold Begbie (if not both of them) is unaware that Anatole France is an Atheist.

The Rev. T. P. Dale, of Bristol, must be profoundly ignorant of the true nature of the doubts which are so prevalent at present. Preaching at Burton-on-Trent recently, he assured his readers, according to the *Burton Evening Gazette*, that "religious doubts" can be satisfactorily met by the message which Jesus sent to doubting John the Baptist. The message was this: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them." Is it possible that Mr. Dale is unaware of the fact that the doubts whereof he spoke are caused by such stuff as that message is made of? The probability is that the message was never sent; but if it was sent, it is absolutely certain that it was largely a lying message. If Mr. Dale were to study the subject of doubt he would soon find out that it is by no means so easily removed as he seems to think.

The New Theology weekly has admitted the Rev. K. C. Anderson, D.D., to its columns again. A short article by this writer on "The Christ Myth" appeared in the last issue. He denies the historicity of Jesus altogether. He declares that even "Paul knew nothing of an historical Jesus." Very impartially, too, and quite generously, he puts in a good word for J. M. Robertson's *Pagan Christs*. We have pleasure in quoting the following:—

"As able a book as this of Herr Drews' is J. M. Robertson's *Pagan Christs*. Some would say that it is abler. But few read it because it is issued by the Rationalistic Press and written by a Rationalist who is known to be no friend of the churches. There is always a certain type of theologian about ready to say 'He is an infidel,' and people are afraid and get scared. The real fact is that Mr. Robertson's book is one of the keenest and finest pieces of historical and literary criticism in the English language, or even in any language, and this is in no way affected by the facts that he is a Rationalist and that the book is issued by the R. P. A., and people who would shut themselves off from the book because of these facts are simply timid and foolish."

Considering how Mr. Robertson's book is sneered at by Christian critics, and even semi-Christian critics, some of whom ought to know, and some of whom do know, a great deal better, this tribute to his scholarship and ability is quite refreshing.

There was a very funny mistake in that same number of the New Theology weekly. It occurred in a leaderette on Tolstoy. Reference was made to the old horetic's being refused Christian burial by the Greek Church, and our contemporary said "Little he'll reek"—a quotation from one of the lines in the famous fine poem on "the Burial of Sir John Moore." Only "reek" should be "reck." The blunder is unfortunate as well as funny. Tolstoy's simple life was not calculated to make him "reek" in his grave.

Now that a General Election is on, we must expect the usual outpouring of religious inanity. Already we have had the stock assurance that God meant the people of England to own the land of England, *but the House of Lords won't let them*. Now the Vicar of St. Ethelburga the Virgin, speaking on behalf of a meeting of people who believe that the need of to-day is "character based on faith in the living God," has issued the following:—

"It is suggested that at the present grave crisis in our domestic politics an urgent appeal should be made to all who believe in God as supreme as well over nations as over individuals, to engage in a united act of daily prayer that the will of God may, above all things, be sought for and obeyed by all who are called on to record a vote at the approaching General Election, as well as by all workers and speakers and by all who offer themselves for the service of their country in Parliament."

The intention of this may be admirable, but it is none the less curious. If the "will of God" is set in a particular direction, one wonders who or what is going to prevent it operating, particularly as he is "supreme as well over nations as over individuals." In that case we are not likely to disobey the will of God, and must look for its expression in our actions. If we are merely to pray to God to let his will prevail, the request seems quite gratuitous. It will do that, one supposes, in any case. Perhaps the advice is an indication that "God's will" is like the program of a political party—subject to alteration at the request of the electorate. Anyway, one would really like to know just what it does mean. The picture of Mr. Asquith or Mr. Balfour deciding whether God's will shall prevail or not is almost too ridiculous for words.

An anonymous Nonconformist, in the *British Weekly*, urges all his brother Nonconformists to "strike hard and win a victory" in the new general elections. "Never before," he says, "have Nonconformists been better led than by the Baptist Chancellor of the Exchequer." We thought Mr. Asquith was the leader of the Liberal party.

We have already called attention to the mawkish article by a pious lady on Björnson in the November *Contemporary*. We see that the article is recommended by the New Theology weekly. When it comes to sentimentality the Christians are thoroughly united. Our Liberal-Christian contemporary represents the great Norwegian Freethinker as "sitting at the feet of Christ." Björnson at anybody's feet would be a strange spectacle.

We are getting on famously in this Christian civilisation. London is to have a new lunatic asylum at a cost of half-a-million.

How sick the *élite* of the working-classes must be with Mr. Keir Hardie's eternal chatter about Christ. The honorable gentleman has been telling the Chiswick Brotherhood lately that he is now looking forward to "the time when Christianity will be free from dogma of any kind." Such a Christianity as that, as organic as a rice-pudding, would apparently just suit Mr. Keir Hardie's type of intelligence.

What babble it is, too, at this time of day to talk in *this* fashion. "Just as the flowers in the field and the birds in the air," Mr. Keir Hardie said, "were protected and clothed by God's hand, so surely did the Creator intend that no less a blessing was to be the right of human kind." What a compliment to the "Creator." His policy is well-meant, but it won't work. He intended man to be happy, but his intentions have always been frustrated. What a God! Hardly worth a shelf or a niche in a museum.

One result of the gambling spirit, says the Rev. J. W. Horsley in the *Guardian*, is the growth of superstition in connection with luck and with objects that bring good fortune. There is quite a fashionable craze for "Mascots," and it will be remembered that in the Wellman expedition a black cat was taken as an omen of good fortune. Such practices, says Mr. Horsley, carry us back into the customs and atmosphere of primitive savages. This is quite true; but we do not agree with Mr. Horsley that these things are a recreation of savage modes of thought. On the contrary, these have always been with us. Except for a difference of speech and dress, the mental habits of large numbers of the population are still astonishingly primitive, and fashion in this case only gives opportunity for their expression. Luck and chance are only other names for ignorance, and ignorance has been the mother of superstition from the most primitive ages onwards.

The *Christian World*, in its comments on Mr. Horsley's article, says that "In the interests of reason and religion" people should laugh these foolish customs out of existence. In the interests of reason, yes; but why in the interest of religion? Mr. Horsley rightly says that believers in luck count the hits but not the misses. But is not that the essential method of religious advocacy? One man prays for health and health follows the prayer. A score pray for health and disease comes. But the score of misses are ignored and the single hit is dwelt upon as a demonstration of the efficacy of prayer. Because a man or a nation is successful in an undertaking, we are asked to believe in the co-operation of "Providence." If they are not successful, it is because "Providence" deems it wiser that they should fail. Britain, in virtue of obvious economic and geographic advantages, secures a controlling power in the world's markets. Therefore, "Providence" intended us to lead the world, and it is rank heresy for other nations to dispute our place. The truth is, that the superstitious mind is well in evidence in all directions. It is the raw material on which all churches, chapels, and religious organisations exist. And so long as these continue active the particular form of superstition illustrated by the belief in "luck," will not lack either expression or justification.

What a number of "spiritual" fossils have appeared as witnesses before the Divorce Commission. One of the most recent is Professor Whitney, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at King's College, London. He denied that there was any necessity for divorce at all. "Would you advocate the repeal of the Act of 1857?" Lord Gorell asked him. "Personally," he replied, "I should like to see it repealed. My main ground would be that I was bound by the very



definite statement of our Lord." The gentleman ought to be in Madame Tussaud's.

We wonder if Professor Whitney feels equally bound by other definite statements of "our Lord"—such as "Take no thought for the morrow," "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth," "Give to everyone that asketh," "If one smite thee on the one cheek, turn unto him the other also." We should really like to know how far the gentleman's obligation to obey Christ extends.

Sensible people are quite assured of Dr. Crippen's guilt. Yet he died with a lie upon his lips, after paying "respectful attention" to the ministrations of the Catholic chaplain, the Rev. T. Carey, besides attending the prison chapel service on several occasions. The chaplain, of course, visited Crippen daily, attending to his spiritual health. It is not reported whether he gave the murderer absolution and administered to him the last rites of the Church.

What is meant by a "discontented Agnosticism"? The expression is used by the Rev. Dr. Orchard in the course of a reply to a correspondent in the *Christian Commonwealth*. Any Agnosticism that we know of, and that is worth talking about, is quite contented, even cheerful. It is doubtless good business, from the religious point of view, to cultivate the notion that the Agnostic is an unhappy being, tormented by doubt and uncertainty, looking longingly at the "certainties" of the religious mind, and sorry he cannot entertain them. The picture is quite false, nevertheless. The Agnostic is not uncertain, he is not in any doubt, and he is not discontented. He is not in doubt about the truth of the Christian religion; he knows it is false. He is not uncertain about the existence of the Christian Deity; he knows it to be a sheer impossibility for such a mass of self-contradictions to exist. He is quite certain about the value of goodness, of truth, of beauty, of all that is of vital interest to human welfare, and therefore feels quite comfortable. The discontent is really with the Christian. He is unhappy at the sight of persons who can reject his superstitions without being as miserable as he thinks they ought to become. Dr. Orchard should write a text-book for unbelievers with the title, *How to be Miserable: a Guide Book for all who Reject the Saving Faith of the New Theology*. Some Free-thinkers might then try to oblige him by living up to its injunctions.

Dr. Orchard is hailed as quite a profound thinker in some quarters. In connection with religion a very little ability serves to secure this reputation, and this may be seen in this case by a single illustration. "The psychological explanation of religion," he says, "is that it is a reaction to our environment, and, therefore, that it is an answer to *something* in the universe." Now reaction to environment is no more a psychological fact than it is a chemical or biological fact. The principle holds good all round. There is no question, either, that the reaction is a reaction to "something." Reaction is meaningless and impossible otherwise. The question is as to the nature of the "something" that is the cause of the reaction. The Christian argues, stupidly enough, that because the reagent is in this case a conscious being, the cause of the reaction is conscious likewise. But a lighted match brought against my face will produce a reaction. Are we therefore to conclude there is a conscious cause for this reaction? Or because we conceive a conscious cause, does this carry warranty of our being right? The savage thinks of any cause of disaster to him as a conscious cause, and his whole religion is based upon this admittedly false assumption. Is Dr. Orchard doing any more than giving to this primitive philosophising an up-to-date look? Is it not animism pure and simple? For a time one feels amused with the work of disentangling the confusions of this class of writers. Then one begins to feel a little weary at the sight of verbose incapacity masquerading as philosophy, or a thinly disguised animism doing duty for scientific thinking.

Religion is a sweet merciful thing. The Home Secretary has just released a prisoner sixty-five years of age from Dartmoor, where he was undergoing a sentence of thirteen years' penal servitude for breaking open a church poor-box, while under the influence of drink, and stealing two shillings. Gentle Jesusites!

When certain people do agree their unanimity is wonderful. Canon Hensley Henson has been talking for the Wesleyans at Sheffield, and they must have enjoyed themselves, for the reverend gentleman went for Atheists tooth and nail—including toe nails. It was quite right, of course, that Christians should get hold of little children before they could think for themselves, and fill them with Christian

dogmas; but it was an awful thing for Atheists to follow suit. There were no less than ninety-four Sunday-schools in England from which Christ and God were rigorously excluded. How terrible! "Every element in them," Canon Henson said, "was nothing more nor less than a calculated outrage on the child's nature, and a mortgage of hell laid upon the life that is to be." What must "the consequences be to society, if the dragon's teeth of atheism were sown in the fertile soil of children's minds"? Men had a right to propagate their beliefs, but only on condition that they "respected those fundamental moral principles upon which alone a sane human life could be built." The hope of the State lay in the Church; it was only the Church that could save the nation. Thus the reverend gentleman went on, and on, elaborating the simple announcement that Codlin's the friend and not Short. We have to add that, in this case, Codlin wants Short dealt with by the police.

The Bishop of Liverpool, in begging for more money for his disgracefully wealthy Church, implores potential subscribers not to "allow the younger generation to grow up without those Christian religious principles which had done so much to make their country the grand nation that it was." The real secret of England's "greatness and prosperity" is "the religiousness of the middle classes." Coal and iron, machinery, shipbuilding, and commerce have nothing to do with it. Of course.

Everybody knows the story of the old lady who was sceptical of many things that her sailor son told her of his voyages and experiences, but believed him at once when he told her that one morning, after riding all night in the Red Sea, they fished up with their anchor one of Pharaoh's chariot wheels. She knew that was true, for she had read about it in the Scriptures. In the same way the *Liverpool Courier* believes the story of Professor Curelly, of Toronto, who has been "discovering" in the East and is now proudly conveying to Canada "the dagger of the 'Pharaoh who knew not Joseph.'" The difficulty is not to find traces of a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph, but to find traces of a Pharaoh who did know Joseph. Both the Professor and the Liverpool paper have mistaken the problem.

### A Wail from Heaven.

'Tis bright as in Naples at noon,  
But all around white as the Poles.  
Neither sun, nor stars, nor pale moon,  
Nor earth here majestic rolls.  
And it's oh for the flame of a Western sky  
And the blaze of some crackling coals.

'Tis summer without any sun,  
Or winter without any frost.  
Naught's ended, for naught is begun,  
And the sense of time is quite lost.  
But it's oh for the fool that repented at last  
And the river of Jordan has crossed.

God gave us this white filmy suit,  
But he left each one his own throat.  
Would to Christ he had kept us mute,  
Like the fishes, in peace to float.  
For it's oh for the sound of a Bechstein Grand  
And a swelling contralto note.

Our tapering films, cornet-shaped,  
A ghostly resemblance wear  
To the flesh from which they escaped  
When live and love were so dear.  
And it's oh for the touch of a lover's hand  
And the smell from a brewing of beer.

Heaven's court-house but one sentence gives.  
The villain the same as the saint—  
Eternally praising him—lives  
In bliss as no Torrey could paint.  
'Till it's oh for the twinge of a molar tooth  
Or a touch of the liver complaint.

A. S. V.

### A PROBABLE "CALL."

Young Minister's Wife (hopefully): "Do you think they will call you to preach in that wealthy Boston church, Henry?"

Young Minister (calmly): "I feel quite sure that they will, Jane! The trustees informed me confidentially that I was the only applicant on the list who was thoroughly sound on Ibsen, Emerson, Browning, and Howells!"



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

January 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, Queen's Hall, London; 10, London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner.  
February 5, Glasgow; 12, Manchester; 19, Liverpool; 26, Birmingham.

### To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 4, Manchester; 11, Liverpool; 18, Abertillery.
- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 4, Battersea; 11, Rhondda; 18, West Ham.
- PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1910.—Previously acknowledged: £271 8s. 7d. Received since:—Horace W. Parsons, £5 5s.; Ernest, 5s.; T. A. M., 10s.; D. H. Hayes, 2s. 6d.
- S. COHEN.—We are obliged, but the gentleman is not worth troubling about, in spite of the Bishop of Manchester's patronage. A drowning faith, like a drowning man, will catch at straws.
- W. FEREDAY.—Thanks for your letter. We wrote from a newspaper cutting sent us, presuming it to contain current news, and are astonished to hear it was eighteen months old. Nothing can be done now, of course. Sorry you have had the trouble of writing.
- C. T. HALL, an Irish reader, says: "I suggest that each subscriber to the President's Honorarium Fund should add fifty per cent. to his subscriptions in 1911. With a good pull this might reach £450, a sum which I am certain would be required for the work to be done." We should be glad to see the £300 made up first.
- W. P. BALL.—Much obliged for cuttings.
- JOSEPH BRYCE.—We agree with you that "Cynic" in our last issue "put the case of China and England into a nutshell." Proof in due course.
- J. G. BRIGGS.—The lines quoted at the end of "Mimnermus's" article are George Eliot's. We do not understand your second question. In reply to your third question, we do not see how a Christian could join the N. S. S.
- B. H. WATTS.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks. Pleased to hear you "look forward to an intellectual treat every Thursday" in the arrival of the *Freethinker*. We wish the persons capable of enjoying an intellectual treat were more numerous. But the people of this country are what Christianity has made them. So we have to wait for our public, which slowly, yet steadily, increases.
- W. STEWART.—We propose to deal with the whole matter when the Divorce Commission issues its report, which will, of course, contain the evidence as well as the Commission's findings.
- H. SMALLWOOD.—Glad to know that this journal has done so much for your mental emancipation.
- R. S. STEVENSON.—Thanks, but it hardly seems on the lines of our mottoes.
- W. CHALMERS.—We do not quite understand. We think we are entitled to ask that announcements, from Glasgow or elsewhere, should reach us through the Branch secretary.
- M. TONGE.—We believe the Shares were of little if any value when the place was closed.
- CLARA GUNNING.—Sorry, but cannot fit it in this week.
- A. LEWIS.—The Rev. C. L. Drawbridge's interest in "respectable Agnostics" is quite touching. We hope they are properly grateful.
- F. M.—The conclusion is not quite worthy of the rest of your short poem.
- A. D. McLAREN.—Very sorry; have ordered the *Freethinker* to be posted to your present address in Germany.
- A. LEWIS.—Your obituary of Robert Child is interesting, but it is long, and arrives on Tuesday, and must stand over till next week. Regret to hear of your illness.
- MRS. M. E. PEGG, the Manchester Branch secretary, desires to say, with reference to a sentence in last week's *Freethinker*, that Mr. Lloyd's lectures were advertised, just like Mr. Foote's, in five newspapers, and by a written poster outside the hall for a full fortnight. Mrs. Pegg adds that experience proves that wall posters are no good for any lectures but Mr. Foote's. But could not something be done with small neat announcements such as Miss Vance gets out for the London lectures?
- BIRMINGHAM FRIEND.—We have received only the three responses that you have seen with regard to the President's Honorarium Fund deficit, which is now a more manageable figure than it was. Thanks for enclosures.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

### Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote wound up the Shoreditch Town Hall course of lectures on Sunday evening. The abominable weather naturally thinned the audience to some extent, but that so many were present in such circumstances was a compliment to the lecturer. Mr. Foote said that he was wet and cold himself, but he hoped to warm himself up by lecturing, and he also hoped to warm up his audience by the same means—which, to all appearance, he amply succeeded in doing; for the meeting was a very "live" one, and the applause at the finish was worth hearing. Several questions were asked and answered, and two members of the audience—one Christian, and the other the Lord knows what—offered opposition. The lecturer's reply created great enthusiasm, and the audience went away delighted—into the rain! And as a cab couldn't be got for love or money, Mr. Foote had to do the same. Fortunately he was none the worse for it on Monday morning.

Mr. Cohen lectures in the Secular Hall, Manchester, to-day (Dec. 4). In addition to the formal advertising, which we hope will be adequate, the local "saints" should make Mr. Cohen's visit known among their friends and acquaintances, and try to bring some of them along to the meetings. We hope to hear of good audiences at both lectures.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd lectures next Sunday (Dec. 11) at the Theatre Royal, Tonypandy—which is just now one of the most famous places in the United Kingdom. The lectures are being organised by the Rhondda Branch. Being a Welshman himself, Mr. Lloyd should be peculiarly acceptable to Welsh audiences. Visitors to Tonypandy that day will be able to obtain dinner and tea at the Empire Restaurant, or light refreshment at Parry's. Mr. J. H. Edwards, of Cardiff, is to preside at both meetings.

The Birmingham Branch is carrying on Sunday Free-thought lectures in the King's Hall, Corporation-street. Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd have already lectured there. To-day (Dec. 4) the platform is to be occupied by Mr. A. B. Moss. We hope the local "saints" will see that he has good meetings and a hearty welcome. On December 11 Miss Kough pays a return visit to Birmingham and delivers two lectures in the King's Hall.

Mr. W. Heaford pays his first lecturing visit to Liverpool to-day (Dec. 4). He lectures for the N. S. S. Branch at the Alexandra Hall, Islington-square, afternoon and evening. We bespeak for him a cordial welcome.

The London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, will not fall on the President's birthday again in 1911. The second Tuesday in January, the usual day for the Dinner falls on the 10th and not the 11th of January this time. Nevertheless we hope there will be as big a crowd as there was on the last occasion. We have heard already from several provincial friends who are coming up on this occasion, and we expect to hear from a good many more during the next two or three weeks. There is sure to be a good dinner, some good vocal and instrumental music, and some good speeches. Mr. Foote will preside, and will be "supported" by Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Moss, Heaford, Davies, Roger, and other well-known London "saints."

The Secular Society, Ltd., has received £250 as an immediate legacy from the late Major John C. Harris. The Society has also an interest in Major Harris's residuary estate under his will.

We take the following from a report of a recent meeting of the Free Library Committee in the *Grimby News*:—

#### "THE FREETHINKER."

A request that the *Freethinker* be provided at the library was presented by three readers.

The Librarian said it was discontinued some time ago.

Dr. Bennett proposed that it be renewed.

Mr. Atkinson: They have a right to have it.

The resolution was seconded and carried."

Yes, as Galileo said, the world *does* move.

The Humanitarian League is arranging several interesting lectures and discussions at Caxton Hall, Westminster, this winter. The first takes place on Friday evening, December 2, at 8 o'clock. Mr. George Greenwood, M.P., is the chairman, and Mr. Carl Heath the lecturer, his subject being "The Death Penalty." Admission is free, and the debate is open to the audience.



## On Immortality.

An Interview with Thomas A. Edison.

By EDWARD MARSHALL, IN "THE NEW YORK TIMES."

THOMAS A. EDISON in the following interview for the first time speaks to the public on the vital subjects of human soul and immortality. It will be found to be a most fascinating, an amazing statement, from one of the most notable and interesting men of the age.

The occasion was the recent death of Professor William James, Harvard's distinguished psychologist, and the alleged reappearance or "manifestation" of Professor James's soul on earth.

The newspapers have been teeming with the subject. The psychic researchers are even now quarrelling bitterly over it. The public is puzzled.

Therefore, I turned to Edison, who has solved for us so many puzzling problems. The existence of the soul, of life after death, has lately become largely a scientific question. Professor James, who, if not a confessed Spiritualist, was very close to the border, worked wholly along scientific lines.

No one has studied the minutiae of science with greater care than Edison. I determined, therefore, to find out what were his conclusions. And the result, as I have said, was amazing, fascinating.

Searching the inner structure of all things for the fundamental, Edison told me he had come to the conclusion that there is no "supernatural," or "supernormal," as the psychic researchers put it—that all there is, that all there has been, all there ever will be, can or will, soon or late, be explained along material lines.

He denied the individuality of the human being, declaring that each human being is an aggregate, as a city is an aggregate. No just judge would, in these modern days of clearing vision, punish or reward an entire city full; therefore future reward and punishment for human beings seems to him unreasonable. Immortality of the human soul seems as unreasonable. He does not, indeed, admit existence of a soul.

A merciful and loving Creator he considers not to be believed in. Nature, the supreme power, he recognises and respects, but does not worship. Nature is not merciful and loving, but wholly merciless, indifferent. He hints, but does not say, that he believes discoveries of vast import will be made by man among the hidden mysteries of life, but thinks the present wave of "psychic study" is conducted on wrong lines—lines which are so utterly at fault that it is most unlikely they ever will produce important information.

"I cannot believe in the immortality of the soul," he said to me, as, with his eyes closed tightly while concentrated in deep thought, he sat the other day in the great dim library which forms his private quarters in the tremendous works known as his "laboratory," at Orange, N. J.

"Heaven? Shall I, if I am good and earn reward, go to heaven when I die? No, no. I am not I—I am not an individual; I am an aggregate of cells, as, for instance, New York City is an aggregate of individuals. Will New York City go to heaven?"

The perfecter of the telegraph, inventor of the megaphone, the phonograph, the aeroplane, the incandescent lamp and lighting system, and more than seven hundred other things, raised his massive head and looked at me with eyes which did not see me because the mind behind them was busy searching the vast mysteries of our existence. "I do not think we are individuals at all," he went on slowly. "The illustration I have used is good. We are not individuals any more than a great city is an individual.

"If you cut your finger and it bleeds, you lose cells. They are the individuals. You don't know them—you don't know your cells any more than New York City knows its five millions of inhabitants. You don't know who they are.

No, all this talk of an existence for us, as individuals, beyond the grave is wrong. It is born of our tenacity of life—our desire to go on living—our dread of coming to an end as individuals. I do not dread it, though. Personally, I cannot see any use of a future life."

"But the soul?" I protested. "The soul—"

"Soul? Soul? What do you mean by soul? The brain?"

"Well, for the sake of argument, call it the brain, or what is in the brain. Is there not something immortal of or in the human brain—the human mind?"

"Absolutely no," he said with emphasis. "There is no more reason to believe that any human brain will be immortal than there is to think that one of my phonographic cylinders will be immortal. My phonographic cylinders are mere records of sounds which have been impressed upon them.

Under given conditions, some of which we do not at all understand, any more than we understand some of the conditions of the brain, the phonographic cylinders give off these sounds again. For the time being we have perfect speech, or music, practically as perfect as is given off by the tongue when the necessary forces are set in motion by the brain.

Yet no one thinks of claiming immortality for the cylinders or the phonograph. Then why claim it for the brain mechanism or the power that drives it? Because we don't know what this power is, shall we call it immortal? As well call electricity immortal because we do not know what it is.

The brain, like the phonographic cylinder, is a mere record, not of sounds alone, but of other things which have been impressed upon it by the mysterious power which actuates it. Perhaps it would be better if we called it a recording office, where records are made and stored. But no matter what you call it, it is a mere machine, and even the most enthusiastic soul theorist will concede that machines are not immortal.

If a man has a strong will he can force his brain to do this thing or that—make this effort, abstain from making that one."

"Is the will a part of the brain?"

"I do not know. It may or it may not be. The will may be a form of electricity or it may be a form of some other power of which we as yet know nothing. But whatever it is, it is material; on that we may depend.

After death the force, or power, we call will undoubtedly endures; but it endures in this world, not in the next. And so with the thing we call life, or the soul—mere speculative terms for a material thing which, under given conditions, drives this way or that. It too endures in this world, not the other.

Because we are as yet unable to understand it, we call it immortal. It is the ignorant, lazy man's refuge. There are plenty of savages, you know, who still call fire immortal. That is because they are undeveloped, and are too lazy and ignorant to change their present state. This speculative idea of immortality needs but be analysed to fall wholly to the ground."

"Along what lines shall we analyse it?"

"You may approach it from a dozen different directions and, if you are sincere and in earnest, the result will be the same—it falls. For our purpose we may go back to the cell theory.

We are, as you know, made up, each part of us is made up, of millions of cells. These cells are not absolutely independent, any more than you, as an individual living in New York City, are independent; but each cell is an individual. You are a part of the city, as each cell is a part of you.

Why should you, a collection of cells, be immortal as a collection any more than New York City, a collection of individuals, should be immortal as a collection? Its citizens are continually dying, moving away, and being replaced; your cells are continually dying, moving away, and being replaced.

This world is made up of collections. Your intelligence is the aggregate intelligence of all the cells of which you are made up. Each cell is really a machine, and together all the cells form a greater machine. The brain is a part of the machine.

The brain immortal? No; the brain is a piece of meat-mechanism—nothing more than a wonderful meat-mechanism.

As far as I can figure it out, it is the cells which have the intelligence. You cut your thumb, and the cells rush out—or in—a horde of individuals to heal the wound. You see? What I have said expresses it."

The world-famous inventor smiled whimsically. "Again, you are, and every human being is, an aggregate of cells, as New York City is an aggregate of individuals. Will New York City go to heaven?"

"Have you investigated psychic phenomena at all?"

"We don't know enough yet of psychic matters, so called, to even experiment and investigate intelligently."

I asked another question, and he either did not hear me or did not wish to take up the new subject at that moment.

"This brain of ours," he said instead, "is a queer and wonderful machine. What is known as the Fold of Brocca, at its base, is where lie stored our lingual impressions in the order in which they are received. There, for instance, is where our knowledge of our mother tongue is stored. It is definitely stored there, and there is definitely where it is stored, just as if that part of the brain was the particular phonographic cylinder on which it had been recorded. Machinery, pure and simple.

A man was injured at Kensington Museum, London, by an umbrella. The injury affected only the lower part of his Fold of Brocca. He was a highly educated man. He lost his knowledge of the English language at once, but he did not lose his knowledge of the few words of French he had



learned nor his fairly thorough knowledge of Greek—impressions recorded after his mother tongue.

Doesn't that prove that the brain is like a phonographic cylinder? Why should it be immortal? It is merely a machine.

No, we are not individuals, we are aggregates, and we are aggregates made up of mighty little things. There are, for instance, 125,000,000 fibres in the nerve cord which leads from each eye to the brain.

Our matter is of very fine grain. There are many pieces of us. Or, to go back to the city simile, we are very densely populated. If you want to read a fine book, get *Brain and Personality*, by Thompson."

Edison's face in repose is only a little more deeply lined than it was ten years ago, but when I asked him again about the psychic, many unsuspected wrinkles came quickly into being.

"No, I don't go into study of the psychic much," he said, but the little wrinkles showed that perhaps he had given the matter more thought than his words indicated. "There is a great field there," he said, after a long pause. "A great field—for other men." Another pause. Then, as he lifted his head and looked up at the gallery which circles the vast room:

"There is a great field there for other men, and that may be the next great field to be developed—by real scientists, I mean. What are we? You don't know, and I don't know. Maybe you have tried to find out. I have, certainly—tried hard. We may be mere whorls in the ether. The ether! What is it? What is in it? There is something there, but we don't know. It is a mystery—a mystery like that greatest of all mysteries—the mystery of what passes between the north and south poles of the magnet."

"Are the people who are going in for psychic research accomplishing important things?" He shook his head as if he very much regretted that he must give a negative reply. "I don't think these people—those who have been the subjects of most talk along those lines, at least—are the type of persons who will really find out much. They are not of the type of those who really get to the real bottom of things.

You see, the present investigators are desirous of believing. That is not the attitude of mind with which to best approach investigation of any sort. If you are anxious to believe, you are likely to believe on insufficient evidence. I know how that is myself.

I remember once when I was experimenting with certain ores I proved that. I selected at what I thought was random certain pieces of the ore to assay. I assayed them very carefully, intelligently, and scientifically, and they showed 20 per cent. I then took the same ore in quantities, and crushed it, and assayed it, and it showed 17 per cent.

That puzzled me. I tried again and again, and each time the same result. I could not understand it. So I went again to the ore heap, shut my eyes, and grabbed, taking whatever pieces of ore I happened first to touch. Proceeding thus, the ore taken from the heap assayed the same as the crushed ore. But if I took pieces while my eyes were open I always took bits which assayed high. It did not matter that I tried with all my will to be absolutely fair in my selections. I could not be so long as I kept my eyes open. I had to shut my eyes in order to get my 17 per cent.—my truly average—samples. Will power and determination to be fair and honest did not count. That's what's the matter with the psychic research people. But the field which now seems so mysterious will be explored some day, and it will yield—yield very richly. I don't know of any man to-day who is fitted to explore it; but the man will rise when the time is ripe, and he is ripe. Some day, somewhere in the world, will come another man like Mendeleff, and such a man will solve the mysteries."

He leaned forward in his chair and took from the top of his desk a cabinet photograph. It showed signs of frequent handling—the edges were a little worn and the corners were a little rounded. But the handling had been very careful—most respectful—that was plain. It was the picture of an old and intellectual-looking man. Down in the corner was the name of a St. Petersburg photographer. He handed it to me, keeping his eyes thoughtfully upon it as it passed.

"That's Mendeleff," said he. "See his autograph down at the bottom? I am glad I have that photograph, and that it bears the autograph.

"Mendeleff was the discoverer of the periodic system. He generalised. That's what the psychic research people must eventually do. They certainly must generalise, else they will never really accomplish much. A great generaliser will come some day whose interests will lie along those lines, and when that man comes he will reveal much to us.

Existing experimenters seem to be working, all of them, with details. This great generaliser will not work with details, he will not call his work 'psychical research.' He will study the problem with an especially adapted intelli-

gence and on broad lines, and he will work through the material."

He emphasised these words and then repeated them. "He will work through the material—through material things—and that man will succeed.

The things with which all scientists who really accomplish anything experiment are material things. The psychicists have therefore been going at their work from the wrong end first. To solve the riddle we shall have to begin investigation at the beginning—and we don't know yet where the beginning is."

Mr. Edison was still looking at the photograph of Mendeleff. Plainly he believed the great Russian might have been the man if he had lived.

"That Russian is dead," he said slowly. "Now, where is his Will? He was a very great man. His Will was the greatest part of him. What has become of that Will? What has become of that Will?" He paused again, then shook his head again. "I don't know."

"There comes in again," I said, "the question of immortality. For that Will to have entirely ceased to exist when Mendeleff's body died would indicate a loose system in nature, would it not?"

"It would seem so," Mr. Edison replied, "and yet nature's systems—nature's methods—are not loose. It's hard to figure out. Perhaps matter is getting to be more progressive. That may be it. But God—the Almighty? No!" And he shook his head emphatically.

"Mercy, Kindness, Love. I don't see them. Nature is what we know. We do not know the gods of the religions. And Nature is not kind, or merciful, or loving. If God made me—the fabled God of the three qualities of which I spoke, mercy, kindness, love—he also made the fish I catch and eat. And where does his mercy, kindness, and love for that fish come in? No! Nature made us. Nature did it all, not the gods of the religions. And Nature did it mercilessly; she had no thought for or against mercy. She did it impersonally—what we call cruelly." Again the genius smiled his smile of whimsy. "Nature seems to be a very undesirable member of society." Then, suddenly, he looked straight at me.

"Now, I am going to ask you a question," he said abruptly. "What are you here for—here on earth I mean." I could not answer him. I hesitated. "I don't know," I finally replied.

He nodded, as if I had said precisely what he had expected me to say.

"Well, there you are. We do not understand; we cannot understand. We are too finite to understand. The really big things we cannot grasp as yet. Our speculations are not even creditably intelligent. They cannot be intelligent till we have developed so that we can understand things better, grasp more. We can't comprehend infinity, we can't comprehend space. We have found that out. We know it. Then—well—"

He leaned back in his chair, and, for the first time in five minutes, seemed to see the things which were around him. To watch him as he talks and thinks is fascinating.

As he approaches a point in conversation he becomes astonishingly more vital, although it is not through movement that his access of vitality is evidenced—it is by the expression of his face. Sometimes as his thought grows tense, he even flushes, as a man might who was making a considerable physical effort.

I went back to the matter of psychical research, and asked him if he had been impressed by the experiments made with Eusapia Palladina, the Italian woman who convinced Lombroso that she was quite genuine as a medium, but who is said to have been proved to be an impostor in New York.

"There is nothing in such cases that would either prove or disprove the existence of life after death," he replied. "I do not deny that there may be a higher sense than those which we have at present developed, but if such a sense is now being developed it is material. I am inclined to think we are developing new senses. Animals have done it when their changing environment required it, so why should not men do it?"

Take the case of the carrier pigeon and the case of the Indian. Their lives, their safety demanded of them an actual sense of direction, a sense which would guide them with accuracy without thought, without landmarks, without maps or compass. Nature filled the want.

Put you or me out in a trackless wilderness, with nothing to direct us, and we would be quite at a loss. Do the same thing with the carrier pigeon or the Indian, and he will not hesitate, or will hesitate but for an instant before he starts on a true lane for home. This instinct did not develop in all creatures, it developed only in such creatures as had actual need of it.

It may be that the needs presented by our changing environment will give the human race new senses now



ungnessed. Sometimes prodigies may point the way—forecast it—but I doubt that.

But there are queer things—things not to be in any measure understood at present, or to be explained by application of known laws. I have had one actual experience with such a case—one only, but that one was remarkable. A man one day came, like the Wandering Jew, here to my laboratory. He did not tell me who he was or where he came from, he made no explanation whatsoever except:

'I have come to show you something wonderful. I am going to astound you.'

I did not know but the man might possibly be dangerous, although he did not look so, and I called a man in from another room. The visitor then told this man to write some names upon a slip of paper.

He had him write the names in such a manner that he could not possibly by any trick see what he wrote by means of ordinary vision, and he did not touch the piece of paper. But he put his hand upon the man and read off the names correctly, as if they had been held before his eyes.

Mind you, the man had written the names on the paper secretly, had folded the paper tightly, and, every minute afterward, had kept it tightly clasped in his closed fist. The thing astonished me; but I decided that it must be a mere trick, so I said:

'May I try that?'

'Certainly,' said he.

I then arranged things so that I was absolutely alone with him in the room, so that I was certain there was no trickery. It was my own room in my own building. I knew all about it. I was well aware that strange things can be done through hypnosis, and, to guard against his exercising any influence of that sort on me, and thus duping me, I kept a problem in my mind, and kept my mind working on it. Then I asked him if I might ask him a few questions, and again he answered, 'Certainly. Write them.'

I was at that time experimenting with my storage battery, and was in doubt about it. I did not feel quite sure that I was on exactly the right track.

'Is there anything better for a storage battery than nickel-hydroxide?' I wrote upon a paper secretly.

'No,' he answered, without opening the paper, 'there is nothing better,' and immediately went away.

I have never heard of him or seen him since. He had seemed to wait until I had asked that question and he answered it, and then, satisfied, departed. It seemed almost as if he had come there for the purpose of answering that question and setting my mind at ease.

He was quite right. There is, I now am certain, nothing better for a storage battery than nickel-hydroxide.

That man did do this strange thing. That is one reason why I say that we may develop a new sense or more than one new sense, in the course of time, but it will be material.

The earth, the air, the sea and, above all, space, contain all sorts of things of which we now know absolutely nothing. There is a fascinating realm of speculation there, and speculation, sometimes, is a dangerous thing. It has led some honest folks astray, and will lead other honest folks astray.

But careful, exact, scientific investigation will reveal new things, and accident will reveal others. Great forces, material forces, undoubtedly exist, under our very noses, of which we know at present absolutely nothing.

An example of one which was revealed to us after many years of lying plain enough, but quite unknown, beneath our very noses, is the X-ray. That thing was uncanny—that X-ray.

And the Hertzian waves; there was another. As we sit here in this room there may be fifty wireless messages passing through it, known to the man who sends them, known to the man who receives them, but utterly unknown to us. How many other things may also be occurring here of which we are quite ignorant?

"We must develop the senses before we can get more out of life. That man may do this is not in the least incredible. New conditions will bring new necessities, new necessities bring new discoveries, both through concentrated effort and what may be called accident—that is, that sort of accident which comes when men put themselves in the way of it.

The X-ray and the ray of radium were discovered through this sort of accident. Neon, crypton, xenon—all these were discovered accidentally to all practical intents and purposes.

Chemical analyses were being made of certain substances, and they did not check up. This showed that something was existent which had not been recognised as being there, and investigation was thus stimulated. It resulted in the discovery of these elements. But they were all results of organised investigation. In other words, if we don't go fishing we won't catch any fish. A lot of us are fishing nowadays.

The psychic forces? The supernatural? Merely words for perfectly natural things which as yet we do not understand."

"Will all the phenomena which men call 'psychic' now be eventually explained and understood as manifestations of natural laws?"

"If it is ever explained, undoubtedly. I have read 'ROENTGEN' through thirty-six inches of solid wood. That would probably have been considered supernatural, 'supernormal,' at one time. But now the scientist is prepared to find anything along purely natural or normal lines.

It would be hard to really astonish us. We are learning how to do all sorts of things to make life comfortable; we shall keep on learning.

I believe, for instance, that the time will come when a man with a bad kidney, if he has good money, will be able to go into the open market and purchase a good kidney of someone else who has a good one, but who needs the money more than he needs the kidney, and have it inserted in the place of his imperfect one. We shall, I think, be able to repair the body much more cleverly than we do now, and more effectively, even to the extent of replacing ill or worn-out parts of it with good ones, as we do broken or worn-out parts of an inanimate machine."

"Shall we, in the course of time, discover life's actual source?"

"Oh, I don't know. Those things are pretty small. Too small to find, perhaps. The world, you know, and universe are full of the infinitely small as well as the infinitely great. We are, as I said early in this talk, all aggregates. To get us down to the ultimate division—to trace life down to its ultimate source—well, I don't know —"

I'll tell you what is very wonderful and very modern. It is the ultra-microscope. The ultra-microscope is getting to be a great thing. We can't tell what it will reveal.

Light, striking on an object of a certain size, vibrates at the rate of four-hundred-million-million times a second as it goes into color above the violet. That is too fast for the human eye, and, hitherto, the things which might have been revealed by this extraordinary light have been concealed from us because our eyes could not make use of such incredibly fast vibrations. But the ultra-microscope permits us to actually see the things revealed by the ultra-violet rays—things which, until this instrument was invented, were as invisible to us as things existent where there is no light at all.

This microscope makes four photographs—makes four simultaneous photographs from four different angles. In these photographs we indirectly see the things which we cannot see directly.

Among the revelations of the photographs, so far, have been the Brownian movements, and by means of them it is hoped that, eventually, we may be actually enabled to see the inner structure of matter. Thus, through the use of three-thousand-million-million light waves per second, we hope to learn the facts about the molecule. Strange business, isn't it? But when we know the inner facts about the molecule — We shall never be able to actually see them, directly, with the human eye, probably, but we shall be able to see those four photographs, and from them, perhaps—perhaps —"

"You have demolished much of the old, suggested much that is new," I ventured. "Shall we ever really solve the problems of our What and Why?"

"I'll be darned if I know," he replied.

## Anti-Cant Tickles; or, Pith and Pepper.

BY A TWENTIETH CENTENARIAN.

Forewords.

PHILOLATRY.

I HAVE no intention of wounding the feelings of many really good people, or to throw ridicule and discredit upon those nobler truths of religion which are the salt of the earth; but (unfortunately) there are thick disguising crusts of traditional whitewash on the faces of all our statuesque sainthoods which badly need chipping and peeling off, in order to reveal their true underlying forms.

This sheepish, conventional credulosity should be laughed out of existence, for one should detest humbug and hypocrisy, more particularly in the domain of man's highest emotions and conceptions.

I have lived in the East, and I assert, without care for contradiction, that the dwellers in the Holy Land to-day (bad as they are) show some improvement upon the blood-thirsty races which we so absurdly and angelically idealise — by enchanting distance—in the pages of our Sacred Books.



The amazement is, that plain folks are blandly expected to accept as *literal truth* the crude pietistic descriptions of anonymous Oriental scribes, who, to-day, are still utterly unable to pen a plain, straightforward history of anything without invoking the implied Divine approval, or its reverse.

These writers weigh and appreciate the value of words no more than you could understand the intricacies of Turkish currency; the value of which varies in every district of that Holy Empire.

I have, therefore, no compunction about digging my pen into the hippopotamus hides of mere thoughtless word-worshippers, in the faint hope of thereby probing some responsive nerve.

To expect terminological exactitude from the Orient is to expect a miracle—and expect it in vain.

Yet you worship every human word; like that infallible Pope who issued a Standard Vulgate, and anathematised horribly anyone who should *alter a word of it*; but which, when printed, contained six hundred errata!

How many of you suspect, even to-day, that religion, like everything else, is the outcome of man's evolution, and did not drop down ready-made any more than his body did?

#### CANT AND HYPOCRISY.

I come from boundless Humbug-lands where men can twist like snakes; I come to lands of "common sense"—but startled wonder wakes.

Is humbug all of Eastern growth, and common sense our rule; have we no superstitions left and not one single fool?

I find each greedy charlatan, from banker down to witch, all dipping in the golden soup to fish out something rich.

The pious and sleekest cheat works most successfully; yet he, of all the humbuggers, should decorate a tree?

Men seem as blind as puppies are; they hide God's name with pelf; scarce any knows his neighbor much, and, least of all, himself.

Contentment is a jewel rare that will not soon be found among these scrambling moneygrubs on their Tom Tiddler's ground.

Their paunch is full, their purse is full, yet they need more, I doubt. Ambition drives them like a fiend—What is it all about?

The world's a stage, and honor goes according to one's clothes, and frauds, if plausible, can cheat, and so the humbug grows.

O, England, Leader of the World! (Though cynic nations scoff, you still are best of all the bunch.) Peel, peel such humbug off!

Blind are you as nocturnal owls, that in broad daylight blink, with eyes and heads swelled up with fat—My God! What can one think?

What centuries of Science, Art, and Learning have been there; yet truths of life so lamely creep, it nigh makes one despair.

#### THE BOGIE MAN.

The animals that roam the wilds, the birds that sing and soar, attend to all their own affairs, but man can do much more.

He makes a hopeless hash of life, and lives by hook and crook; but when you ask him, "What is Heaven?" *he knows it like a book.*

(To be continued.)

#### "OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN."

We feel too much, we know too little,  
We gaze behind us and before;  
The magic wand of faith, grown brittle,  
Breaks in our grasp; our dream is o'er.

Our love and hate have aims, but thine  
Are idle bolts at random hurl'd,  
Impotent, hiddden, yet divine,  
Brood o'er thy broken-hearted world.

Cold to the prayer of human sorrow,  
Deaf to the sob of human strife,  
Thou workest grandly, night and morrow,  
On thy great masterpiece of life!

For thine own pleasure is it done,  
Since art's delight is in the doing,  
Thine own enjoyment, slowly won,  
Is the sole end thou art pursuing.

—Robert Buchanan.

Aunt Abby: "The minister is going to lecture on 'The Manners and Customs of the South Sea Islanders.'"  
Uncle Ben: "Is that so? I knew they had customs, but I never s'posed they had any manners."

#### The Highest Heaven.

I KNOW a Man whose treasured things are few,  
And simple, like the honeysuckle curled  
About his cottage porch, or like the dew;  
And yet he would not change them for the world.

With them he has no wish for any thing;  
Without them he would have no wish to live;  
'Tis death to human hearts where Love is king  
To throb alone, and have much love to give.

There are his human friends, like purest gold,  
Dearer than phantom Christ and Seraphim;  
Men talk of Heaven, where love grows never cold,  
But love of friends is Heaven enough for him.

There are his book-friends, waiting all in rows  
To comfort him in need, and soothe, and charm,  
Or fire his thoughts anew when fervor goes—  
Brave Shelley and Carlyle, and old Khayyam.

Some of his friends are pictures; there are six  
Around his den—a blue Italian bay  
And five portraits of mighty heretics—  
I saw a Bruno hanging there to-day.

Across the fields a bell calls men to God,  
But from the garden drifts the hum of bees;  
What need for church and priest, while from yon sod  
White daisies spring, and birds chirp in the trees?

Among these treasured friends he works and lives;  
And all the sweet companionship he gave  
To pale dead Christ in other years, he gives  
To living things, frail creatures of the earth  
Whose smile can yet be highest heaven, and worth  
A thousand phantom heavens beyond the grave.

THOMAS MOULT.

#### National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON NOV. 24.

The President, Mr. G. W. Foote, in the chair. There were also present:—Messrs. Barry, Cohen, Charlton, Dobson, Heaford, Lloyd, Lazarnick, Moss, Quinton, Roger, Rosetti, Samuels, Silverstein, Shore, Thurlow, Theakstone.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed, and the monthly cash statement presented and adopted.

Twenty-seven new members were admitted to the Parent Society or from the following Branches:—Bothnal Green, Birmingham, Islington, Maesteg, and Stockport.

An application from the Camberwell Branch for a grant to aid in defraying expenses incurred by outdoor propaganda was received. The application was granted.

Arrangements were also made for propaganda in Finsbury Park next season.

In view of the coming Parliamentary Election, the President called the serious attention of the representatives of Branches present to their duty, as Freethinkers, to see that all candidates were questioned as to their attitude towards the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws and also towards Secular Education. In order to assist in this matter, it was resolved that 5,000 copies of Mr. G. W. Foote's leaflet, "Laws Against Religious Liberty," in which the necessary questions were clearly set forth, should be at once printed and supplied gratuitously upon application.

On account of the Christmas holidays, the meeting was adjourned to the first Thursday in January.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

#### CHILDISH WISDOM.

During a visit of Bishop L — to one of his parishioners, who was entertaining a Sunday-school class of little boys, he inquired of them the meaning of an "episcopal visitation." After a profound silence, little Johnnie, at the rear of the class, arose and said: "It is an affliction sent by God."

#### HE WAITED.

Convict: "Yes, lady, I always made it a point never to rob a house on Christmas Eve."

Philanthropist: "The fact does you credit."

Convict: "Thanks, lady. Ye see, it's always best to wait till Christmas night. By then the presents are all unpacked an' layin' around loose, so yer kin estimate them better."



**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.**

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Public (Minor) Hall, Canning Town): 7.30, W. Davidson, "The Happy Family."

**OUTDOOR.**

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

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Highbury Corner): 12 noon, Ivan Paperno and S. J. Cook.

**COUNTRY.****INDOOR.**

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (King's Hall, Corporation-street): A. B. Moss, 3. "The Philosophy of Life in the Twentieth Century"; 7, "My Recollections of Charles Bradlaugh."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon and 6.30, Joseph McCabe, Lectures.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, "The Influence of Religious Beliefs on Morals."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): W. Herford, 3. "The Triumphs of International Freethought"; 7, "Francisco Ferrer: A Memorial Tribute."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): C. Cohen, 3, "Ideas as Social Forces"; 6.30, "Christianity and the Logic of Life." Tea at 5.

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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.

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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,

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