

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE

Everything is relative; that is the only absolute proposition.—AUGUSTE COMTE.

A Bishop's Blarney.

"PROVIDENCE" has rather a way of providing people with something gruesome at Christmas. This year we were treated to a frightful pit disaster in which more than 840 men have perished. They were literally hurled "out of time into eternity." And if time is necessary to "get right with God"—to use a Torreyism—it is to be feared that most, if not all, of them have gone to a worse pit than the one in which they met the only deaths they will ever know.

What a horrible idea, that the majority of those honest, hardworking fellows, pursuing one of the most dangerous of callings, and that for a very poor living, have gone from Pretoria Pit to the Pit of Hell! Yet that is what must have happened if Christianity, orthodox Christianity, real Christianity, be true. This conception informs what Dr. Johnson regarded as the most awful passage in *Hamlet*—the passage in which Hamlet refuses to kill the king while he is at his prayers, and resolves to wait and catch him—

"When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed,
At gaming, swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't;
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
As hell, whereto it goes."

That is how Shakespeare had to express it in an age that believed in a literal hell and everlasting fire. And the awfulness of it was not apparent to Shakespeare's contemporaries as it was to the later and more softened mind of Dr. Johnson. They firmly believed in a God who tortured *his* enemies for ever and ever, and why should they shrink from the idea of serving *theirs* in the same fashion?

Shakespeare was not expressing his own beliefs, sentiments, and character in that tremendous passage; like a true dramatist, he wrote as the interpreter of other men's thoughts in a given situation; and this particular thought had to be put into the mouth of Hamlet, sceptical as he was, because there was no other way of expressing what would have occurred to nine out of every ten in an early seventeenth century audience if the villain was to be slain at the moment when he stood the best chance of winning heaven.

But we are diverging a long way from the tragedy of the Pretoria Pit. Shakespeare, however, is so fascinating a subject that we may hope to be excused. He allures one even "in the lap of horror."

Amongst the crowd near the pithead on the Thursday, while the entombed men were still lying dead below, were a number of clergymen. Dean Welldon was there, for one, making his way from group to group, and "bringing encouragement and comfort wherever he went." *Encouragement and comfort!*—with all those shattered and blistered dead bodies waiting to be brought to the surface, and recognised by the yearning eyes of suffering love, or cast on the heap of human *débris*. For all the "comfort" and "encouragement" he could give Dean Welldon might as well have been sailing a yacht in the Mediterranean. Words are cheap enough.

What the poor women and children waiting, waiting, waiting wanted was their husbands, brothers, sons, and fathers. The very idea of "comfort" and "encouragement" while the dead were down in the pit, and some few perhaps still alive in their pain, was simply a treachery. This sort of "comfort" is the comfort that Tennyson sings of as "scorned of devils." It is too mean for honest human nature.

Brave men were risking their lives down in the pit, and some losing them, in rescue work; and the gentlemen of the third sex, as Sydney Smith called them, were talking professional nonsense in safety overhead. We will not trouble about the Rev. This and Father That, or the representatives of William Booth. They know their business—and so do we. We want to fly at higher game. It was the day previous that saw the Bishop of Manchester on the scene. His lordship stood on a heap of cinders, surrounded by a crowd of weeping women and children, whom he asked to sing "Jesu, lover of my soul," and when they had got through the satirical performance his lordship (according to the *Daily Chronicle*) delivered himself of the following "few words":—

"I am here, my dear friends, for nothing but just to show from my heart how I feel for those that are mourning. My heart beats for them. I pray to our God and Heavenly Father to comfort them in their sorrow, and this, I think, we may do together. We may offer prayer to God our Father on behalf of those who are down below, and that if they are now living He may be pleased to grant that they be rescued and brought safely up."

What hypocritical nonsense is this! The Bishop of Manchester knew very well that the dead were dead, and that the living would not be rescued by God's pleasure, permission, or assistance, but solely by the generous efforts of men—mere *men*—who feared no danger when the lives of comrades were at stake. The plainest common sense suggests that if this "God" of Bishop Welldon's was capable of interfering he might have interfered far more wisely and usefully *before* the catastrophe instead of *after*. Was his negligence owing to the fact that the Bishop of Manchester had not arrived to advise him what to do?

If those poor women at the pithead had not been brought up to listen with reverence to pious absurdities, and to look with awe upon wealthy and titled representatives of one who taught "Blessed be ye poor" and "Call no man master," they would have shouted to the Bishop "Away with you! We do not want you or your God. We want our men."

The Bishop of Manchester's salary is £4,200 a year, and Dean Welldon has £1,500 a year for helping him. From a mere commercial point of view, they are entitled to get what they can—and keep it. Our quarrel with them is on account of what they *say* they are, and what they *are*. We say that their taking all that money as representatives of "the poor Carpenter of Nazareth," and going over from their snug quarters in Manchester to the Pretoria Pit, and talking in the name of Christ to people of whom whole families live on thirty shillings a week, and dispensing "comfort" and "encouragement" to poor bereaved women a thousand times more sincere and useful than themselves, is worse than thimble-rigging and the confidence trick.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Reign of Cant.

THE General Election has come and gone. For a month the air has been vocal with the vices of one party and the virtues of the other, but which owned the vices and which the virtues depended altogether upon which party the speaker supported. Probably most of the speakers really believed in their opponent's vices—while they were speaking. The power of the human animal for self-deception is simply enormous. Probably, also, these speakers would all admit in private, or when the heat of the battle was over, that those on the opposite side were not quite what the speeches had painted them—that a Radical was not necessarily bent on robbery nor a Conservative on plunder. But they would, at the same time, justify their speeches by the reflection that they were all "playing the game." All parties acted in the same manner; the people looked for it, and candidates would fail to arouse enthusiasm if they acted otherwise. And in any case, they might argue, little harm was done because thoughtful people were not deceived at all, and even those who were deceived quickly recovered from their illusion.

Party followers, too, were waiting before the election for a pronouncement from their leaders as to what opinions they were to express, and what war-cries were to be used. And the party leaders—who lead because they follow—were equally concerned to find out what were the unexpressed opinions of their followers, or what opinions might secure their support. Thus the "leader" leads because he voices the prejudices of his followers. The followers follow because they see their own prejudices offered them by someone with a louder voice or a greater gift of verbal presentation. That a leader should lead because he is a clearer thinker, has greater moral courage, or indicates new lines of progress, is not to be thought of. Or, if a few do think thus, they are so few as not to be worth conciliation.

If this insincerity, self-delusion, and lack of independence were characteristic of election times only, the harm done would be trifling. It might even, in a way, act as a kind of safety valve. Unfortunately, a general election only offers a special illustration of a widespread condition of things. The number of people capable of really independent thinking always represents the minority in a nation. Those who have, at the same time, the courage to express their thoughts, represent a still smaller number. Society at large cares little for independent thought, still less for fearless speech. It reads and listens not so much for instruction or stimulation as to see its own prejudices placed before it in the most attractive manner. The man or woman who breaks in on the closed circle of ideas that forms the mental furniture of most people is not hailed as a deliverer—he is hated as a disturber. Against the assertive individuality of the few is arrayed the coercive gregariousness of the many. Society, as Emerson put it, is in a conspiracy against the manhood of its members. It promises protection at the price of individuality; and this conspiracy of society against its creative individualities is in final analysis the one great obstacle to reform. Expressed dogmatism may be fought and conquered. In the act of expression dogmatism reveals its weakness and challenges opposition. But the apathetic conformity of the crowd provides no individual strength to which an appeal may be made, no consciousness of mental independence that may be roused to activity. There is only apathy, delusion, cultivated ignorance, and against these even the gods are powerless.

Greatest of all the forces that make for the maintenance and prevalence of this frame of mind is religion. The note of insincerity, evasion, subterfuge, runs through the modern religions. Preachers, one feels, would not believe as they do if they had the courage to submit their beliefs to careful examination and the ability to appreciate the weight of evidence. And even with those that are of a bolder

and more able type, what they discard makes us more than ever suspicious of what they retain. It is impossible not to feel that they who *say* so much must *know* a great deal more, which is not said because of the consequences that would follow. Preachers do not speak out because of their congregations; congregations maintain an outward conformity because of their preachers. One-half the world is busy inoculating the other half with the virus of hypocrisy in the interests of honesty. And the pressure of the mass is brought to bear against the few who have the courage to step out of the beaten ruts.

For the peculiar feature of all punishment—legal or social—for heresy, whether the heresy be of a religious, a social, or a political nature, is that it punishes courage and honesty only. The man who will tell a lie or act one escapes scot free. It is like promising a boy a thrashing if he tells you the truth—with the inevitable result that he tells you a lie. The necessity for a religious qualification could not shut out a *dishonest* Atheist from any office in any State. But it could, and does, shut out all the honest ones. Among all the people burnt by the Christian Church for heresy, there was not put to death a single sturdy liar. The Church could bag only the honest heretics, because only the honest ones would say what they were. And it is surely a delightful and truly Christian arrangement which provides that heresy added to lying may prosper, but heresy added to honesty and courage shall be sternly repressed.

Curiously enough, the most mischievous punishments for heresy are not those that are legally enforced—even when the law is sternly and persistently applied. In England a king is not supposed to have political opinions. He is permitted to have opinions in religious matters, but here no one bothers about them. They go with his office, they are fixed by law, and it is quite recognised that his private opinions might be different to those selected for him. So with the rest of the people. Where people are legally compelled to profess a particular opinion, the profession may be made without one sinking either in one's own estimation or in that of one's neighbors. The compulsion is obvious, and it is generally recognised that conformity under such conditions is no indication of conviction, any more than a Republican paying—through taxation—a part of the King's income would indicate a belief in monarchy. In such cases the conformity is wholly on the surface; the hypocrisy does not bite so deep as in another instance to be mentioned, and does not have such a cankerous effect on the character.

The morally mischievous conformity is that enforced by social custom and opinion. If for no other reason, because it is in operation at all times and under all forms. A legal enactment must be consciously and openly applied, and can only be set in operation in specified cases. A social enactment may be applied in all sorts of disguises, and in an almost infinite number of directions. It commences with the child at school; it operates in the choice of a career, in the choosing of a wife; nor does it relax its hold on an individual until he sinks into the grave—and even then it will exert a supervision over his character. Legal restriction would be defied by hundreds who wilt before this many-headed tyrant of social conformity. All people connected with advanced movements will be at no loss to recall cases of characters that have held out for long against this social pressure, only to go under in the end. It is not a case of frank and open surrender. They do not say, I am tired of the struggle; or, I am hopeless of good by struggling; or, I value a position in the world more than aught else; or, I have sons and daughters, and wish to place them in life. Were any or all of these reasons offered, the one who offered them would be acting honestly towards himself and others. Instead of this, his action is covered with a hundred-and-one excuses which serve to blind others and to deceive himself. The *moral* effect of this social coercion is far greater and much more deplorable

than that exercised by any legal coercion that has ever existed.

For this reason I cordially agree with Philip Gilbert Hammerton when he says:—

"It is better for the moral health of a nation when there is to be compulsion of some kind, that it should be boldly and openly tyrannical, that its work should be done in the light of day, that it should be outspoken, uncompromising, complete. To tyranny of such a kind a man may give way without loss of self-respect, he yields to *force majeure*; but to that viler and meaner kind of tyranny which keeps a man in constant alarm about the means of earning his living, about the maintenance of some wretched little peddling position in society, he yields with a sense of far deeper humiliation, with a feeling of contempt for the social power that uses such miserable means, and of contempt for himself also."

The strongest and greatest obstacle to-day to real Freethought, whether religious or political, is this social terrorism which people profess to despise even while they yield to it. It is the last refuge of a detected falsehood, and it can only be broken down by all who disbelieve in the customs and beliefs it defends, saying as much with unmistakable voice and manner. There is only one time suitable for anyone to call a lie by its proper name, and that is the moment they recognise it as such, not to wait until there are singers enough to make a respectable chorus. In this case delay is a real danger. It is usually much more difficult to palter with one's sense of rectitude at the beginning than it is after a long course of dissimulation. Excuses will wait on inclination, and the truth is apt to look less alluring when we contemplate it through the diffracting media of a socially easeful conformity. In strict truth every man who sees a belief to be false, and continues acting as though it were true, is doing what he can to give it a fresh lease of life. Among the mass of the people there is little or no resistance to conformity, little or no insight into the real nature of things, and because of this there is all the more reason for those who see with a clearer vision to speak out.

All opinion brings with it responsibilities. Behind each opinion stretches a long heredity; the individual merely expresses the last stage in the process. Ultimately all opinion belongs to the race, and is one of the chief instruments by the aid of which progress is made. Unbelief thus brings its responsibilities no less than belief, nonconformity as much as conformity. There is no real reason why the heretic should go through life with his mouth closed or his voice attuned to a minor key lest he should hurt the feelings of the believer. There is nothing praiseworthy in paying homage to a lie because it is ancient. This policy has been followed too long, and its practical results are seen in the insincerity and moral cowardice that are among the most deplorable features of contemporary life.

C. COHEN.

The Unseen World.

ONE is profoundly amazed at the utter silliness of many of the arguments employed in the attempt to discredit the doctrines of Freethought. It is taken for granted, in Christian circles, that Freethinkers are ignorant, coarse, and vulgar; that their characters are so awfully corrupt and hideous that the mere contemplation of them excites disgust in the minds of all decent people; and that their one object in advocating unbelief is to drown the voice of conscience. That this estimate of them, as a class, is grossly unjust, most Christians are fully aware, though they are by no means ready to admit it, even to themselves. In the past, unscrupulous abuse was the most effective weapon in the Christian armor, and it is still in constant use by those soldiers of the cross who lack brains, and whose sense of honor does not forbid hitting below the belt. The proverbial wickedness of Freethinkers is even now, with not a

few defenders of the faith, the most conclusive evidence that can be adduced against their cause. Naturally, much of the abuse is aimed at Freethought itself. Bad people are never likely to be found championing a noble cause. Freethought is a wholesale thief. It seeks to rob humanity of its most valuable treasures. It is a conscienceless iconoclast. Nothing is sacred in its sight. No sense of reverence deters it from the commission of the most nefarious and sacrilegious acts. Such is the characterisation of Freethought and Freethinkers indulged in by the professional Christian apologists. Let us now examine it with as much critical care as we can command.

Let us take a concrete example. Freethinkers are charged with endeavoring to do away with the unseen world. As a matter of fact they do nothing of the kind. It is true that they do not believe in the unseen world portrayed by theologians. They refuse to acknowledge the existence of any realm inhabited by supernatural beings and disembodied men and women. Their contention is that such a sphere is a creation of the fancy, and that there is no objective reality corresponding to it. It is fairly well-known now how the belief in deities and ghosts arose, and through how many stages it had to pass before it assumed its present form. Thus, the unseen world of the divines was imagined in consequence of the inability of primitive man to account for certain natural phenomena which he frequently witnessed or experienced. Grant Allen devoted the longest and most interesting of his numerous books to a careful examination of the rise and growth of the great divinities that have been cherished and worshiped by mankind. It is difficult to conceive how it is possible for honest readers of *The Evolution of the Idea of God*, *The Golden Bough*, and other works of that order, to believe in the Christian unseen world. What we hold is that the real unseen world is within the sphere of the natural, and that it is science alone that is competent to deal with it. When the preacher enters this field he mixes things up most hopelessly, and shows his utter lack of the sense of perspective. He says:—

"The unseen things are, after all, the greatest, however we may measure them. Science, in her experiments and attempts to explain life, is ever bearing testimony to this effect. In her search she is constantly confronted with the problems of the unseen. Most of her difficulties are found in this region. She is out to discover the undiscovered, to explore the unexplored, and here is a wonderful field. In this work she is in no sense the enemy of religion, but the helper; and although her equipment may not fit her to go far, she may prepare the way of the Lord, and clear an accumulation of rubbish which impedes the progress of the king."

This is a perfectly typical pulpit utterance. Science does recognise the reality of the unseen, but in so doing renders no help whatever to religion. Even the despicable people labelled "rank Materialists" are enthusiastic upholders of the reality of the invisible; but their invisible things are all material. The atmosphere is just as much matter as a bar of iron; and the same thing is true of the ether. Science laughs to scorn the irrational idea of an immaterial substance. The preacher condescendingly observes that the equipment of science "may not fit her to go far"; but will he kindly inform us what other equipment there is? We even challenge him to do so at his earliest convenience. The truth is that the theologian, as such, possesses no equipment whatever, and is not authorised to go a single step farther than the scientist. "The way of the Lord" and "the progress of the king" do not admit of any sort or degree of verification; and all that the preacher has to say about them he finds in the mythologies of ancient times. He has no equipment for making discoveries in the so-called supernatural universe. There is only one known Universe, and this is partly visible and partly invisible, but wholly material.

"But," the preacher objects, "you surely believe in faith, hope, and love, the three greatest and

grandest things in existence, and they are wholly invisible." So they are; and if the preacher reflects a moment he will realise that they are equally non-existent. They are but mere terms which denote social relations, and nothing more. Faith, hope, and love are relations either between individuals living together or between most living things and their mother Nature. There is a sense in which it is true that the unseen is the fountain out of which the seen flows. There is no denying that what is visible to-day was once invisible, and may become invisible again; but, visible or invisible, it is equally material or physical. This is the latest theory of matter, and this is how Mr. A. J. Balfour put it from the chair of the British Association:—

"To-day there are those who regard gross matter, the matter of everyday experience, as the mere appearance of which electricity is the physical basis; who think that the elementary atom of the chemist, itself far beyond the limits of direct perception, is but a connected system of monads or sub-atoms which are not electrified matter, but are electricity itself.....If gross matter be a grouping of atoms, and if atoms be systems of electrical monads, what are these electrical monads? It may be that, as Professor Larmor has suggested, they are but a modification of the universal ether, a modification roughly comparable to a knot in a medium which is inextensible, incomprehensible, and continuous."

How such a theory of matter can "prepare the way of the Lord," or quicken "the progress of the King" passes human comprehension. Such a theory emphasises the hypothesis that the invisible basis of the visible universe is purely physical. There is nothing in it to suggest, however remotely, the existence of "one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions," nothing that may be regarded as a hint, however slight, of "the things which are not seen," spoken of by St. Paul. No, science does not come to the help of religion at a single point, but it does demonstrate its falseness at some points.

Thus Freethought and Science are in full harmony, so far as their positive teachings are concerned, only Freethought, animated by the scientific spirit, undertakes the task of undermining the Fables of the Above and Beyond. The unseen of science has no affinity of any kind with the unseen of theology, for the latter is an unseen necessitated by no phenomena. The phenomena which led to the belief in God and a spiritual world are now explained on exclusively naturalistic lines. And yet the belief that sprang from the primitive inability to account for them still persists, and is pronounced eternally true by the very people to whom the phenomena present no mystery. In other words, the supernatural interpretation of the phenomena is still preached by men and women who have fully adopted, and are quite satisfied with, the natural interpretation. The utter inconsistency of such behavior is self-evident, and is steadily making for the complete disintegration of the Christian religion.

Now, what has been the utility of the belief in the unseen world of theology. "Wherefore we faint not," says the Apostle Paul. He attributed his courage to his faith in the invisible; and the modern preacher says of him:—

"Of enemies and obstacles there were not a few. Strife and jealousy frequently dogged his steps. He was no stranger to lust, greed, and all kinds of selfishness as they conspired to wreck these little churches he had recently founded. He must have been frequently tempted to think that he had failed in his work. There was so much seeming to point to wasted energy.....He is maligned and constantly held up to public scorn and ridicule, and yet we find him undismayed, and bravely forging ahead in his great work. And why this?..... This was all by the grace of God, this was God's action, the sign of his presence; it was to Paul, God clothing himself with human powers, and with his eye thus upon the invisible he might well write to these Corinthians, 'Wherefore we faint not.'"

That passage deserves careful perusal. There is such a ring about it. But there is absolutely nothing true. Three parts of it could be applied with equal truth to many a Freethinker. What numbers of

them have been "maligned and constantly held up to public scorn and ridicule, and yet have been undismayed and kept forging ahead in their great work. And why this?" It was *not* by the grace of God, it was *not* God's action, nor the sign of his presence; it was simply because they firmly believed in the principles they advocated, and that their mission was for the benefit of mankind. They gloried even in their persecutions, because they were persecutions endured in the service of their fellow-men. They were as serene and cheerful as any Christian apostle that ever lived, though sustained by no supernatural hopes or promises. The other day a prominent Freethinker died in the City of London in his 78th year; and writing of the event a son testifies that, though his last illness was characterised by great suffering, he bore it with marvellous fortitude, and that after a long life of beautiful integrity and quiet usefulness, his end was perfect peace. "*Nothing more lovely could be imagined.*" And yet there was the entire absence of faith in the Christian unseen world. The plea that Freethinkers are miserable wretches, in life or in death, is a total delusion.

At the beginning of another year it is a source of inspiration to know that the belief in the supernatural world is rapidly dying out. There are now Freethought missionaries inside the Churches themselves, and their work is bearing increasing fruit. Within God's own houses they are pulling him down from his throne, and setting Reason up in his place. Altogether, the prospects of Freethought were never as brilliant as they are on this the first day of the year, 1911, which, it is hoped, will be a prosperous and happy one for every reader of this journal.

J. T. LLOYD.

Obiter Dicta.

AN observer does not need to have the wisdom of a patriarch to discover that the dominant characteristics of the present age are froth and flummery. Ruskin has remarked that a nation's greatness is reflected in its architecture; if he were living now, he could justly say that its littleness found expression in the daily papers.

They are the abstract and brief chronicles of our time: at break of day they scream that all is well with the world or otherwise: at night they chant the sun to rest with details of the latest murder.

The sensation-loving public has been well catered for in that respect during the last few weeks, and the hallowed quiet of a respectable English Sunday has given leisure, with the willing assistance of the Sunday papers, to the masses, to study in detail the latest affair of national importance. To the quidnunc students of these engrossing matters, who know why he did it, how he did it, and what he did it for, these papers are ever ready to supply information. What a deplorable state for England to be in, when she has such a large retinue of highly paid priests, whose children demand nothing better than the hogwash supplied by our daily papers!

But, your pragmatist argues, the double-edged tool of knowledge is not for the masses. Freethinkers who fight for the sacred cause of Truth know that the dissemination of Ignorance is easier than the propagation of Reason. Knowing it, they are not dismayed; and as knowledge, applied in the right direction, leads to earthly happiness, their fight is for Humanity's attainment of it. And whose judgment shall decide that the Freethinker's attitude is not the noblest to life and its problems? Is it not better than the Christian's, who thrusts his head in the sack of Faith and complains that he cannot see? In the battle of ideas our opponents always play with the loaded dice of Immortality. The frigid truth of reason, the sole guide of searchers, is silent on this subject. Continuous existence after death must be the last vestige of some savage instinct still slumbering in man, and the medicine-men can still find re-

sponsive signs in that direction. The mystery merchants and their followers of the twentieth century are composed of two classes—the cunning and the ignorant.

Does not history tell, in unmistakable language, the part that the former have played in every country under their baneful influence? And do not poverty and its attendant evils speak eloquently of the latter—Ireland, Russia, Spain, and Italy—countries all in the grip of the priests, and cursed by the enervating atmosphere of religion.

Even in the late Government the pious element kept constantly asserting itself. An Organ Fund, or hymns between speeches, would not have met with much opposition amongst a motley graduated from tabernacles, "men only" meetings, and the precincts of the P. S. A.

The people—simply a shuttlecock to be battered about in turn by every faction in the country, but never to be assisted on the way to social betterment. The bigoted persecution of Bradlaugh is indicative of the vicious forces that are immediately let loose against those leaders who are not afraid to suffer for their convictions as long as truth is on their side.

No abuse was too vile, no slander too gross, to level at this champion of the people. The violence and unrest in his life was but a repetition of the persecution suffered by Thomas Paine. Help the people! Yes, a hundred times the parsonic chorus cries, but only our particular way. Soup-shops, blankets and coals, and all the other stultifying and disreputable adjuncts of a miserable business. Give the patient ass a carrot, but do not dream of knocking off his load.

Earthly amelioration will ever remain stationary so long as heavenly hopes are dangled before the eyes of the people. What a cursed trade to batten on the childlike ignorance of human nature that never had a chance! What despicable villains are the mealy-mouthed Lord's servants! For honesty the pedlar in the gutter, with laces at a penny a pair is a king. He does not take the proffered coin and tell his customer to go down on his knees, shut his eyes, and have faith that the sky will rain bootlaces. This, of course, would quickly land him in gaol for obtaining money under false pretences.

Yes, it is a lamentable fact; the priests may never need despair for their occupation. The frothy public, tickled with tasty bits from the Carmelites, will ever be fertile soil for the now up-to-date theologian, who will preach on any subject under the sun, from fogs to prize fights. Freethought offers no death-bed repentance, no rose-strewn path of mental laziness, no eternal life. About the latter only the arrogant presumption of a knave could pretend to know anything.

To the cunning scoundrels who breathe the grey breath on what would be a happy world it offers no quarter, but will not soil its hands by retaliating with the same methods used against heretics. To those with minds and hearts racked with doubt about the creed they find themselves enslaved to it offers hope, self-reliance, and the precious jewel of Reason.

Where Freethought is, there Truth and Reason build up an earthly Heaven; and, with a life of optimistic endeavor and the cultivation of those nobler virtues which radiate mental harmony, the Freethinker may, when the great curtain descends, exclaim—

"I have warmed both hands at the Fire of Life;
It sinks, and I am ready to depart."

VIVIAN GRAY.

The Pulpit and the Powers that Be.

Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers; for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God.....They are ministers of God's service.—ROMANS (R. V.) XIII.

THESE are those subjects dealt with by the modern

duty of the masses to the powers that be; (2) modern scientific research, and (3) the problems of poverty and unemployment. With most thinking people the Apostle Paul has acquired the reputation of being opinionative, egotistical, and somewhat autocratic person. At the same time, he suffered a good deal for the cause he espoused, and endured hardships and privations which few modern clerics would undergo. He is probably best described as an acute-minded fanatic. He appears to have written and said some extraordinary things, and Romans xiii. is one of the most extraordinary. He is regarded by the Churches as a powerful reasoner; but it is evident that he was also a dogmatist and a leader who laid down the law and expected it to be obeyed by those he addressed without reasons assigned. Paul says plainly that there is no power but of God. Consequently Nero must have been a divine delegate when clothed with the Imperial power of Rome. His Satanic Majesty exercises considerable power. Does he enter the same category?

This dogmatic exclusion of the right of private judgment is not merely hurtful, but leads to endless confusion. It retards the acquisition of knowledge and is therefore hostile to the advancement of Truth. We have, of course, in practice, moved far in front of the position stated by Paul as the orthodox position with reference to the "Higher Powers." During recent years the right of criticism of all "power" has been more and more firmly established, and it is more and more clearly recognised that these so-called "powers that be" are ministers not of God but of the people, liable to be called to account and to have their duties prescribed and varied as the majority of the people may decide.

The common attitude of the modern pulpit to modern science is a sneer; but it involves a concession to Agnosticism. The second-rate preacher in his "little Bethel in Upper Tooting" jeers at those proud scientists who think they know so much while all the time *none of us knows practically anything*. But it should be remarked that the vast majority of scientific researchers are not proud, but, on the contrary, plain and honorable and receptive men. The best educated and most learned men are, almost without exception, the most modest, unobtrusive, and unassuming. The egotism and pride are to be found in the brethren of the little tin Bethel, who presume to level themselves with such men, who have devoted their lives—often for the slightest rewards—to scientific research for the amelioration of humanity's lot. They, at all events, are real and practical benefactors, whatever may be the character of ecclesiastical gasbags and mystery-mongers. Their laboratories are scenes of patient and fruitful industry.

On questions of poverty and unemployment the Churches seem to be in a state of hesitating bewilderment. Some churchmen see that, unless the ecclesiastical bodies do more with reference to sociology and economics, they will alienate a lot of sympathy and support. Herein is contained another admission that the pulpits are out of touch with the times, and that science is, after all, of some practical utility.

That peculiar human being the Christian Socialist is a living contradiction. How a man can subscribe to Paul's doctrine in Romans xiii., and at the same time embrace Socialism, is a problem for the most erudite philosophers. Socialism, on its very forefront, bears a denial of the intervention of God in human affairs. Socialism is right up against the doctrine believed in by our pious friends that God is the economic distributor who, as it pleases him, pulls one man down and shoves another up—

"And no for any guid or ill
They've done afore Thee."

Surely the doctrine of the divine right of kings (and sub-kings) has long since been discredited. But is it not really accepted and believed in still—in our own land? Another coronation is approaching, and we have had a royal proclamation announcing it, freely plastered with references to God. Our King

is said to hold office by the grace of God, and God is always looking after him and the affairs of his dominions, according to the formal State documents; it is time they were obsolete.

SIMPLE SANDY.

The Lord God and Other Ideas of God.

BY L. K. WASHBURN.

THERE is no worse slavery than the slavery of idolatry.

The earth needs to be swept of its gods as the followers of Knox stripped the churches of their symbols—for the truth's sake.

Many a deity has been kept in a temple or a cathedral whose right place was in a cemetery. We are ready to go to the funeral of the Christian God at any hour. When men lose respect for God, rest assured that the general notion of divinity is beneath human reverence. When men stoutly deny a theology they do so because it violates their truest convictions.

Let us confess that we have no conception of the mystery that is behind the wonders of the world, and no rule by which we can take the measure of that light and life that people infinity with splendor and glory. In matter lies every secret of life, and the structure of the universe admits of no abode for Deity outside of the atom. The God who walked upon the earth and talked with man belonged to a time when knowledge of the universe was limited to acquaintance with a small portion of the earth's surface. So the faith in divinities that dwelt above the earth was born from ignorance of the heavens. The gods that once peopled the space above us have fallen to the ground and perished in the fall. The divine beings that were in the habit of visiting earth and associating with the daughters of men have quit making calls of late. Such gods are not popular with the present age.

No god is better known than he who is called the "Lord God." The person who invented the Lord God doubtless thought that he had got up the best God that could be made. Moses, in singing his praises, said of this ugly Deity, "The Lord is greater than all gods." The author of First Chronicles tells us that "He is to be feared above all gods." Notwithstanding the assertions of these parties we think that the Lord God is mighty small potatoes. The Bible-tracks of this divine monster cannot be rubbed out or covered up, and they reveal a character that inspires indignation and disgust.

The world has too long spoken of this creature as though he lived somewhere here or there and would take vengeance upon all who refused to bow down before him in fear and trembling. But he is no more to be feared than a mummy. He is as dead as a dried herring, and as harmless as Adam and Eve.

If this Old Testament God had any existence anywhere in the universe, man's duty would be to resist his oppression, defy his commands, and seek his destruction. We should besiege heaven, not with prayers for mercy, but with swords of right and spears of justice, and demand that mankind be treated with fairness. We do not want a God that hides from man, whether behind a rock or behind a planet; but one that is not ashamed of himself; and when he reveals his glory to us we want it to command at least our respect.

Man has been to the funeral of hundreds of gods. Every deity is destined to pass away. No matter what name is given to God it will fade from our language and cease to be spoken by human tongue. That alone will remain which has always existed. The God of Nature will die, but Nature will live. The eternal God will fall from his throne, but eternity will not be disturbed. The infinite God will perish, but infinity will not be changed. The God of heaven will vanish, but the heavens will still be filled with light.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Acid Drops.

Sergeant Tucker, one of the policemen shot by the foreign burglars at Houndsditch, was for some time the people's warden at the Church of St. Michael, Lant-street, Borough, and a memorial service was held there the night before the funeral. The hymns sung were almost comic in their inappropriateness: "Peace, perfect peace," and "Now the laborer's task is o'er." The peace that Sergeant Tucker found was not desired by him nor welcomed by his wife, who was on the eve of becoming a mother again; and so far from wishing his task to be o'er, his family and friends would rather have seen him in the police force for a good many years to come. But what is to be expected at Christian funerals?

The Bishop of London's sermon on Eternal Punishment, which a correspondent calls attention to in another column, is certainly what the *Church Times* calls it, a "remarkable sermon." It is chiefly remarkable for its cool effrontery. The Bishop denies "what the secularist lecturer says"—"that the Christian Church believes that millions of the heathen will perish in terrible torment, or that people in the poor parts of London, where the Church has not reached, will burn in eternal fire." It may be true that the Church does not teach this brutal doctrine now. But it did. As a matter of fact, it is the doctrine of the Thirty Nine Articles, which still stand in the Prayer Book. The Church of England is the trickiest Church in the world. It is capable of anything to preserve its material interests. It is full of Vicars of Bray.

Missions to the Heathen were started when Christians believed that the Heathen were all necessarily going to Hell. The name of Jesus was the only name whereby men could be saved, the Heathen had never heard of it, therefore the Heathen could not be saved unless the name of Jesus were made known to them. The mere moralisation of the Heathen is an afterthought. Hell is played out, and the Missions must be kept up.

The converted Jew, Noah Woolf, who was banged at Pentonville on December 21 for the murder of another converted Jew at the Home for Aged Hebrew Christians, St. John's-villas, Upper Holloway, died as piously as he had lived. Just before the execution he wrote on the slate in his cell, after thanks to the prison governor: "I pray God's will be done. The Lord receive my spirit." Not a word about the man he murdered.

The Dean of Carlisle, speaking at a meeting of the Deaf and Dumb (it should have been the Blind too), is reported to have "referred in pathetic language" to the death of Thomas Rawcliffe, who was hung at Lancaster Castle for the murder of his wife, and who made such an edifying end—singing "Jesu, lover of my soul" on the way to the scaffold—singing it without a quiver in his voice, although the chaplain and the gaol officials wept. The Dean couldn't have made much more of it if it had been the death of the "Crucified One" himself. It is one of those things over which Christian preachers generally grow maudlin. Their religion is a pathological affair, making heroes of murderers and heroines of harlots.

"God will help and comfort you." So said Bertha Emma Ward, of Brentwood, in a letter to her lover, W. M. Partridge, of Acton, before drowning herself in the Thames. Yes, as Talmage and Torrey have said, these Atheists will commit suicide.

"I pray every night to the Blessed Lord that He will get us together again." Thus wrote Maria Gobell, a servant girl at Reigate, to her lover from whom she was parted. But the Blessed Lord did nothing, and the poor girl committed suicide by taking poison on her lover's doorstep. The verdict was "Suicide during temporary insanity." Praying to the Blessed Lord was one of the proofs.

"Thank God for that. We have been praying all night." So said the two apprentices on board the trawler *Friendship*, of Brixham, who were rescued by the trawler *Gratitude* in the late terrible gale. The captain and the mate had been washed overboard. According to the apprentices, their elders were unworthy of the Lord's attention. The apprentices were the boys for Him. Such is the modesty of youth and piety! Such is the logic of faith!

More "Providence." During the late earthquake shock a small volcanic island in the lagoon of Ilopanga, about

seventy miles from San Salvador, sank, carrying 170 people with it to the depths of the lagoon. Scores of other small islands were engulfed, and the death list amounts at least to 500. "He doeth all things well."

The poor woman who tried to drown herself with her boy at Goring-on-Sea, said: "We wanted to die together and spend Christmas in heaven." Her life was such a failure that she failed even in that. The miserable condition of these two unfortunates excited general sympathy; they were committed for trial, but they probably found Christmas in prison a treat after their terrible experiences. Christmas in heaven might have been no better. It might have been worse, as far as the refreshment department is concerned, for the diet in heaven seems to be shockingly monotonous, consisting entirely of manna, which appears to be washed down with cold water.

Pope, who was a much finer and deeper thinker, as well as a greater writer, than some of his high-and-mighty critics imagine, turned out whole poems, such as the *Essay on Man*, in which every sentence involved distinct intellectual effort, and in which intense vigor is maintained from the first line to the last. It must be rather curious to the uncatholic mind to find Pope praised so highly by so different a writer as Ruskin. This praise, so nobly conceived and so nobly expressed, occurs in the third of the *Lectures on Art*, written at the very zenith of Ruskin's mental and literary powers. Ruskin classed Pope with Virgil as the two most accomplished artists in literature; declared him to be, in his theology, two centuries in advance of his time; and represented him as the author of two lines which are "the most complete, the most concise, and the most lofty expression of moral temper existing in English words":—

"Never elated, while one man's oppress'd;
Never dejected, while another's bless'd."

Ruskin went on to tell his Oxford students that they would find in Pope "every law of art, of criticism, of economy, and of policy" expressed "in the strictest language and within the briefest limits," together with a "humble, rational, and resigned" benevolence. After that splendid tribute one need not be surprised that it was Pope who, in the midst of some grand lines, pointed it out as one of the great evils of the world to "entangle justice in the net of law." One thinks of this in connection with Mr. Justice Bargaive Deane's summing up in the *Pretty divorce* case. Strictly speaking, according to the absolute letter of the law, the wife, by reason of her own misconduct, was not entitled to relief; but to go back to an impossible husband was hell, and there might be heaven in her going to the home of an honorable man, who loved her, and was bent on making her happy; so the judge calmly, deliberately, and wisely dared to exercise what he considered to be a rightful discretion,—disentangled justice from the net of law, and gave a judgment which made it prevail. The wife's decree nisi was made absolute, and she gained the opportunity of henceforth living honestly and happily. This was the way of common sense and common humanity. And what a happy change it will be when justice is no longer entangled in the net of law, when all courts will become courts of equity, and when the wisdom and knowledge of venerable judges, who have seen so much of the world, will be employed in remedying evils and establishing real justice, rather than acting as umpires in contentions between legal controversialists, paid to win if possible whether right or wrong.

The value of cash to religion is shown by the Rev. Dr. Rufus W. Weaver's lament over Carnegie's want of Christian partisanship fervor. Just listen to this:—

"The great educational institutions of Christendom have revolted against the control of orthodox Christianity. In 1850, there were in this country 120 colleges and universities, 77 of which were then under denominational control; of these, 19 have changed their charters and are now described as non-sectarian. These 19 institutions, recreant to their obligations and unfaithful to their founders, have gained endowments which now amount to over 53,000,000 dols. The 58 institutions that have kept faith with their founders have a total endowment of barely 11,000,000 dols. These 19 colleges and universities sold their birthright—but not for a mess of pottage.

The total endowment of educational institutions in this country under guaranteed Christian control is barely 30,000,000 dols.—while the endowment of non-sectarian institutions—institutions that are not required to give the Christian interpretation to life—is over 220,000,000 dols.

Mr. Carnegie, through his foundation, has struck Christianity a blow, the heaviest which it has received in all modern times. Schools, born of prayer, reared by the toil and sacrifices of our sainted dead, have fallen under the spell of his malign secularisation. Mr. Carnegie, borne down by the infirmities of age, is nearing the death. He has set the world of

example in splendid generosity; yet he must face the fact that he has closed more doors of learning in the face of Jesus Christ than any other man who ever lived. Mr. Carnegie needs our prayers, but more, at the sunset hour and as the darkness deepens, he needs the companionship of Jesus Christ, the rightful Teacher and the only Savior of men.

I am aware that Mr. Carnegie's friends insist that he is not opposed to religion but to sectarianism. An Anarchist, by the same reasoning, could hold that he was not opposed to government although he was in violent opposition to all governments that are in existence."

It is the same in America as it is over here. Money is the Churches' best friend. Their only friend when it comes to the last pinch.

Mr. Leadbeater has been enlightening the world on the subject of the time which elapses between a man's death and his next birth—or, as the Theosophists like to put it, between one incarnation and the next. We have not seen Mr. Leadbeater's article, but there is an account of it in Mr. Stead's magazine. The highest specimens of mankind spend a long time in Devachan—which seems to be a good solid sleep between one life and another. The average highly developed man comes back in fifteen hundred years. Plato will take two thousand years to come back. And as it is more than that since he lived at Athens we ought to have heard something about him before this. The ordinary middle-class man comes back in two or three hundred years; the skilled workman in one or two hundred years. The higher kind of savage returns in forty to one hundred; the most brutal savages and habitual criminals come back almost at once. What a wise economy of things! Let us hope, as the old lady did who heard of the crucifixion of Christ for the first time, that it isn't true. After all, why should it be true? Mr. Leadbeater has no more real knowledge on the subject than we have.

Devachan has wonderfully diminished since Madame Blavatsky used to bamboozle people. She put it down at something like eight thousand years. And now a gentleman like Bill Sikes only takes a few years—or is it a few months?—to reappear.

Sir George Reid, the High Commissioner of Australia, was the guest of the Savage Club the other evening. Responding to the toast of the evening, he took occasion to offer advice to men of science as regards their attitude towards religion. According to the *Daily Telegraph* report, he said that, while

"he gloried in their brilliant discoveries, which had thrown a flood of light on the mysteries of the universe and reinforced industrial efficiency for the comfort and happiness of mankind, he would like to see a franker acknowledgment of the existence of a Supreme Intelligence. Let them put back as far as they liked the origin of man, and make the primary elements as muddled as they liked, to him these things made only the more marvellous the creative mind which from such materials could work out the body and soul of man and woman. He considered that science attained its greatest glory when it recognised that there might be an intelligence in the great Creator as well as in the man who studied the wonders of his hand."

Sir George Reid evidently takes himself very seriously, and there is something quite childlike in his desire that science should reform and frankly recognise a "Supreme Intelligence." Unfortunately for Sir George Reid, science, in spite of the vagaries of some of its professed votaries, knows nothing whatever of a "great Creator," and so cannot, without stultifying itself, make any such recognition. And the business of science is to find out what is true, not to manufacture statements for the mere purpose of satisfying people's animistic tendencies.

Rev. J. A. Joyce, of Murshidabad, India, has written a letter in which the following significant passage occurs:—

"I was talking with a group of undergraduates this morning, and they said to me: 'Our head-master tells us that in Europe the majority of people have ceased even to believe that Jesus Christ historically ever existed.' The thousands of Indian, Japanese, and Chinese students in England and Europe return, hardly having come into any contact with Christianity. It is astonishing how little even England appears as a 'Christian' country to a foreigner who does not come into contact with Christian families or Church life. Most Indians returned from England come back to India hating Christianity and hating the English."

Naturally, Mr. Joyce prays for a thorough revival of Christianity, but we rejoice to know that Pagans educated in Christian countries return to their homes active opponents of the cruel religion of the Cross.

The curious thing is, however, that Mr. Joyce, while frankly admitting that "the observant Eastern nations will never accept Christianity till they see Europe practising

what the missionaries of Europe preach," is convinced that if the East is not Christianised forthwith it will adopt "rationalistic materialism," and become a serious menace to the West. Therefore, he says, "every pound put into missions now is worth £100 spent ten years hence, and every life given to Africa or China now is worth a regiment of soldiers that may have to be slaughtered on some bloody field fifty years hence." Vain delusion! How eminently Christian to Christianise the East as an act of self-protection to the West!

The *Church Times* remarks that in addressing working men the preachers succeed best who give evidence of "wide culture and knowledge," and "in no way strive to make points or score brilliantly from the ignorance of Atheists." Hear, hear! We have seen these cultured preachers at the game of scoring brilliantly off ignorant Atheists; and, having seen them, are not surprised that the *C. T.* advises them to desist. Certainly this is not the way to impress working men in favor of Christianity. He may get a truer knowledge of Christianity in this way, but that will not help him to believe in it. We quite endorse our religious contemporary's advice to preachers. If you want to impress onlookers with the truth of your religion, don't reply to Atheists—at least not when they are present. If they are absent—well, that is quite another matter.

Another religious paper advocates the formation of a body of preachers who will travel about the country addressing outdoor audiences. Evidently it wants to infect the clergy with the foot-and-mouth disease.

Mr. Firth's new book, *The House of Lords During the Civil War*, draws attention once more to the noble spirit of toleration which was one of the strongest elements in Cromwell's nature. One of the reasons why the great Lord Protector was in favor of a Second Chamber was the arbitrary conduct of his second House of Commons, which tried to usurp all functions, including judicial functions, to itself. He saw that some check was needed on the absolutism of a Single Chamber; otherwise the lives and liberties of every citizen were at its mercy. Cromwell detested religious persecution. He credited no man with infallibility—neither popes, priests, nor puritan members of parliament. He once begged a Scotch Presbyterian to be less dogmatic. "I beseech you, in the name of God," he wrote, "to imagine it is possible that you may be mistaken." The man who wrote that was not likely to connive at the action of the House of Commons, in 1656, in trying the harmless and remarkable Quaker, James Nayler, for blasphemy, and voting that he should be pilloried, whipped, have his tongue bored, be branded on the forehead, and then imprisoned. They would have gone farther if they could. They consulted Commissioner Whitelocke as to whether they could put him to death after all those barbarities, and Whitelocke (no doubt with Cromwell behind him) humanely decided that they did not possess that power. Cromwell's blood boiled at their behavior, and it is good to know that he eventually sent them packing. He called them together to make laws for the people of England, not to discuss theology, and try blasphemers, and torture their fellow men for a difference in religion. He made up his mind to get rid of them, and he did. His sword was more merciful than their bigotry. He reminded his officers of the Nayler case when they disapproved of his idea of a Second Chamber. "By the proceedings of this Parliament," he said to them, "you see they stand in need of a check, or balancing power, for the case of James Nayler might happen to be your case.....By their judicial power they fell upon life and member." The more one studies Cromwell and his career the more one realises how different he was from the crowd of Puritan "saints." He had a great mind and a great heart. Nature gave them to him. You can see signs of them in his grand face and head. Even the awful religion of that time could not poison his nature. It often made him unhappy, but it never made him bigoted and cruel to other men.

General Booth's eyesight is nearly gone. He admits that he has not been able to see the faces of his hearers for some time. We are sorry for the old gentleman, but this is one of the penalties of old age. In his case, however, it raises a religious problem. The suggestion is frequently thrown out that General Booth's life is prolonged by the Almighty for the sake of his great and glorious work. We respectfully ask, then, why the Almighty doesn't make the miracle more obvious by prolonging the vigor of his faculties, including his eyesight. Readers of Tennyson's fine *Tithonus* will remember that the goddess who prayed for the gift of immortality for her human lover forgot to pray also for the gift of eternal youth, and thus secured for him nothing but everlasting senility.

General Booth does not answer Mr. Manson's criticism. He knows it is unanswerable. What he does is to get Mr. Rider Haggard to write a flattering volume called *Regeneration*, in which the Salvation Army is praised to the very skies—or half-way through the floor of heaven. Like the good business man he is, the General has an autograph letter of his enclosed with the volume, pleading for the sum of £53,000 for the social work of the Army. By "social work" he really means *any* work, for the General claims the right to spend all the Salvation Army funds as he pleases. Under the Army's "Trust Deed" the only person who can call William Booth to account is William Booth. So *that's* all right.

Emperor William has mistaken his vocation. He should be occupying a pulpit rather than a throne. He claims to have proved the existence of God to "a Freethinking Protestant theologian" (supposed to be Professor Delitzsch), who had spoken for an hour to demonstrate that Christ was not divine. This is how the Berlin story goes on:—

"When he had finished, the Emperor said: 'Professor, have you ever said to your students, "I am the vine, you are the branches"?'"

'No, your Majesty.'

'Do you think that before your time a professor ever said it?'

'No, your Majesty.'

'In future, will professors ever address their students in such a way?'

'Assuredly not.'

'Well, professor, because no teacher can or will speak as Christ spoke, I believe that Christ was not merely a man, but the true God.'

This is the most extraordinary of all the "proofs" of God's existence that we ever came across. It might occur to a non-imperial mind that before you can prove that A is B you must establish the existence of B as a positive fact. If there be a God, Christ's speaking in that way might (we simply say *might*) be regarded as proving that *he* was God, but you must get God first, or the argument rests on no foundation. As for the argument itself, with or without a foundation, it may be worthy of an Emperor, but it would be smiled at in a school of logic or anthropology. Talking in that head-swollen way—"I am the vine, ye are the branches"—is a common characteristic of fanatical religious founders. If it proves anything in Christ's case, it proves that he was one of a well-known tribe.

There now! The murder is out! We hope the Emperor won't have our head cut off and our property confiscated. The latter is not a very important matter; the former is of the greatest importance to ourselves—and of some, we trust, to the cause of reason and free discussion.

"Isador Buskin, a Jewish teacher of Brooklyn, was telling his pupils that 'God is good' when his face paled, he staggered, and, sinking to the floor, died before a physician could reach him. The children who received the instruction must have thought that God had a queer way of showing his goodness."—*Truthseeker* (New York).

"Archbishop Whatley was very fond of playing at boomerang. He used to go into the square attached to St. Stephen's Green in Dublin, where the Palace stood, with his chaplain to have a game. Two old women were one day looking at him through the railings. 'That's the Archbishop of Dublin, Mary,' said one of them to the other, 'playing in there.' 'You don't say so, Biddy; well isn't he the innocent crathur!' 'He's the Protestant Archbishop, Mary!' 'Oh, the ould fool!'"—*Daily Chronicle*.

The St. Pancras Borough Council got out of the Whitefield Tabernacle rating business by accepting the 'cute suggestion of the Finance Committee that the Registrar General's license of the building for religious worship, as long as it stood, should be accepted as sufficient to exempt it from rating. Thus the real point at issue has been successfully evaded, and the whole quarrel ends as much ado about nothing.

The Pope is still breathing out fire and slaughter against Modernism. He had better let it be. The Vatican keeps its thunders, but has lost its lightnings. It can fulminate, but it cannot kill. And heresy was never put down yet by mere words. Deeds were always necessary—deeds of cruelty and blood. Yes, Papa Taylor had better let it be.

"Are the natives of the island Christianised?" asked the sombre lady. "They would be," sighed the escaped missionary, "if their diet had had any effect."

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, January 1, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, London, W.: at 7.30, "God."
 January 8, 15, 22, 29, Queen's Hall, London; 10, London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner.
 February 5, Glasgow; 12, Manchester; 26, Birmingham.
 March 5, Liverpool.

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 15, Birmingham; 22, Canning Town; 29, Liverpool. February 12 and 19, Queen's Hall, London; 26, Glasgow. March 5, Manchester.
 J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 1, Harringay; 8, Abertillery; 15, Holloway; 22, Birmingham; 29, Maesteg. February 19, Failsforth; 26, Queen's Hall. March 5, Queen's Hall; 12, West Ham.
 PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1910.—Previously acknowledged: £296 17s. 7d. Received since:—H. Kennedy, £1 12s.; H. Shaw, 3s.; A. J. Bowers (Arkansas), 10s.; Mrs. Clarkson, 17s. 5d.—Total £300.
 A. H. PEBRETT.—Thanks for the American cutting, also for your appreciation and good wishes.
 A. A.—We received the letter you refer to and answered it through this column; at least, we have received no letter from you since the one we did answer. Your good wishes are cordially reciprocated.
 R. H. ROSETTI.—We wish the West Ham Branch all success in its continued enterprise at the Public (Minor) Hall, Canning Town.
 SECULARIST (Lincoln).—See paragraph. Thanks.
 J. KNOX.—Pleased to hear from one who has read the *Freethinker* for twenty-five years, and learnt from it how to live and not be afraid to die. Your photograph adds to the value of the testimony. We note your good wishes for Mr. Cohen, Mr. Lloyd, and Miss Vance.
 W. WILBUR.—Yes, better now. Thanks.
 H. KENNEDY.—Thanks for "mite to help in making the Honorarium Fund's £300 'an accomplished fact.'" Also for your assurance that you owe to the *Freethinker* "many enjoyable hours." With regard to the Burns extracts, we believe we used both of them in a series of articles we wrote many years ago on "The Real Robert Burns." The last article of the series dealt at considerable length with Burns as a Freethinker.
 V. WHITTY.—Ask for the "Oaths Act (Bradlaugh's)." It is printed in full in the N. S. S. tract on "The Right to Affirm," which was drawn up by Bradlaugh himself."
 THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
 THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
 WHEN the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.
 LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
 LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
 FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
 ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
 PERSONS remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send *halfpenny stamps*.
 THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

Sugar Plums.

The attention of London Freethinkers is specially called to the new course of Sunday Evening Lectures at Queen's (Minor) Hall during January, February, and March. Mr. Foote opens the course this evening (January 1) with a lecture on "God," which is the first of five consecutive lectures designed to form a complete review of Christian Theism. No doubt a good many "saints" will try to attend them all. Even if the majority cannot do that, they can at least help to advertise the lectures among their friends and acquaintances, as well as attending themselves when they are able. For this purpose they should obtain the neat little printed announcements which Miss Vance (2 Newcastle-street, E.C.) will be only too happy to supply. Window bills can also be obtained if anyone can display them. It really ought to

be easy to fill the hall every evening. We make a special appeal to the "saints" to bring their women-folk (wives, sisters, daughters, etc.) along to these meetings. The world will never be converted until the women are converted—it will not even be half converted; so we must sweep the ladies into the Freethought net. And it isn't as hard as it seems. Men don't always give them a fair chance. They should do more than *give* it,—they should *urge* it upon them. Kindly and persuasively, of course. No driving. You'll drive ten men before you'll drive one woman. The priests know that. If you don't believe it, watch them.

We have omitted to say that there will be vocal and instrumental music for half an hour before each of the Queen's Hall lectures. This should be an added attraction. There will also be a dramatic or poetical reading before each of Mr. Foote's lectures, either by himself or by his daughter,—the one who read Browning's "Confessional" at Queen's Hall on the great "Bradlaugh" night.

We have heard from more provincial "saints" who are coming up to join their London brethren at the Annual Dinner on Tuesday evening, January 10. This function takes place, as usual, at the Holborn Restaurant. The price of the ticket is only 4/-, and it includes a good dinner, some good speeches to toasts, a good musical entertainment, and a good opportunity of renewing old friendships and forming new ones. Year by year the popularity of this function has grown. We hope this year's attendance will beat the record—and be beaten itself the year after.

A lady Freethinker wished to have the honor and pleasure of making up whatever deficit there might be in the President's Honorarium Fund. We promised to put her down as the last subscriber for the amount that might be necessary to make up the £300. Happily, at least in one sense, the amount needed was not very large. Thus the 1910 Fund closes in the most satisfactory manner.

"I've just read your splendid article on 'The Star of Christ,'" Mr. Harry Shaw writes, "and it has immensely delighted me. It is just what is needed at this season of the year to cause waverers to come to a decision and join the forces of reason and progress once for all. I know many men who are in that position, and I intend making them a Christmas-box of a copy of the *Freethinker*. 'To me,' Mr. Shaw adds, 'Thursday is the red-letter day of the week, because then I can revel for a few hours in the pages of my *Freethinker*.'"

An English, or rather Irish, Atheist, writing to us from Philadelphia, says that he can't be happy till he gets the *Freethinker* again. He has read it for ten years and is unable to do without it. "Early in August," he says, "I had my last *Freethinker*. It was on the boat coming over here. I read it to a good many of the passengers, who used to sit up till twelve o'clock debating religion, and before we landed each leaf of it became the property of a passenger." After paying some rather unprintable compliments to the old paper and its editor, this correspondent asks us, with regard to a certain question, to answer it personally. "I know," he says, "that this is Miss Vance's side of the business, but if you could find time to write me only a couple of words I would treasure them as I would no others on earth." We have written the "two words." And we may add that the knowledge that we are so thought of, because of our life's-work, is better payment for it than money could be; though "the Lord God Almighty" knows how necessary that article is.

Two or three years ago, we forget which, the civilised world was talking about Jack Binns, the young "wireless" operator on board the *Republic*, who stuck to his post, looking death in the face all the time, raying out the messages that gave other ships an opportunity to come to the rescue. He was the hero of the hour. And we noticed that he was a modest hero. He reckoned that he had done his duty, and he did not want to be everlastingly mobbed for it. And that's the sort of man for our money—as the saying goes. We are now glad, though not surprised, to learn that Jack Binns is a Freethinker. He was not in want of religion to support him in his office on that sinking liner. He was "all there" without it. There is a nice portrait of him in the New York *Truthseeker* of November 26, together with an article from his pen on "Immortality and Mortality," which is quite Atheistic. We shall reproduce this article in our own columns.

The late Professor Henry Sidgwick was a Freethinker. This is admitted by Mr. A. C. Benson, the author of an appreciation of Sidgwick in the November *Cornhill*. He was intended for the Church, both his parents being devout Christians; but he "gave up all dogmatic faith" and came to "regard Christianity from the sociological point of view." He said he found it "more and more incomprehensible how anyone whom I feel akin to myself in intellectual habits and culture can possibly find his religion in it." "My own alienation from it," he added, "is all the stronger because it is so purely intellectual." Yet he was one of the few men to whom Mr. Benson felt that he could honestly, and in the highest sense, apply the word "saint." "He was so sincere, so simple-minded, so unselfish, so sympathetic, so utterly incapable of meanness or baseness, so guileless, so patient, of so crystalline a purity and sweetness of character."

Mr. Benson's deduction from the facts is interesting:—

"If the deliberate abnegation of a particular form of religious faith is attended by no sort of moral deterioration; if, on the contrary, a character year by year grows stronger and purer, more devoted and unselfish, and at the same time no less appreciative of the moral effect of a definite belief, it becomes impossible to say that such qualities can only spring from a vital and genuine acceptance of certain dogmas."

What a public it is that reads popular magazines when a writer like Mr. Benson has to express himself so tentatively!

Owing to the Christmas holidays, this number of the *Freethinker* had to be made up on Saturday (Dec. 24), our office being shut on the Monday and Tuesday following, so that our employees may enjoy all the holiday that is going. Any shortcoming in the paragraph department will therefore be understood—and allowed for.

THE LAUNCH.

"At Portsmouth Dockyard, this morning, after a brief service of prayer, the Marchioness of Winchester successfully released from the slips H.M.S. *Orion*—the greatest warship in the world."—London Daily Paper.

O Thou who reignest King in Zion,
Look on us as we launch the *Orion*,
Designed Thine images to kill,
Obedient to the Heavenly will.

The captain from his conning tower
Directs with ease the deadly shower:
We use the very latest means
To blow our foes to smithereens.

With confidence we ask Thine aid
To make our enemies afraid;
Help us, oh God of love, right well
To blow the Germans into Hell.

This *Orion* on whose deck we stand
Is built to guard our Fatherland,
Look down, we pray, pronounce it good,
For Thou, we know, art British blood.

The coal and iron in the earth
Were placed there at this planet's birth
To build and move these ships of ours,
To terrorise the other powers.

When on the sea this *Orion* roars,
Strike terror to the foemen's shores;
May all the shots it fires be hits,
And blow our brother men to bits.

Oh God of battles, by thine aid
This mighty Empire has been made
Inspire our tars with holy zeal
To murder for the common weal.

Some day we know that war shall cease,
And all mankind will be at peace,
'Twill dawn when every foe is dead,
And all the maps are painted red.

Bless Thou our ships and guns till then.
The glory shall be Thine. Amen.
Our prayer is ended, yo heave ho!
Knock out the stays and let her go.

—W. E. Hopkins, "Truthseeker" (New York).

WHERE HE FELL SHORT.

Nan: "Bess, didn't you enjoy Mr. Highroller's intellectual paper on 'The Ethical Basis of Mental Progress'?"

Bess: "Yes, his paper was all right; but the idiot came out where I was making the welsh rabbit, stirred it the wrong way, and curdled it!"

From the Wesleyan Pulpit to the Freethought Platform.

BY H. PERCY WARD.

(Reproduced from the New York "Truthseeker,"
October 1, 1910.)

A FAVORITE argument with the orthodox Christian is the so-called "argument from experience." Now, whatever value this argument may be to the Christian, it is of equal, nay, of greater, value to the Freethinker. In the majority of instances the Freethinker has been a Christian, and can compare Christianity with Freethought from personal experience, whereas the Christian has tried only his own. The Freethinker, therefore, can say, in a sense far more real than any Christian, "Once I was blind, but now I see." A conversion to Freethought is differentiated from a conversion to Christianity, mainly in that the former is the outcome of calm and patient reasoning, whereas the latter is the result of mere emotionalism.

I desire to tell, briefly and plainly, the story of my pilgrimage from Christian superstition to Rationalism.

I was brought up in a religious atmosphere, in a small market town in England—Driffild—one of those places where everyone appears to know everybody else's business. Both my grandfathers were Wesleyan preachers, and I showed early signs of following in their steps. One of my earliest recollections is that of being perched on a pair of small steps in a passage in my grandfather's house reeling off a string of Bible texts and some anecdotes I had read in Christian tracts. About this time my ambition in life was to become a missionary to the "heathen in his blindness." Even at that early age I possessed one of the chief ingredients which goes towards the manufacture of a successful missionary—audacity. So deep was my sympathy for the heathen that I often stopped strangers in the street and begged of them to become subscribers to the Wesleyan Methodist Junior Foreign Missionary Society.

I was taught the old-fashioned brand of Wesleyan Methodism, and inherited a spirit of pious contempt for the misguided members of all other Christian sects. I call to mind, when on one occasion I ventured, out of curiosity, to visit a Congregational Church, instead of going as usual to the Wesleyan chapel, how my rigidly orthodox grandmother was so horrified at the awful sin I had thereby committed that she told me I was never to call her my grandmother again. After events, however, did not prevent the resumption of the usual relationship between us.

Despite my regular attendance at the chapel and Sunday-school, I was not yet a "child of God." I had not been converted. Although I was hardly out of first childhood, it was not long before I entered second childhood by undergoing that mysterious, quick-change, spiritual process of being "born again." This took place when I was nearly fourteen years of age at a special service conducted by the Rev. J. H. Hopkins in the Wesleyan chapel in my native town. After the evening preaching service the Wesleyans usually hold a public prayer-meeting. While various members present literally shout to God in prayer, asking him to give sinners no rest until they find rest in Jesus, other members, like burglars in the night, steal tip-toe along the chapel aisles, and if they detect a stranger, or some known unsaved character, they invade his pew and in a whisper ask him the conundrum, "Where do you expect to spend eternity?" and endeavor to persuade their hell-deserving victim to come out in front of the congregation, kneel at the penitent-form, and there make his peace with God. At the aforementioned meeting a saint singled me out as his prey, reminded me of the many prayers relatives and others had offered up on my behalf, and asked me whether I did not think that it was time for me to begin to serve Jesus. The result was that I went

with my persuader to the penitent form, and, as I then sincerely believed, there gave my heart to God and had all my sins washed away in the "precious blood of the Lamb."

A leading feature of Wesleyan Methodism is its weekly class-meeting. Connected with each Wesleyan chapel there are a number of these classes. Each one is presided over by a member known to be "sound in the faith," who is called the "class leader." Members are expected to attend regularly, pay two cents per week, and twelve cents for their quarterly ticket of membership. The leader asks each one present how it has been with his, or her, soul during the week past. The members then relate in turn to their brothers and sisters in Christ their spiritual experiences; how terribly the Devil has been tempting, and how bountifully God has been blessing, their souls. The leader then gives spiritual advice suited to each case.

A few months after my conversion I left my home and went to the city of Hull to serve a five years' apprenticeship to the bookselling and stationery trade. I was soon engaged in helping God to save mankind. Most of my spare time was spent in distributing religious tracts and in attending various "means of grace." I also began to preach in the open air and in mission halls.

I had not been many months in Hull when one evening I noticed in a newsagent's shop, on a shelf behind the door, a weekly journal bearing, to me, the strange name of the *Freethinker*. It aroused my curiosity, and in a few moments the newsagent was two cents the richer and I became possessed of my first dose of Freethought. The reading of the paper horrified me. I was amazed that God Almighty permitted such blasphemy to be printed. But, like Oliver Twist, I longed for "more"; and afterwards I often bought a copy of the paper just to see what could be said on the other side. As an antidote I took in several "Christian evidence" periodicals. Later on, I discovered that they also took me in.

Early in 1891 my attention was arrested by a poster announcing the delivery of three Freethought lectures in the Alhambra Music Hall, Hull, on Sunday, February 1, by Mr. G. W. Foote, the editor of the *Freethinker*, and the latest prisoner for blasphemy. At the bottom of the bill were the words "discussion invited." I resolved to attend the evening lecture for the purpose of speaking in opposition. In pious innocence I thought that with the help of an all-powerful God I should have a very easy task in utterly pulverising the "infidel" lecturer. Just before entering the hall I felt that I was committing a grievous sin by neglecting God's holy house to attend a Freethought lecture. Ultimately, however, my curiosity got the better of my conscience, and I soon found myself listening to a lecture which contained more blasphemy than I have heard during all the rest of my life put together. At the end of the lecture the chairman, Mr. N. B. Billany, asked for opposition, and I marched forward to the platform. The audience appeared surprised to see a youth fifteen years old championing Christianity. I do not recollect what I said in reply to Mr. Foote, but I have not forgotten what he said in reply to me. He brought down the house by remarking that at least one prophecy in the Bible had been fulfilled that night, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast ordained strength." I little thought that evening that the next time Mr. Foote and I met on a public platform I should have the honor of being his chairman.

About this time the first change took place in my theology. The reading of Farrar's *Eternal Hope*, Cox's *Salvator Mundi*, and White's *Life in Christ*, shattered completely my belief in the damnable doctrine of everlasting torture. No human father worthy of the name would deliberately torture his child for a single moment. Surely, I thought, the heavenly father has not inspired earthly parents with a love superior to his own.

Attendance at a series of "Christian evidence" lectures, delivered by the Rev. A. J. Harrison during

1892, led me to think that my special mission in life was to annihilate Infidelity.

Letters from my pen exposing the "immorality" of Secularism and challenging the local Secularists to put forward a representative to debate with me, appeared in the *Eastern Morning News*. The outcome was that I was officially invited to lecture in the Cobden Hall, before the Hull Branch of the National Secular Society, on the condition that I would allow discussion at the close of my address. I accepted the invitation, and in June, 1892, delivered my first lecture, which was a reply to a pamphlet, entitled *God is Love: Is it True?* written by the secretary of the Branch. The Branch survived my attack. In replying to my critics, I said that I should always be a Christian, and that if ever I sank so low as to become a Secularist might my right hand forget its cunning and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. I little imagined, when I uttered those foolish words, that four years later I should, like the apostle Paul, be preaching that faith which previously I had endeavored to destroy.

I attended nearly all the Freethought lectures that were delivered in Hull during my stay there, and seized every opportunity that was offered for discussion.

But I was not satisfied with merely writing and speaking against Secularism. I wished to entirely wreck the Hull Branch, which was damning so many precious souls. Through reading a certain "anti-Infidel" monthly—the editor of which, I afterwards discovered, had been imprisoned for embezzling his employer's money—I learned that, according to an Act passed in the reign of George III., it was illegal to hold a public meeting on a Sunday at which there was discussion and to which a charge for admission was made. I resolved to make use of this information at the first favorable opportunity. I had not long to wait. Mr. Foote was advertised to lecture again in the Alhambra on Sunday, February 5, 1893. Discussion, of course, was invited, and the prices of admission were stated. This, I thought, was the time to set the law in motion. In order that the Branch might not have time to make other arrangements, if it were necessary, I waited until the Saturday previous to the Sunday on which Mr. Foote was announced to speak. I then wrote to the Chief Constable of Hull, stating that the local Secular Society had organised three meetings to be held on the morrow, contrary to a certain Act of Parliament, a copy of which I enclosed, and that it was his duty to prevent the delivery of the lecture. The consequence was that the Chief Constable did not have the courage to directly attack Mr. Foote, but he warned the lessee of the Alhambra that he would be proceeded against if he allowed the Secularists to charge for admission to Mr. Foote's lectures. The lessee made an interdict upon Mr. Foote against charging for admission. Mr. Foote, however, delivered his lectures to large audiences, admission, of course, being free. But the triumph of bigotry was short-lived. A month later Mr. Foote visited Hull again, took another hall, in which he delivered two Sunday lectures, charged for admission, invited discussion, and challenged the Chief Constable to fight. The Chief Constable, however, was a coward and did nothing, and the result was a victory for Freethought and Free Speech. This incident is an illustration of that accursed spirit of intolerance which Christianity has ever inspired in its devotees.

When I was barely eighteen years old I was put "on trial" as a Wesleyan local preacher in the Driffield circuit. To become a full fledged local preacher—to be put on "full plan," as it is termed—one has to be on probation for at least a year. During that period the candidate conducts divine services from time to time in the various chapels in the circuit. He is expected to read John Wesley's *Fifty-three Standard Sermons* and his *Notes on the New Testament*, and master the Wesleyan Methodist Catechism. He must also preach a trial sermon before a congregation of which the superintendent minister of the circuit is a member. Afterwards the candi-

date has to undergo an oral examination in theology at the local preacher's quarterly meeting. His case is then discussed, and it is decided by vote whether he shall be put on full plan.

Being engaged almost every Sunday in preaching in the various Wesleyan chapels on the Yorkshire wolds, I relaxed somewhat my attempts at "Infidel-smashing." All I did in this line was to publish a pamphlet, entitled *What Atheism has Done*. On its cover there appeared the following quotation: "An Atheist of any capacity invested with power would be as dreadful a scourge to the rest of mankind as the most bloody enthusiast." The booklet did not contain a single argument which could possibly be controverted. Its pages were absolutely blank, the idea I wished to convey being that Atheism had done nothing. If what was printed on the cover of my pamphlet about Atheists be true, it is greatly to the credit of such dangerous men that the pages of their history hitherto are so unsullied. Unfortunately, Christians cannot present so clean a record of their past.

During my year "on trial" my mind considerably broadened. Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* gave the first shock to my faith. The reading of a character sketch of the late Charles Bradlaugh, written by Mrs. Annie Besant, which appeared in the *Review of Reviews*, forced me to admit that even an Atheist might possess nobility of character. Gradually I came to respect those holding opinions differing from my own. When a Christian gets thus far he has made tremendous mental progress.

When the time came for me to preach my trial sermon, my Christianity was infected with tolerance. "What is it to be a Christian?" was the subject of my sermon. Towards its close I pleaded for a broader Christian charity. I said I did not believe a just God would condemn an honest man or woman; and I pictured the look of amazement which would spread over the face of the late Mr. C. H. Spurgeon when there walked up to him in the streets of heaven, with a hearty "How do you do?" the late Charles Bradlaugh. Then I exclaimed that if God had damned a man like Bradlaugh I would most cheerfully be damned with him. There was then a hymn and prayer, and I left the congregation split up in small groups discussing my heterodox sermon.

I never expected to pass my examination at the local preachers' quarterly meeting. My examination in theology, however, appeared to give satisfaction. I then left the meeting whilst my case was considered. When I was called again before my examiners I was astonished to learn that by a unanimous vote I had been elected on the full plan. I was advised by the reverend chairman to cease tampering with "Infidel" books and read only sound works on theology. I was told that in view of the fact that I was a young man and gave promise of doing useful work in Christ's Church, the meeting had taken a lenient view of my case. And so I found myself a full-blown local Wesleyan preacher.

For nearly a year afterwards I preached constantly in Wesleyan pulpits. When I was a little over nineteen years of age I finished my apprenticeship. After preaching several times in Louth circuit, Lincolnshire, I returned to my native town to study for the Wesleyan ministry. In order to be recommended as a candidate it was necessary for me to preach another trial sermon. Two ministers were present as my judges, and this time my sermon caused no trouble, owing mainly to the fact that one of them had revised it before I delivered it. Then it was that doubts began to multiply in my mind. Interest in Theosophy led me to the study of comparative religions. I discovered that the best part of Christian morality was equalled, and even excelled, in pre-Christian Oriental religions, compared with which Christianity is but a babe of yesterday. I saw that the ethics of Christianity were but the generalities of all the world's great religions. I then examined the peculiarities of Christianity—those teachings which differentiated it from other forms of faith. I became convinced that the Holy Bible,

with its contradictions, absurdities, atrocities, and obscenities, could not be a revelation from a God of infinite truth, wisdom, love, and purity. I learned that nobody knew when, where, or by whom the books of the Bible were written. My reason rebelled against such doctrines as the Trinity, Original Sin, the Incarnation, the Atonement, salvation by faith, damnation for unbelief, the resurrection of the dead, hell and heaven. A study of the history of the Christian Church forced me to the conclusion that Christianity was the deadly enemy of human progress. Yet all the time that this scepticism was flourishing in my mind I wished to believe that the faith of my childhood was true. But the head was stronger than the heart, and my reason forced me irresistibly to the conclusion: "Christianity is not true."

I recollect walking out on a clear starlight night and gazing up at the sky, feeling lost amid the constellations of space, and asking myself, believing as I then did in a God: Is it possible that the infinite Being who created all this magnificence came from everywhere to this earth, this grain of sand, this tear-drop in the infinite ether, and was nailed to two pieces of wood merely because a woman stole an apple? But my religion was so firmly rooted within me that it seemed as possible to tear out my heart as it did to give up my religion.

I was also putting to a practical test another Christian doctrine, that of prayer. If any Christian has ever prayed with sincerity, then I have. I can remember—I shall never forget—how in the darkness of my doubt I prayed to the Father God in whom I then believed, asking him to lighten my darkness. But the more I prayed the deeper the darkness became, and the only light I ever received was that which was the result of my own research.

There was but one honest course for me to take. Shakespeare says: "This above all, to thine own self be true; and it must follow as the night the day thou canst not then be false to any man"; and so one evening in March, 1895, I wrote to the superintendent minister of my own circuit severing myself forever from the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

I had a final interview with the superintendent minister, the late Rev. Robert Daw. He was charitable enough to inform me that I possessed a vast amount of conceit, or I should never dare to set up my puny mind against the colossal intellects of the Christian Church. During our conversation I asked him whether he believed that an honest, righteous unbeliever would suffer everlasting damnation. "Most decidedly," was the answer, accompanied by a thump from his fist on the table, which made all the ornaments in the room quake with fear. "Does not God's Word say, 'He that believeth not shall be damned'?" Then I inquired if he considered that a person of grossly immoral life, who sincerely repented just before death, like the dying thief, would enjoy eternal salvation? There was another thump and another text. "Most certainly. What does God's Word say? 'He that believeth shall be saved.'" I told him that from such a creed as that my head and heart recoiled with abhorrence. His parting advice to me was "Go home, fall down upon your knees, and ask for God's pardon, or you will be lost to all eternity."

I next gave up belief in a personal God. The fact of pain in the world is in itself sufficient to completely shatter all belief in a God of love. I later abandoned belief in individual immortality, and on August 25, 1896, I was enrolled as a member of the National Secular Society.

In conclusion, let me say to Christians whose eyes may scan these lines that I, who prayed to a Divine Father as earnestly as any Christian, sang with ecstasy sacred hymns, read with faith the Holy Bible, and with sincerity preached the so-called Gospel of Christ, find infinitely greater satisfaction in Free-thought than I ever did in Christianity. It is better to serve man, who needs our help, than serve a God who needs it not; better to rescue our kind from the real hells of poverty, crime, ignorance, and pain in

the present life, than to save them from an imaginary hell in a doubtful future life; and better to help our fellows to rear an earthly paradise, here and now, than to delude them with dreams that may never come true.

PESSIMISM AND RELIGION.

The word "Pessimism" is at present on everybody's tongue, but few understand it. The common notion is that Schopenhauer invented it as well as the sombre creed it denotes, to which Hartmann is supposed to have given the final perfecting touch. But, as a matter of fact, Pessimism is as old as history and literature. The Old Testament is deeply impregnated with it. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," is the constantly recurring sentiment of the great Hebrew writers. The New Testament is no less subject to the same influence. Jesus was a thorough Pessimist with regard to this world; the rectification he looked for lay beyond the grave. Buddhism is pessimistic in its very essence. Its *Nirvana* is the negation of life. Final emancipation from evil involves the extinction of individual life. Only by absorption into the unconscious infinite can the soul of man rid itself of the misery which attends every form of being. Many of the greatest poets and philosophers of Greece and Rome were Pessimists, and the name of such in modern times is legion. Chaucer, Spenser, Bacon, Shakespeare, Swift, Byron, Shelley, and many other great writers of this, the most optimistic nation in the world, have left on record their partial or entire agreement with the preacher of "Ecclesiastes." Germany, France, and Italy are not behind us in this respect. The world's greatest dramas are tragic; its greatest poems as well as its sweetest "toll of saddest thought"; its masterpieces of music are "terrible as an army with banners" or melancholy as the wailing of wind over a desolate land "where no man has been since the making of the world," so that the poet who said the supreme word concerning it spoke of "the music yearning like a god in pain." The world's noblest men and women have been martyrs, its greatest minds have mostly been unhappy, every living generation treads the nameless dust of countless generations of the dead, and, to crown all, it is one of the truest of sayings that man's capacity for suffering is the supreme test of his worth. No paltering with reason will change the nature of things, and it is well to rid ourselves of "the fool's hectic of wishing about the unalterable." Pessimism is not new, but as old as thought. It has been perceived in every age that nature (including human nature) is not moulded to our desires. The supernatural creeds have simply tried, though with small success, to make men contented with a hard bed here by promising them a happy lot hereafter, instead of helping them to soften the couch, or at least to smooth down some of its most galling ridges.—G. W. Foots, "Atheism and Morality."

THE CONFESSION OF A SPIRITUALIST MEDIUM.

"You begin to take me. And, after all, these worthy people [Spiritualists] do not suffer so greatly. If I did not take their money some other impostor would. Their huge conceit of intelligence would breed perhaps some viler swindle than my facetious wrappings. That's the line our doubting bishops take, and why shouldn't I? For example, these people might give it to public charities, minister to the fattened secretary, the prodigal son. After all, at worst, I am a sort of latter-day Robin Hood; I take from the rich according to their incomes. I don't give to the poor, certainly; I don't get enough. But—there are other good works. Many a poor weakling have I comforted with lies, great, thumping, silly lies about the grave.".....

"There are bishops who believe in Darwin and doubt Moses. Now, I hold myself better than they—analogue perhaps, but better—for I do at least invent something of the tricks I play—I do do that.".....

"Now, some of my dodges," he said, with a sudden change of voice, turning towards Lewisham, his eyes smiling over his glasses and an emphatic hand patting the tablecloth; "some of my dodges are damned ingenious, you know—damned ingenious—and well worth double the money they bring me—double."—H. G. Wells, "Love and Mr. Lewisham."

THE ORIGIN OF HOSPITALS.

In its inception the hospital was a charity. It was established to take pity on the sick and homeless poor, and was simply a poor makeshift as a last resort for the helpless and forlorn.

As such we read of houses of detention in connection with the temples of many religions long before the Christian era.

As such it continued its career through the centuries of the conflict between Christianity and Mohammedanism and

the Middle Age struggle between Protestantism and Catholicism.

This initial idea still persists, says the *Hospital*, and must persist, as a prominent feature of our many-sided and ever-broadening work.

CHRIST AT THE BAR OF HUMANITY.

Now in the name of vestals sacrificed
To feed the lust of those same priests of Christ,
Of acolyte children tangled in their mesh
Of infamous and nameless filths of flesh, [pope
In the name of those whom king and priest and
Cast down to dust, beyond all peace and hope,
Yea, in their names who made this man their guide,
And curst by men, by him were justified,
I demand justice on their Christ, this Jew!

Now in the name of life defiled and scorned,
Of hearts that broke because this phantom warned,
Of weary mothers desolately dying
For sons whose hearts were hardened to their crying,
Of wives made husbandless and left unblest,
Of little children starving for the breast,
Of homes made desolate from sea to sea
Because he said, "Leave all, and follow me,"
I demand justice on their Christ fiend.

—Robert Buchanan.

Correspondence.

THE PASSING OF HELL.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I send you an extract from the *Church Times* of the 16th inst., containing a report of what that journal itself calls "a remarkable sermon on Eternal Punishment," by the Bishop of London.

Two points in the sermon have struck me as somewhat of a new departure for a Bishop of the Established Church.

First, the Bishop, after describing what he imagined was to happen after the "Judgment Day," said: "And if it" (the sentence) "is Depart, is it for ever? It may be for ever. But modern scholarship has helped us to a truer understanding of the Greek, and we know that the word in the Greek text does not necessarily mean everlasting. As a great writer says, when self-will ceases, hell ceases."

But forty years ago I knew a clergyman who practically lost his whole congregation because he preached and published a series of sermons in which he pressed this very point, and combated the popular idea that "torment in hell" would never end. He was the incumbent of a proprietary Episcopal chapel in Belgravia, which he had to give up on account of the loss of nearly all his congregation, and I heard him once say at a small meeting of sympathisers that he had as certainly lost the money he had invested in the chapel as if he had sunk it in the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway, which was just then in very low water. And he suffered enormous persecution and abuse from those persons who could not be happy without thinking that a large number of people would be maintained alive for ever in eternal fire.

Then, again, the Bishop says: "The whole purpose of what is meant in the Bible by hell is for the cure of the diseases of the soul, and if hell won't effect a cure nothing will." This looks to me very like the Romish doctrine of purgatory.

JNO. TOMKINS.

Obituary.

THE readers will learn with great regret of the death of Mr. Henry E. Forrer at his residence, Mona House, Birkdale, Liverpool, on Tuesday, December 13, in his 53rd year. The cremation took place on the following Friday at Anfield Crematorium, with a Secular Service.

Mr. Forrer, who was a well-known member of the Liverpool Cotton Exchange, was a fearless Freethinker, and, although he did not take any active part in the work of the local Branch, was well known and loved for his unfailing kindness and benevolence to all with whom he came in contact.

Amongst those present to pay their respects to his memory were Mr. John Hammond, Mr. and Miss Ross, and Mr. and Mrs. Roleffs.

Our sincerest sympathy is given to his sorrowing wife and relatives in their irreparable loss.

E. M. VANCE.

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.**

QUEEN'S (MINOR) HALL (Langham-place, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "God."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Public (Minor) Hall, Canning Town): 7.30, J. Rowney, "No Real Christian Can Be a Good Man."

OUTDOOR.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (The Green): 7, J. Hecht, a Lecture.

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

COUNTRY.**INDOOR.**

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, Sidney Wollen, "The Rise of Sectarianism."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Musical and Literary Evening.

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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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