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One of the greatest pains to human nature is the pain of a new idea.—WALTER BAGEHOT.

God and the Strikers.

WE have nothing to do in the *Freethinker* with the Strike as politics or political economy, but there are certain aspects of it that fall under our special purview.

As the "trouble," as it is politely called, began at Liverpool, we may notice the attitude of the Bishop of that city. His lordship (poor soul!) being away for a three months' holiday to get rid of the sad effects of "overwork," was "deeply distressed at the state of things in Liverpool," and resolved to do what he could to remedy it. Accordingly he worked his brains for all they were worth and excogitated the following prayer:—

"O Almighty God, King of Kings, and Governor of all things, Whose Power no creature is able to resist, to Whom it belongeth justly to punish sinners, and to be merciful to them that truly repent; save and deliver us, we humbly beseech Thee from our present troubles; abate the violence of men and assuage their bitterness. Grant to our people a spirit of wisdom, justice, reasonableness, and self-restraint, that we, being armed with Thy defence, may be preserved evermore from all perils to glorify Thee Who art the only giver of all peace and concord; through the merits of Thy only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Did anybody ever read a worse rigmarole? Yet the Bishop of Liverpool fondly hoped that this would act as oil on the troubled waters of that great and turbulent city. Of course it produced no effect at all. Liverpool went from bad to worse, and the "bitterness" became more and more intensified.

The Archbishop of Canterbury was not going to keep his holy fingers out of the same pie. He also issued an address to the Almighty, designed for use in "parish churches and elsewhere during the present labor anxiety":—

"O God, who art one Father of all, and who alone makest men to be of one mind, we beseech Thee, at this time of strife and unrest, to grant to us by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, a fuller realisation of our brotherhood man with man in Thee; allay all anger and bitterness, and deepen in us a sense of truth and equity in our dealings one with another, for the sake of Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

This prayer is better than the other one—because there is less of it; it has the advantage of brevity; in all else the prayers are worthy of each other, and it would be extremely difficult, if not absolutely impossible, to adjudicate between them for the prize of absurdity.

Dr. Davidson says it is God that makes men to be of one mind. He does not tell us why God did not do this in good time and thus prevent the strike altogether—instead of acting like the man who locked the stable door after the horse had run away. Moreover, it appears to us that God left the function of peacemaker to Mr. Asquith and the Government. Anyhow the King has not favored "God" with one of his telegrams of congratulation.

Most of the newspapers pointed out the painful consequences that would follow a thorough-going general strike. The food supply would be so affected

that half the population would suffer the pangs of hunger. The failure of the milk supply would cause the wholesale death of infants in a city like London. This was a very pathetic consideration. It was cruel for employers or strikers to fight their quarrel out over the bodies of helpless little children. True—perfectly true—indisputably true. We all felt it. But why did not the newspapers extend the same criticism to "God"? The long drought which he, as governor of the universe, had arranged or permitted, had diminished the pasturage and caused a shortage in the milk supply, which meant a higher price and a smaller quantity available to the children of poor parents. Infant mortality increased in London and other large towns. The same thing happened, with still greater severity, in Germany; no less than 305 infants dying in Leipzig alone, in one week, of complaints caused by the abnormal heat. This slaughter of the innocents, if Christianity be true, is the work of "Providence." Why, then, is not that personage rebuked and advised to mend his ways? We invite the newspapers to explain.

The drought, combined with the high temperature and the perpetual sunshine, was on the point of causing myriads of people to perish of thirst. In some Cambridgeshire villages water was selling at threepence and fourpence a bucketful. Several head of stock died owing to the great heat and being without water. The sufferings of these poor creatures calls for the deepest commiseration. And a heavy responsibility rests upon the "Providence" who tortured them in that terrible way.

The most violent and reckless strikers set fire to buildings and other things. This is very regrettable. But destructive fires have been caused by the prolonged heat, not only in Great Britain, but also throughout the continent of Europe. We beg to ask, therefore, why "Providence" is not taxed with incendiarism?

Typhoid fever, too, broke out in Northamptonshire. The wells had dried up, and water had to be taken from ponds. Here is more destruction of life for which "Providence" should be held accountable.

We wonder how the clergy would use the general strike to show the beneficent influence of Christianity. Without entering into chronological niceties, it may be affirmed that England has been a Christian country for more than a thousand years. During the whole of that period Christianity has dominated everything, including government, education, and social life. It calls itself the religion of love,—which is as true as its claim to be the religion of peace. Two thousand years after Christ there is no love lost amongst Christians. Self-love is rampant. Every side in industrial quarrels talks of "our rights" and "your duties." The idea of a moral obligation binding on all for the good of all scarcely exists. You may find it in Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus—one an emperor and the other a slave, of sixteen hundred years ago, and both Pagans—but not in the political and social controversies of to-day. Yet nothing else will ever save a nation. The idea that civilisation can be evolved out of the painfully adjusted clash of mere self-interests—whether of the classes or the masses—is one of the saddest of modern fallacies.

G. W. FOOTE.

What is to Follow Religion?

It is curious that reformers in general and Freethinkers in particular should have gained a reputation for destructiveness. It is a direct perversion of the facts of the situation, since there are none who take less interest in destruction, as such, or who have a more ardent interest in construction. Probably the accusation is based upon the fact that it is what is removed, not what is established, that chiefly interests the non-reforming or anti-reforming class. In a revolution it is the street fighting, the noise, the chaos, the dislocation of the old order that arouses interest; the solid and enduring work of social reconstruction passes comparatively unnoticed. Our own press, to take a typical example, were eager enough in reporting the Portuguese Revolution, and still find space for anything that savors of plots or disturbances in connection with the new Republic. But of the work that has been done, and is being done, to regulate the affairs of the country in a more satisfactory manner, scarce a line appears. So with more peaceful methods of reform. It is the attack on the old order that excites most notice. The establishment of a new state of things is passed by in silence.

The real change to which advanced thinkers are open is that of a too great zeal for reconstruction. The striking characteristic of agitators, revolutionaries, or by whatever other name threatened privilege describes insurgent right, has always been a too great readiness to produce ready made plans of a reconstructed society in which all, from king or president to scavenger, shall find their proper place. They are so possessed with the idea of reconstruction that destruction is a mere incident by the way. Their indifference as to what is destroyed is the reverse side of their strong sense of what may be established. Had they less zeal for construction, they would be less eager for destruction. The greatest destructive movement of modern times, the great French Revolution, was brought about by men who were obsessed by ideas and plans of rebuilding. They saw the future so clearly, the end became of such transcendent value, that the present was lost sight of, and any means became justifiable.

Now, from the point of view of mere tactics, this habit of producing sketch plans of a future state of society is a mistake. It enables the defenders of existing institutions to direct attention from the real issue. Instead of the question discussed being that of whether a particular institution is useful, or a particular teaching true, it becomes that of whether a proposed change will produce unalloyed good—a result that cannot be expected to follow in any case. The attacker thus becomes the defender, and the real issue is obscured. For the challenge to existing institutions is that they have outgrown their utility and that their removal is necessary to free and further growth. So long as they discharge a useful function so long is their existence defensible. When they no longer do this their removal is warranted, and it may well be that their removal is all that is required to effect the desired improvement. The outworn institution is the piece of grit in the social machinery, and what is needed is not a new machine but the removal of hindrance to its smooth running. Moreover, the wise man with a due sense of historic proportion and a proper conception of the laws of evolution, will be in no hurry to draw up detailed accounts of the society of the future. He will recognise that, in the long run, it is life which determines what theories shall persist, not theories that determine in what grooves life is to run.

Yet some of our wisest leaders are apt to stumble in this matter. In the preface to the *Data of Ethics*, as a justification for publishing the work out of the proposed order, Spencer remarks:—

"Few things can happen more disastrous than the decay and death of a regulative system no longer fit, before another and fitter regulative system has grown up to replace it. Most of those who reject the current

creed appear to assume that the controlling agency furnished by it may safely be thrown aside, and the vacancy left unfilled by any other controlling agency."

This passage not only illustrates the tactical mistake already mentioned; it really misrepresents those who reject the current creed. The Freethinker does not assume that in the absence of Christianity there will be, and need be, no "controlling agency"—whatever that may precisely mean. What he asserts is, first, that Christianity does not assert any controlling agency for good; second, that so far as it controls, it does so in the interests of stagnation or retrogression; and, third, that its removal will permit other and normally controllable agencies to express themselves in a profitable manner. And Spencer, above all others, should not have needed reminding that systems of thought, while they have any vital connection with current life, will successfully defy all attempts at eradication. It is not the attack on religion that is the ultimate cause of its decay. The attack is the conscious expression of an instinctive revolt against a system that has ceased to find justification in current life. The reformer is what he is because he is alive to the drift of events; but his main strength is derived from the thousand and one subterranean influences that establish and destroy all systems.

Still, it must be confessed that the quotation given from Spencer expresses a fairly common view of affairs. The demand for something in the place of religion has served its purpose, since it has impressed upon people the conviction that religion discharges a useful function in life, and that consequently its place is to be filled by a new force if life is to be complete. Hence the growth of numerous schemes and systems, from Comtean Positivism downwards, all aiming at developing a controlling force to take the place of that which is or has been attributed to religion. But this involves an evasion of the real issue. No intelligent Freethinker has ever denied that many things without which society would be the poorer are done in the name of religion. What he does challenge is the assumption that these things are either products of religion or that they are so bound up with religion that they cannot stand alone. He would not deny for a moment that, with numbers of people, the avowed mainspring of conduct is a certain number of religious beliefs. He would simply suggest that the instincts of man are deep laid, and that their development and perpetuation has been dependent upon the indestructible necessities of social life, and not upon the constantly changing requirements of religious belief.

Those who take up the position indicated by Spencer commit the fundamental error of picturing human conduct as governed by a single idea, whereas there are a multitude of beliefs—social, religious, domestic—which operate; and these, again, are largely determined by forces that never rise into consciousness at all. At most religious beliefs are only a part of the mass of beliefs that go to regulate conduct, and it is plainly unwise to ignore all other factors, and to talk as though the destruction of religion means reducing society to chaos. The expressed reasons for action are not even the frequent causes of action. Still less likely is it that beliefs which show themselves dependent upon constant stimulation and protection are the really effective controlling forces of life. Indeed, the decisive disproof of the controlling influence of religion is that in a civilised country men cannot be socially grouped according to their religious convictions. People of all shades of religious belief, and of all kinds of no religious belief, are found playing the same social parts, exhibiting the same kind of actions, and manifesting the same vices and virtues. And when this occurs one is clearly driven to look to something deeper and more fundamental than religious belief for an explanation.

It was argued by Sir James Fitzjames Stephens that as men have been in the habit of associating moral feelings with the belief in God, a severance of the association may entail moral disaster. Such a

result could only follow in the case of an individual here and there; it could not operate on any large scale or for any length of time. Luther complained of converts behaving worse as Protestants than they did as Catholics, and it may well have been that in a transference of allegiance a certain lawlessness of conduct prevailed for a time. But in the long run, the deeper social needs prevailed, and the conduct of Catholic and Protestant touched much the same level. Again, the conception of the State was for ages closely bound up with religious beliefs. Yet that connection is being surely destroyed all over the civilised world, without it affecting for the worse our conception of the reciprocal duties of the State and the individual. On the contrary, one may say that these duties have become clearer in proportion as the religious association between Church and State has been broken down. In the same manner, if one believes that the ground of morality, the "controlling agencies" of life, are independent of religious belief, it is useless to talk of the "disastrous" consequences that will follow if religion is not replaced by something else. The reply is that the effective agencies remain, and that a separation of ethics and religion—without the substitution of an elaborately concocted system—will no more involve moral chaos than a political revolution can destroy society.

I come back, then, to the point from which I set out. There is no need for the reformer to have at command a ready-made plan of a future state of society, in order to attack institutions which he perceives to be useless. Such plans are quite as likely to be wrong as right, and they provide the enemy with opportunities for diverting attention from the real issue. The strength and justification of the Freethought attack rests on two considerations. First, that certain institutions are obviously useless and certain teachings are obviously false. Second, that religion has all along been a parasite upon the social life of mankind, deriving sustenance by the absorption of energy that might have been more profitably expended. Man's deepest needs are not religious, but social, and however much his religious beliefs may react upon his life, it is the social qualities and requirements that sooner or later mould religion to their needs. Hitherto this process has gone on in a more or less unconscious manner. But it is one of the consequences of the evolutionary process that man becomes more and more conscious of the forces by which his own development is brought about. He thus learns to hasten some processes, to retard others, and to eliminate the unessential ones. And the recognition of religion as a species of social parasitism means its removal as an obstruction to the more efficient working of forces that are as indestructible as the human nature from which they spring, and whose needs they subserve.

C. COHEN.

The Inescapable Inference.

AS a rule we make too little argumentative capital of the fact that there is no agreement among Christians as to what their religion really is. When a moderately intelligent disciple is requested to furnish a clear definition of Christianity he is unable to comply. He may have some dim notion that it affects his standing before God and the safety and felicity of his soul in eternity; but how or why it does so he cannot tell. The same thing is true of the professional theologians, though in a somewhat different sense. Their definitions of Christianity, while intelligible enough as definitions, form a great multitude none can number. The theories of the atonement alone, if collected, would fill the largest library ever seen. Until lately, all theologians believed in the atonement and championed their respective theories of it; but to-day there are some who pride themselves upon clinging to the fact of the atonement as distinguished from

all theories. The Rev. Dr. Goodchild, an American divine, preaching in London the other Sunday, said:—

"Now I wish to say clearly that I have no theory of the atonement. I have no plan of salvation worked out exactly as some of our fathers used to work it out. I should not for the life of me know how to detail what is sometimes called a 'scheme of redemption.' What He passed through there was mysterious even to the Son of God himself.....All that I know about it is that the sufferings that He endured had no real relation to his own soul's need, but that those sufferings are wonderfully and savingly related to the needs of my poor soul."

Every thoughtful reader sees at once that the reverend gentleman was theorising all the time. To call Jesus the Son of God is to theorise about his person; and to claim that his sufferings are wonderfully and savingly related to human souls is to offer a theory concerning the nature of his death—a theory that renders his death essentially different from every other death in the world's history.

The only consistent course for those who disown all theories of the atonement is to give up the atonement itself; and this is the course taken up by Liberal Christians. For them Jesus is simply a human teacher, although the best teacher humanity has yet had. Liberal Christians are rapidly multiplying, especially in Germany, but are still a minority. Recently the Court of the Upper Church Consistory tried Pastor Jatho for heresy, found him guilty, and deprived him of his living. Pastor Jatho was a distinguished clergyman, highly respected and profoundly loved by a large church at Cologne. But he belonged to the school of Liberal Christians, and was ruthlessly cast out by the Conservative majority. What contributed to the irony of the trial was the fact that the theological assessor for the Court was the famous Dr. Harnack, himself a confirmed Liberal, and that afterwards, in an extraordinary communication to the Press, he defended the verdict. For some time now Germany has been agitated by a characteristically acrid controversy between the two Liberals. Naturally, Herr Jatho taunts Dr. Harnack with being an unfair and cruel opponent inasmuch as he holds the same views himself. Dr. Harnack retorts by charging Herr Jatho with having misunderstood his teaching. They both deny the Divinity of Jesus, but they disagree as to his relation to God and his mission in the world. Jatho maintains that he was merely a seeker after God, and, consequently, incapable of furnishing mankind with any new revelation regarding the Godhead, while Harnack asserts that he was a Divinely inspired teacher, and that this inspiration qualified him for teaching the world in a way and sense beyond the capacity of any God-seeker. The result is that the Liberal Christianity of Harnack differs considerably from that of Jatho; and it is well known that the Conservatives or Positives are at one in scarcely anything save in cursing all the Liberals.

The situation, when we come to think of it, is irresistibly laughable. Canon Hensley Henson, for example, frankly admits that the Protestant Reformers were nearly all Fatalists. His words are significant:—

"The strength of Fatalism, when allied with a religious creed, has been demonstrated in many famous chapters of human endurance and achievement. Calvinism, which perhaps best deserves the description of Fatalistic Christianity, was the creed of the greatest heroes of the Reformation—the creed of Coligny, of William the Silent, of Gustavus Adolphus, of Oliver Cromwell, of William III. These men, and countless less famous heroes, had risen above the exaltations and discouragements of changing fortune, because they had grasped firmly the truth of God's omnipotence and eternal purpose. They realised, what indeed sober reflection must needs affirm, that the divine will cannot be ultimately defeated."

If God is omnipotent his will cannot be defeated at all. If he is the Infinite Sovereign of the Universe, his will must prevail absolutely at all times and places. There is no logical escape from this posi-

tion. Let anyone read Romans ix. 19—28, and declare that Paul was not a Fatalist; and yet Canon Henson has the audacity to exclaim, "But Calvinism is not Christianity, and the Gospel is not properly described as Fatalistic." It is true that Calvinism is not in accord with the facts of life; but precisely the same thing is true of Christianity. If there were a Supreme Being there would be no opposition to his will, nor any need for Christianity. The existence of Christianity implies the non-existence of a Supreme Being, and the complete failure of Christianity as an infallible remedy for the world's maladies proves it to be a cruel imposture.

Christian divines are fanatics and Christianity is a superstition. Protestants see plenty of superstition in the Catholic Church, and Nonconformists used to find a fair amount of the same commodity in the Anglican communion; but, in the estimation of unbelievers, religion itself, in all its supernatural forms, is synonymous with superstition, and all religionists are fanatics. All superstitious people are not fanatical, but all fanatics are superstitious. According to a French writer of more than a century ago, "fanaticism is the religion of little spirits with hot heads." Continuing, the same writer says:—

"Ordinarily a superstitious person is but a passive being who vegetates in peace at the feet of base divinities formed by himself; but he is not nearly so active as the fanatic, whose little and cruel soul swells with poison only to scatter it abroad, who has no zeal but to persecute men; no voice but to curse them; and no hand but to exterminate them. Superstition is a lake insect, but tranquil, which hurts only those who approach it. Fanaticism is a burning torrent which precipitates itself from the crater of a volcano, overruns the plain to blight it, and leaves everywhere livid traces of destruction" (*De La Philosophie De La Nature*, Tom Septieme, p. 2).

Fanaticism and reason are not on speaking terms. With what sublime cocksureness Catholic priests denounce Protestants as liars, evil-livers, and fit fagots for hell fire, and with what terrible severity Protestant ministers condemn the blind zeal with which Catholics observe superstitious rites and ceremonies. The Lord has a million voices, and almost every one of them contradicts all the others. One Sunday, you heard dancing and card-playing and theatre-going proscribed in the name of the Lord; the next, the whole three were mildly commended in the same name. It is so safe to say and do things in the name of the Lord, because he neither speaks nor acts on his own behalf, and there is never the least danger of getting into trouble. Elders and deacons are much more to be feared than is the Divine Master of all. But the inevitable inference from all this is that the "God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" is as mythical a being as Zeus, Apollo, or Poseidon. A well-known preacher, descanting against the theatre the other day, said:—

"When I see what the world is, and think of what God wants it to be, then, if God means anything to me, I have no leisure to expend on pursuits which, however lawful they may be themselves, are not expedient for me. Let us become better Christians."

Here is a naive confession that what the world is is not what God wants it to be; but how on earth does any reverend gentleman know what God wants the world to be? Who made the world as it is? If God made it at all, he made it as it is, and it is a piece of impudence on anybody's part to say that he is not satisfied with it. If God made it what it is he must have bungled atrociously, and thoroughly discredited his creative power and wisdom; and there is absolutely nothing to indicate that he could improve matters by further interference. To allege that God wants the world to be what it is not, is to acknowledge his colossal incompetence both as creator and as ruler. Christian Churches are so many monuments commemorating the masterly inactivity of Heaven and their pastors so many interpreters of the inscriptions which time has written, in the silence of its passage, on those monuments. The interpretations are not to be taken literally, for

they need to be themselves interpreted in the light of history. As an example, take this from a recent sermon by Dr. Horton. Speaking of the coming of Christ, he said:—

"We know that he is coming, for in our hearts we have enthroned him, and our life is all made by him, and we know well that for this world there is no life except in his lordly and conquering love. We know therefore that he is coming. The day will dawn when he will reign, and all the world will recognise him; it is the Lord of Love, the Lord of Life, Very God of Very God, the Eternal Son, who came to seek and to save the world."

Correctly read, that passage means, "He is going; he has been slowly going for ages; he will never come at all." The very idea of his coming was from the first a mere hallucination. *He* is not there either to come or to go; he is a dream which mankind indulged in "when monarch reason slept"; the monarch is now more than half awake, and the dream is passing. And this monarch, when fully awake, shall deliver the world from all its cramping superstitions and blinding fanaticisms, and lead it into possession of itself in the fulness of its power and glory.

J. T. LLOYD.

Seaside Superstition.

THE natives at most seaside resorts are dreadfully superstitious, especially if they are engaged in the occupation of fishing. The supposed disciples of Jesus were fishermen. They were, therefore, naturally ignorant and unlettered. While they were out at sea trawling, or on shore dragging in their nets, they had no time for acquiring knowledge; and the time occupied in preparing the fish for sale would leave them little opportunity for the improvement of their minds. Jesus, it is alleged, promised to make them "fishers of men," but subsequent events proved that in that line they were a dead failure.

At the various seaside places at which I have stayed during my summer holidays at various times, I have always found the fisher-folk very ignorant and superstitious—men with stout hearts and noble courage, but with very little capacity for understanding great and complex problems. Consequently, the religion of fishermen is always of a very primitive character. Then, too, the Salvation Army always thrives at great seaside resorts. The members, being drawn from the most ignorant persons in the community, find a certain amount of "spiritual intoxication" in fervent prayer-meetings and in the singing of hymns, the blowing of brass instruments, and the beating of tamborines, and, above all, in relating their experiences, or what to them is the same thing, relating what their perverted imaginations lead them to believe their experiences ought to have been in their unconverted condition. Well, at Hastings—for that is the seaside town of which I am writing—the Salvation Army is apparently a very important body, and at the last meeting of the Town Council a discussion took place as to whether this body should be allowed to continue its meetings at a particular spot on the front in contravention of the bye-laws. It appears that other bodies had asked to be permitted to hold meetings at this portion of the foreshore, but when it had been pointed out to them that the managers of the Queen's Hotel had objected on behalf of their visitors, they were reasonable enough to go further down, where they were allowed to deliver their addresses without let or hindrance. But the Salvation Army stuck to their determination, and the matter had, therefore, to be decided by the Council. After a very long debate, which was reported at great length in the local press, the Council rejected an amendment giving the Salvation Army the right to occupy this position on other evenings of the week and carried their original resolution. Even as it is, the Salvation Army holds three meetings simultaneously on Sundays at various stations on the front at Hastings and St. Leonards, while other

religious bodies have scarcely a look in. In other words, the Army evidently thinks that their religion is the most suitable for the people of Hastings, and ought, therefore, to prevail.

Notwithstanding the diverse and conflicting views of the multitude of visitors who patronise this popular watering-place, the primitive ideas of the most ignorant among the Salvation Army orators are to have three chances against every one of any other form of religious faith. It was really very interesting and amusing to find Councillor after Councillor getting up and giving the Salvation Army a certificate for sound religious sentiment and good conduct. The Army was, according to them, always prompted by the "best of motives," and one Councillor went as far as saying that these people "were the friends of all and the enemies of none. They were doing immense good, and their social work was beyond all praise. They were reclaiming drunkards." Now all this is open to very serious dispute, but it is so general for people to make these statements without real knowledge that, on account of their frequent repetition, the unthinking masses take them for granted.

We all know, however, that the possession of "good motives" could be claimed on behalf of persons of very injurious beliefs. "The Peculiar People" have "good motives" when they let their children die because they will not seek the aid of a doctor; early Christians had "good motives" when they burned unbelievers; and present-day Christians have equally "good motives" when they refuse to employ men who do not happen to hold the same religious beliefs as themselves and have the courage to say so.

How these pious people can be said to be "friends of all and the enemies of none" when they teach that the vast majority of mankind are to be consigned to hell by their "Heavenly Father" requires a good deal of explanation to render it worthy of credence; while as for the so-called "social work" they are doing, its utility has been called in question again and again by nearly every trades union in the country. But it is said "they reclaim drunkards!" So did the various temperance societies before the Salvation Army was ever heard of. There is, however, a far better thing than reclaiming drunkards, and that is educating the masses and altering their conditions, so that "excessive drinking" or excessive eating, or excessive anything, becomes repugnant to their very nature.

But these primitive and absurd ideas are not only good enough to be promulgated at the seaside, but they are apparently good enough for the acceptance of the majority of the Councillors of a fashionable watering-place. Having read what Hastings Councillors thought of Salvationist religion, I thought I would listen to a little of the beach oratory myself. On Sunday last, therefore, I strolled leisurely along the front and sampled a little of the oratory of the various religious and other speakers who seek to convert the public to their views. First, I heard a Salvation Army captain, who told how happy he was since he had given himself to Christ, but he whined in such a miserable tone of voice that I could not help thinking that he might have asked the Lord to make him appear more cheerful before he undertook the task of trying to make others as happy as himself. In fact, by his manner he seemed to be saying, "O Lord, I am a miserable sinner, but Christ alone knows how happy I am! I am jolly, miserably happy!" The second speaker I heard was not a Salvationist, though he had the same Gospel to preach. He told us how he had become converted, and how easy it was for us all to become converted if we would only give ourselves up to Christ, body and soul. He did not tell us that there was any difficulty as to what we should have to believe in order to become true followers of the meek and lowly Jesus. Oh, no; that was a very secondary consideration. All you had to do was to throw yourself at the feet of Jesus, and Jesus would do all the rest. God Almighty was very anxious about his children.

While the preacher was talking thus I was thinking of the thousands this same merciful God was destroying all over Europe by the heat-wave; and I knew that Shakespeare was right when he said:—

"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,
They kill us for their sport."

And as I looked up to the great hills on my right and on my left and saw human beings striding along—in appearance almost as small as grasshoppers—and when I reflected that this little world on which we dwell is only one, probably of many millions, that revolve in space in this great universe, I could not help thinking how presumptuous was this young preacher to imagine that any God could occupy any of his precious time in saving or damning the souls of such insignificant creatures.

The third speaker I listened to was an old gentleman with a sad countenance and a long beard. He wore a black frock coat and a tall hat, and looked a model of respectability. I was told that he was a retired baker, but of late years he had devoted a great deal of his time to advertising "the bread of life," which "B. V." (James Thomson, the poet) in his masterly satire, entitled "The Story of a Famous Jewish Firm," refers to; and the consumption of which, he says, is more likely to produce indigestion and flatulency than any substantial benefit to the human constitution.

Well, this grave and reverend gentleman told us a little about heaven. He did not say where it was, or in what direction we should have to travel to reach its golden gates; but he said of one thing we might be quite certain, that it was not a place where we should be lying about constantly in idleness, but it was a place where there would be plenty of work for all; no unemployment—only everyone would be able to do, as the Americans say, as he "darned well pleased."

One gentleman in the sparse audience begged to ask a question, but the pious preacher was not out to answer questions, he was only there to tell them the truth as he knew it through Jesus Christ.

So I passed on to the next stage. A little further along the front I found another preacher of the Gospel. He was a "very 'umble" representative of the Church of England. His vicar was standing by his side to give all the moral support he could to his little band—his very little band—of workers.

This gentleman (the preacher) was asking, when I arrived, how it was that, though there were thousands of visitors in Hastings, so few of them came to church to worship. They came to Hastings for enjoyment, it was said, but surely they could spare a little time for their Savior. They had all the week to enjoy themselves, and yet they could not give up one short hour to the service of the Lord. I should have liked to have told this young man why intelligent persons do not go to Church in these days, but as I do not believe in disturbing any meeting, however insignificant, I passed on and came to the last, and, without a doubt, to the largest gathering on the front. At all the previous meetings women and children largely predominated in numbers, but at this last gathering men were decidedly in a majority. It was a Socialist gathering, and the speaker was telling his hearers how they might improve their conditions in this life. He had nothing to say about "the great hereafter"—he left that subject for the sky-pilots; but because he addressed himself exclusively to the things of this real, practical world in which we live, he got an intelligent crowd to listen to him, to feel some interest in what he had to say; and whether they agreed with him or not, they could not help feeling that he was dealing with matters of vital importance. And that is what the Free-thinker has been teaching for so many years, that the affairs of this life should claim our first attention. Deal with what we know, deal with what can be decided here and now, and step by step we may achieve some reform. And by the gradual changing of men's ideas and men's ideals we shall gradually make possible the new world for the generations yet unborn.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

The Value of Church Property.

(Reprinted from the New York "Truthseeker.")

THE Government census of 1890 reported Church property in continental America valued at \$679,426,689. That of 1906 found the value raised to \$1,257,575,867. This is not, on the face of it, quite a doubling in value in sixteen years, but the 1906 census compiler explained that only 87.7 per cent. of the Church organisations answered the inquiries about the amount of their property. If the one thousand two hundred and fifty-odd millions given represent 87.7 per cent. of the whole, then the total must be above one billion four hundred thousand; and, if the average tax rate in the country is 2 per cent., the Churches dodge \$28,000,000 (in round numbers) of taxes.

But this vast sum of \$1,257,575,867 includes only buildings owned and used for worship, with their sites. The organs, furniture, and bells are left out. The personal property of the Churches is omitted. Neither are there included parsonages, episcopal palaces, clergy club houses, parochial school buildings, theological seminaries, monasteries, convents, sectarian colleges, hospitals, homes, protectories, and so on, the value of which is enormous, and many of them enjoy not only exemption from taxation, but appropriation from the public funds.

The census is incomplete in not telling the whole truth. A comprehensive census would take in all these institutions, giving their value and the amount of their exemption and appropriations, if any, and include it in separate tables under the head of "Religious Graft in Continental America." Graft in our island possessions, in Porto Rico and the Philippines, should appear in its appropriate place.

There is no economic reason, whatever else can be pleaded, why places of worship should not be taxed. The Churches are not poor. The Catholic Church has three hundred millions worth of church edifices, and its monasteries, nunneries, and schools will bring the value up to at least a half billion. Its Church edifices are of an average value of \$28,431, to say nothing of organs and other furniture. The Episcopalians worship the Galilean tourist in edifices averaging \$20,644; the Jewish synagogues rise to an average of \$31,056, while the ruling value of Unitarian sanctuaries is \$35,191. These church edifices, untaxed, run from five to ten times the value of taxed homes.

It is an ominous fact that Church property is increasing in value more rapidly than the Churches gain in communicants, even though communicants increase faster in proportion than the population of the country. In twenty years, from 1890 to 1910, the total population increased less than 47 per cent.; Church communicants increased 71 per cent., and from 1890 to 1906 the value of Church property more than doubled. That is, Church wealth increased over the population in the ratio of more than 100 to 47. Add the other Church property and the ratio would be about 3 to 1. The parsonages alone of the 25 per cent. of the organisations reporting on them are worth \$143,495,853. If the 75 per cent. of organisations not heard from own as much more, the total of \$286,991,706, representing only the parsonages, would nearly equal the value of all the Church property in the United States fifty years ago.

Figures taken from the different censuses show how untaxed property accumulates. That of the Churches was in 1850 worth \$87,928,801; in 1860, \$171,897,932; in 1870, \$354,483,681; in 1890, \$679,462,689; in 1906, \$1,257,575,867. There was more than fourteen times as much of it in 1906 as in 1850. Meanwhile the population of 23,191,876 in 1850 had hardly quadrupled. Assuming that the Church communicants in 1850 constituted one-fourth of the population, or, say, 6,000,000, they have multiplied about six times—not half as fast as church wealth.

The kingdom of Christ makes a much better showing when counted in dollars than when counted

in souls. The souls are few in comparison, and they are small enough to slip out of their just dues to the State and spread the taxes on their godhouses over the property of the non-communicants.

GEORGE MACDONALD.

"Jesus the Socialist."

I HAVE been reading a pamphlet, intitled as above, by Denis Hird, M.A. The writer concludes his essay by declaring that he has "proved up to the hilt that Jesus was a Socialist." But he has done nothing of the kind. For—

Firstly. He has not proved that such a being as the Jesus Christ of the Gospels ever existed. To have done so must have proved that a *corpse rose from the dead, and walked, and talked, and ate, and digested what it had eaten, and finally rose from the earth and disappeared behind a cloud* (Luke xxiv. 39-43). And that he has not done. For it must not be forgotten that the resurrection of Christ is purely a *physical* question.

Secondly. He has overlooked the fact that the Gospels "according to" Matthew, Mark, and Luke, to which he "confines his appeal," portray not one Christ, as he seems to think, but two Christs, who differ in character from each other as widely as the poles of the earth are asunder. Of this there cannot be the slightest doubt. The one Christ is a being of ineffable sweetness who whispered softly, "Forgive thy brother not seven times, but until seventy times seven" (Matt. xviii. 22). The other Christ is a brutal fiend who cried, in the harshest tones, "He that believeth not [on me] shall be damned" (Mark xvi. 16); "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. xxv. 41).

Thirdly. He has been careful to select from the writings of the Evangelists whom he quotes only those texts which apparently bolster up his assertion. To wit, according to Luke (xvi. 1-9), Christ commended the unjust steward for *deliberately robbing his master*. Is that a tenet of Socialism? And according to Luke also (xiv. 26), Christ taught that *everybody was to be hated except himself*—"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, wife and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Is not such teaching odious and repellant even to Socialists?

Further, do we not read (Matt. xx. 1-15) "that an householder went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard, and when he had agreed with them for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard"; that hour after hour, even to the eleventh hour, he did the same thing; that, at the end of the day, he "paid every man his penny"; that those who had "borne the burden and heat of the day" murmured against such treatment; and that then he declared "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" So far, then, from being a Socialist, Jesus was the upholder of the Capitalist.

J. W. DE CAUX.

From the great house in the city of London to the village grocer the commercial life of England has been saturated with fraud. So deeply has it gone that a strictly honest tradesman can hardly hold his ground against competition. You can no longer trust that any article you buy is the thing that it pretends to be. We have false weights, false measures, cheating and shoddy everywhere. And yet the clergy have seen all this grow up in absolute indifference. Many hundreds of sermons have I heard in England, many a dissertation on the mysteries of the faith, on the divine mission of the clergy, on bishops, and justification, and the theory of good works, and verbal inspiration, and the efficacy of the sacrament afterwards, but, during all those wonderful thirty years, never one, that I can recollect, on common honesty.—J. A. Froude.

Acid Drops.

A great man has come over from America. We have the New Theology organ's word for it. We never heard of him before, but what does that matter? He is able to set forth "the next great step in human evolution." This is the wedding of Science and Religion. We fancy this has been predicted by religious gushers "made in Great Britain." But we should be sorry to dispute the American preacher's originality. Not that he is original in everything. He repeats the old theological wheeze about evolution being impossible without involution—which is a mere play upon words. But it is given to no man to be perfect. Even the great "Mr. W. J. Colville, of America," has his limitations.

The metaphysician of the hour is Bergson. The theological flies are all buzzing around him. Somehow or other he is to set religion on its legs again. The weekly organ of the New Theology devotes several columns to recording his wonderful discoveries, as if they were staggering novelties that will change the face of the intellectual world. And at the finish it all comes to no more than our English poet Spenser said three hundred years ago: "For soul is form and doth the body make."

"The Moral Bankruptcy of China" is the impudent title of an impudent article by the Rev. J. Sydney Helps in the *Foreign Field*, the missionary organ of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. A man who can talk about the moral bankruptcy of China in view of her attitude towards the opium traffic, and our own in comparison with it, has "face" enough for anything. One of his sad statements is that China has fortune-tellers. We presume he has never heard of such impostors in England. Finally, the reverend gentleman declares that "apart from Christianity there is no ethical dynamic. It is not mere morals China needs, but the will and the power to practise them. And that only a Divine and Loving Christ can give." Of course! What else could the reverend gentleman be expected to say? After all, he is merely puffing his own business. Missionary work has to be kept going somehow—for the sake of the fatal salaried people engaged in it, who are under the fatal necessity of living.

The Archbishop of Canterbury got "the jumps" over the railway strike, and his printed supplication to the Throne of Grace duly appeared in the newspapers; but it was not needed, and if he had been more astute he would have altered it at the last moment and made it serve as an appeal for rain.

A Yellow Press organ, during the strike week, quoted the words—"This is a time that tries men's souls." Many readers probably thought the quotation was from the Bible. It was taken, and a little spoilt, from Thomas Paine. But the Yellow Press organ couldn't afford to say so.

The following inspired paragraph appeared in London newspapers on Monday:—

"SALVATION ARMY EMIGRATION.

Conducted parties of families—the wives and children of men who have 'made good' in Canada—are now being organised every week by the Salvation Army, and when the season's work is completed early in November it is estimated that nearly 10,000 men, women, and children will have emigrated—mostly to Canada—under the Army's auspices."

Technically, this announcement is not inaccurate; substantially, it is an utter falsehood. It is cunningly worded with an intention to deceive. The ordinary reader would imagine that the Salvation Army assisted deserving poor persons to emigrate from England to Canada. But it does nothing of the kind. It simply acts as an emigration agent, taking its commission on emigrants' tickets from the shipping and railway companies. That is all "the Army's auspices" means.

Father O'Shaughnessy has been saying that "Swindon is an irreligious town." The Free Church party admit that people don't attend "divine worship" as they used to; in other words, that the churches and chapels are getting emptier; but this does not involve "irreligion." Now suppose we gave this argument a turn towards the drama, and said that people who never go to a theatre are mightily fond of it; wouldn't Free Churchmen, as well as others, laugh at us?

Last week's *Athenæum* contained an able and interesting review of a book entitled *The Quakers in the American Colonies*, by Rufus M. Jones and others. It was projected, as part of a new History of the Quakers by the late J. W.

Rowntree, whose friends are carrying on the work as a labor of love in testimony of their affection. We may deal with this book later on; at present we give our attention to the review.

Readers of history know that the Protestant Puritans who fled from what they called "tyranny" in England, with a view to safeguarding the "rights of conscience" in America, had no conception whatever of any "rights" but their own, and were as remorseless "tyrants" as ever trod the earth. The Quakers were treated very badly in England, in spite of what protection could be extended to them by the great heart of Cromwell, but they were treated in New England with a ferocity which, considering their harmlessness, was simply extraordinary. Some of the things done to them are, quite wrongly as we conceive, slurred over by historians as too horrible to relate. But surely historians should have more courage; we might even say more fidelity. Students, at least, are entitled to plain facts instead of decorative paraphrases. It is on the facts that human judgment should be based. What is the use of merely telling us that religious persecutors were cruel? Tell us exactly what their cruelties were. We shall then know what to think of them, and the principles they represented. Our imaginations will have something real to work upon. We shall be able to picture to some extent the actual scenes which occurred. And we shall be practically, instead of theoretically, on our guard against the devilish spirit that still exists and tries to pass itself off (for the sake of future opportunities) as an angel of light.

"Their enactments against Quakerism," the reviewer says of the New England Puritans, "proceeded in a crescendo of ferocity, the lashing of men almost to death and the boring of women's tongues being among the means provided. Frequently our author finds the full account too horrible for modern print." The historian, however, should recollect that his first duty is to truth,—and that, as Renan said, truth is higher than politeness.

Here is a case which is considered "presentable":—

"The two visitors were taken to Boston on Monday, and there received thirty stripes a-piece with a three-corded knotted whip, which cut their flesh so cruelly that a woman spectator fell in a faint. They were then put in a bare cell, with no bedding, and kept three days and nights without food or drink; and in addition were imprisoned nine weeks, in a *New England winter, with no fire*. And by a special order of the Governor and Deputy-Governor.....the prisoners were severely whipped twice each week, the first punishment consisting of fifteen lashes, and each successive one being increased by three lashes. As this order was issued when two weeks of the imprisonment had passed, the total number of lashes endured by these long-suffering men at this time would be 257."

In a later punishment of these two poor Quakers, whose only crime was preaching what they considered the Gospel, the rope was tarred and knotted to make it more effective:—

"William Brend and William Leddra pushed on to Salem and held a meeting in the woods, but were surprised and carried off. Brend, though the oldest of the band of missionaries, was called to pass through the most cruel sufferings that were meted out in Boston to any prisoner. The tale is too awful to tell in detail, but.....one incident in his round of torture consisted of one hundred and seventeen blows on his bare back with a tarred rope. He was found dying—'his body having turned cold' and 'his flesh having rotted'—and a physician was hurried in to treat his mangled body and implored to save his life, for the magistrates were now frightened by the impression their brutality was making on the citizens of Boston. But [the Rev.] John Norton was still stout in his remorseless attitude, saying of William Brend: 'He endeavored to beat the gospel ordinances black and blue, and it was but just to beat him black and blue.'"

If these were the "printable" tortures what must the "unprintable" have been?

Christianity boasts of having abolished slavery. There never was a more villainous lie. These New England Puritans helped to make slaves; yes, white slaves; slaves of their own nation and society. "We read," the *Athenæum* reviewer says, "of an inoffensive religious couple, convicted of sympathy with Quakerism, being persecuted and fined into utter destitution, and then expelled—and their two young children ordered to be sold into slavery." (The italics are ours.) Two dear innocent children, whose parents were not even Quakers, but only had some sympathy for them, ordered to be sold into slavery—to hard work and blows and all the rest of the death-in-life of beings given absolutely over to the "mercy" of others. That is how the New England Puritans did their share in the abolition of slavery.

Who handled the money that was gained by the selling of those two young children into slavery? The good kind

Christian gentlemen who ordered them to be sold. And—
and—Christianity abolished slavery!

It is pointed out by the *Atheneum* reviewer that it was only amongst laymen that the tormented Quakers found any sympathy. He justly says that "the rulers were harsher than the people, and the trustees of the Gospel more bitter than the rulers." Now there is a great and important truth in this. Christian apologists ask us to believe that Christian persecutions in past ages were not due to Christianity, but to the impatience and cruelty of human nature. What a fraudulent plea is this! Human nature is better than the creeds. It is capable of outbursts of cruelty, but systematic cruelty, such as the doings of the Inquisition and the New England Puritans, is due to the spirit of religious persecution, and is nearly always engineered by the clericals.

Now for a flash of sarcasm over this detestable tragedy—which we are glad to see the reviewer notes. Charles II. was revelling at Whitehall with his minions and his mistresses. He was a bad lot in many ways, but he was not malignant; there was indeed a good deal of human nature about him. It was he, curiously enough, who founded the Royal Society. And it was he who stopped the torture and murder of the Quakers in New England. "Being a person of indifferent godliness and some humor," the reviewer neatly says, "he not only wrote a command that they [the cruelties] should cease, but even dispatched his missive over-seas by the hand of Samuel Shattuck, a Salem Quaker who had been expelled under penalty of death if he returned."

One of the strangest things in this sad history of the persecution of others by those who fled from persecution themselves is the fact that the Church of England was far more tolerant, at least internally, than the Puritan sects who called it the hottest names in the dictionary. Presbyterians and Quakers, in New England, kept apart from each other as far as possible. Intermarriage was damned to the deepest hell. But little Dan Cupid is the strongest of all the gods, and young Presbyterians and young Quakers fell in love with each other, and the note of human affection was heard above the din of religious bigotry. "Ruth," said William Wanton, a member of a brilliant and wealthy family, to the young lady he wanted for his wife,—"Ruth, let us break away from this unreasonable bondage. I will give up my religion, and thou shalt give up thine, and we will go to the Church of England and the devil together." Ruth would have had to go far to find a better husband than the man who said that—and we dare say she knew it.

Dr. Warschauer quotes Sabatier's phrase that man is "incurably religious," and asserts that it is true, "in spite of all one hears about the materialism and indifference of the age." In the same number of the *Christian World* "J. B." declares that "deeper than all churches, all priests, all Bibles even, is the spiritual nature of man." If this is true, why are the leaders of the Churches so bitterly opposed to secular education in the day-schools? Why do parents, Sunday-school teachers, and parsons take such endless trouble to instil religious ideas into the minds of little children, and to train them in various religious exercises? And, above all, why are the majority of children so averse, at first, to believing in God and to repeating prayers? Furthermore, if man is "incurably religious," what creates the necessity for these innumerable churches, Sunday-schools, clergymen, and all sorts of Christian workers?

The truth is that man's so-called "spiritual nature" requires to be laboriously infused into him, or created out of nothing, and then carefully nourished within him, and that if such processes are neglected he grows up without it. Herbert Spencer investigated this matter very thoroughly, and succeeded in adducing numerous practical illustrations of the truth of the proposition just made. Spencer's conclusion is thus stated: "Clearly, then, religious ideas have not that supernatural origin commonly alleged; and we are taught, by implication, that they have a natural origin."

Mr. R. J. Campbell is becoming more comical every week. A few weeks ago he assured the sceptical persons in his congregation that they were listening "not merely to man's wisdom, but to something higher." Did he really imagine that any sane man or woman would take such a silly claim seriously? But here is a more nonsensical utterance still, if possible: "I would stake my whole existence on the fact that the presence of Jesus is still with his own and available in marvellous ways when we call upon him in the hour of need." How would he do it? By committing suicide? By

inducing some fool to murder him? We will give him his chance. We do not believe that there exists a Jesus to be present with, or to do anything for, anybody. How can Mr. Campbell prove to us that there does? We demand the redemption of the wager. Ah, he would; but he won't.

"The *Appeal to Reason* opines that the progress of Socialism will bring a real revival of religion, and that Atheists, while remaining free to express their doubts, will care less to do so. This is pleasant reading for Freethinkers, who have been frequently told that economic reform would automatically put an end to religious faith. In all probability neither statement is incontrovertible. The credulous mind will surrender itself to blind superstition, whether the stomach is full or empty. Priesthood may accomplish its designs with its dupes in one manner in an era of economic bondage, and in a different fashion in an age of economic liberty; but as long as the minds of men are enslaved, the class which profits by their dupery will thrive at their expense. As a matter of fact, however, as thought precedes action, the very reasoning of our Socialist friends, designed to show the intimate connection between the 'capitalist' church and economic slavery, should indicate to them the improbability that real economic freedom will ever be won by those who have not first emancipated their minds from docile subservience to a class of 'holy' misleaders."—*Truthseeker* (New York).

A Polish priest has been dragged off to prison for refusing to mention the Czar in his prayers. No doubt he is now mentioning the Czar in his prayers to some purpose.

The *Daily Chronicle* refers to some good folk of South Carolina who are "seeking an injunction against their curate to restrain him from again praying for rain—his last plea being too successful." This reminds us of the Baptist Convention that met to pray for rain after a long spell of drought. After wrestling with the Lord for thirty minutes, the Convention received a telegram from a place represented: "Stop praying. Flooded out."

Robert Owen, who taught the importance of "conditions" to human life, was howled at as a blaspheming Atheist by all the Churches. But things have altered in a hundred years. Canon Wilson, preaching at Worcester Cathedral, now praises the Labor Party as "religious," its object being to "make the conditions of life better for all." We hope the Labor Party understand that this respect is the respect of fear.

Mistley Robert Benjamin Clarke, a Church clergyman, was found drunk on the highway at Manningtree. Before the magistrates he pleaded guilty, and was fined 5s. and costs. He said he "had been out in the sun." Not the sun of righteousness that time.

The Jesuit weekly *America*, published we believe at New York, contained the following paragraph (which we take from an American exchange) in its issue of July 1:—

"A Catholic senator of France, M. Piou, declared a few days ago in the Senate that, in the awful catastrophe which recent legislation has brought upon the Church, there is involved an industry representing an investment of 257 million francs, and in which 65,400 workmen were interested. He referred to the manufacture of church goods and religious articles. How true were the words he spoke statistics just to hand made known to us. In Lyons investments in gold and bronze industries have fallen from 4,500,000 francs to a bare 500,000 francs. In Paris workers in these same industries are mourning a loss in salaries amounting to 4,000,000 francs. Returns from one of the departments of the Loire tell of a decrease of 18,000 francs in the amount of business done in these same branches of trade, and a loss of 240,000 francs in salaries. A church builder in Lille computes his losses at half a million francs, and he confesses that he has been obliged to reduce his working force from 125 to 25 men. Naturally—who can fail to recognise the reasonableness of their action?—many corporations and firms long established in France are leaving the country to seek new opportunities in lands less hostile to their business interests."

France will survive the loss of this trade in the frippery of superstition. Whether the Catholic Church will survive it is another question.

His Holiness the Pope, who has been at the point of death, is said to have ordered his tomb. Another might have been ordered at the same time—for the Christian religion.

Rev. A. Lukyn Williams, B.D., regrets that there is an "extreme left" of Judaism that regards the Hebrew Scriptures as "little more than a collection of fables, and thinks that miracles were never performed, and that prayer can expect no answer." How sad!

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

October 1, 8, 15, Queen's Hall, London; 22, Birmingham Town Hall; 29, Liverpool.

November 5, Leicester; 12, Manchester; 19 and 26, Queen's Hall, London.

To Correspondents.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1911.—Previously acknowledged £282 19s. 9d. Received since:—An Old Worker, £1; Geo. P., 10s.; S. Clowes, 4s.; W. P. Kennedy, £1 1s.

THE VANCE TESTIMONIAL FUND.—Previously acknowledged, £123 18s. 6d. Received since:—F. Whatcott, 2s.; C. Deane, 10s.; Geo. P., 10s.; S. M. Peacock, 5s.; G. White, 5s.; D. R. Bowe, 3s.; M. C., 1s.; J. C., 1s.; E. C., 1s.; J. F., 1s.; H. R. F., 1s.; W. P. Kennedy, 5s.

T. C.—The joke is older than you fancy. "Jack the Baptist" was used as a set-off to "Tom Paine" before Ingersoll was heard of. It was used by Robert Taylor, who died in 1844, when Ingersoll was a child. And we believe it antedates Taylor.

F. WHATCOTT.—We note your good wishes for Miss Vance.

LIBREPENSAADOR.—The extracts you send us from Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* appeared in our columns some years ago. Thanks all the same. Goldsmith was an exquisite writer, full of natural felicity. He was also a great admirer of Voltaire.

ROBERT IRVING.—Members of the N. S. S. are not necessarily committed to woman suffrage. Your inference to that effect is rash. Neither are they committed to what you call "Laborism"—whatever that may be. The right of working men to combine, like other citizens, for the promotion of their own interests, does not involve agreement with everything they may do when combined.

S. C. FISON.—Pleased to hear you and your wife are both in love with the *Freethinker*, after three years' close acquaintance. There is no "presumption" in writing to us. We are always glad to hear from "saints" who feel grateful for help derived from this journal in "finding salvation."

S. CLOWES.—Your good wishes seem likely to be partially realised, for we feel plenty of "fight" in us yet against the enemy of all progress.

R. CHAPMAN.—The South Shields subscriptions are together in the list.

C. R. BOOKER.—We have heard no more of the Branch at Sheffield. You will see a paragraph on the Leeds matter in "Sugar Plums."

J. NEATE.—Glad the Victoria Park audience wants to hear Miss Kough again.

H. J. HYETT.—See paragraph. Thanks.

J. HECHT.—Why will Wood Green and Edmonton correspondents ignore our repeated intimations that Tuesday is too late for paragraphs? The Anti-Vivisection Society would supply you with literature about Hospitals.

J. JOHNSON.—Always glad to receive building material in the shape of press cuttings.

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 new three months' course of Sunday evening lectures at Queen's (Minor) Hall, under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd., starts on October 1. Mr. Foote is preparing three special lectures for the first three Sundays. The lecturers booked for other dates are Mr. C. Cohen, Mr. J. T. Lloyd, and Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner.

Mr. Foote is sorry that he has been unable to fit in a Sunday for Glasgow—which he is always glad to visit, and

where he always gets large and enthusiastic meetings—this side of Christmas. We are informed that this will be a great disappointment to "saints" all over South-West Scotland, and even farther afield, but it really cannot be helped. Mr. Foote hopes to take two Sundays at Glasgow between New Year and the Spring Holiday.

Stratford Town Hall has been engaged for the four Sunday evenings in November under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd., with the co-operation of the West Ham N. S. S. Branch. Particulars will be published in due course.

East London Freethinkers will bear in mind that the fine Shoreditch Town Hall has been engaged for four Sunday evenings in January. The lectures will be under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd.

The Bradlaugh Dinner, under the auspices of the Bradlaugh Fellowship, takes place this year at the Holborn Restaurant on Wednesday evening, September 27. Mr. G. W. Foote presides on this occasion. The chair is to be taken at 7 o'clock. After dinner Mr. Foote will deliver a special address on Charles Bradlaugh's life and achievements. The rest of the program will appear in our advertisement columns. The tickets are only 3s. each, part of the cost of the dinner being defrayed through a bequest (for the purpose) of the late James Dowling.

Mr. Cohen's recent article "In Defence of Christians" is reproduced from our columns, with due acknowledgment, in the New York *Truthseeker*. An exchange of this kind is beneficial to both papers and to both sets of readers.

Another "social" for London Freethinkers, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, has been arranged to take place at Anderton's Hotel, Fleet-street, on Thursday evening, October 5. Admission is free, and members of the N. S. S. are at liberty to introduce a friend. Non-members who may not be able to get introduced in that way should apply to the N. S. S. secretary, at 2 Newcastle-street, London, E.C., for a complimentary ticket.

Some N. S. S. open-air Demonstrations are being arranged in London. Mr. E. Wilson has kindly promised to provide a brake and a pair of horses as on former occasions. The first Demonstration takes place this evening (Aug. 27) at 6 o'clock in Brockwell Park. The speakers are Mr. Cohen, Mr. Davies, Mr. Moss, Mr. Heaford, and Miss Kough.

On Tuesday morning, too late to be dealt with in the present issue of the *Freethinker*, we receive particulars (which might as easily have been sent us several days ago) of a "blasphemy" prosecution at Leeds. Mr. J. W. Gott is in trouble again, and with him is Mr. T. W. Stewart, who has been lecturing as "Dr. Nikola." Mr. Gott's offence is a "blasphemous" pamphlet—Mr. Stewart's is a "blasphemous" open-air lecture. They are charged with damaging the Holy Scriptures and the Christian Religion. We do not yet know the details of the information. If it proceeds, the case will have to go the Sessions. Meanwhile Mr. Gott (28 Church-bank, Bradford) is appealing for subscriptions.

We want to let the light of civilisation into the Churches. The air in these places is poisoned with the falsehoods of dogmas, with the darkness of superstition. The old owls of priestcraft must come off their perch, and cease their hooting. They are night-birds and haunt the dark. Let the sunlight go into every place where men live and congregate.

The Bible is not divine authority on anything; on any subject or on any doctrine. There is no such thing as divine authority, and those who claim that there is are consciously or unconsciously deceiving the people. Divinity is a term of no meaning to this age. Men can lie enough about what they know, without dragging in what no one knows anything about.

When I am asked by a Christian if I believe in Jesus, I always answer by inquiring, "Which Jesus do you mean, the Son of God, who could cure more diseases than any patent medicine; the son of Mary, who got himself disliked by denouncing the religion of the Pharisees; the peasant of Galilee, who fancied he was born to hold the sceptre of Israel, or the Christ that is made of flour and water and baked in an oven, whom the priest eats at the celebration of 'Mass'?"—L. K. Washburn.

"The Law is a Hass!"

(Reprinted from the New York "Truthseeker.")

THE working class Englishman has always been endowed with more horse sense than sentiment. Perhaps there is no one living that is able to see things with a clearer vision than the average English navy; he is particularly clever in smelling out humbugs. It was one of this class that turned "hoc est corpus" into "hocus pocus."

Some thirty years ago there was erected in London a very large building, such as one would call "Le Palais de Justice" on the Continent. In England, they proposed to call it "The Courts of Justice," but the quantity of justice meted out was so extremely small and the quantity of law so overwhelmingly large that the common people renamed it "The Law Courts," and it has borne this name ever since. The extraordinary eccentricities in the administration of justice in England led an English working-man to make the following observation, which has become proverbial throughout the British Empire—"The law is a hass."

While at Henley a few years ago I noticed among the vast crowd of pleasure-seekers a gipsy woman, very dark and swarthy, with a baby slung on her back. She was going about telling fortunes for 6d. a head. Not finding many customers among the showily dressed throng, she visited the dwelling houses to tell the fortunes of the servant girls. I will take a typical case:—

She appeared at the back of a small villa. A young and silly servant girl put her hand out of a back window and "crossed it with silver," as the saying is, that is, a sixpence, and the gipsy told the girl that she was extremely lucky, that she was born under a lucky star, that she had been endowed with very great personal beauty and would not long remain in her present position, that her matchless beauty would soon be discovered, and that inside a year she would be married to a charming prince. She would live in a splendid palace, and have horses and carriages, silks and satins, and loads of diamonds. Just as the gipsy was pretending to see a beautiful little prince and a charming little princess, with heavenly blue eyes and golden hair, the cruel policeman put in an appearance; the fortune teller was led off to the police station and "put in the jug" for a month for obtaining money under false pretences. On the following Christmas, a grand pantomime was started at Drury Lane Theatre, and among the players was a young man who took a minor part and received £2 a week. His sweetheart, to whom he was engaged to be married, was also in the same pantomime, but receiving £6 a week. Both were Irish and devout Roman Catholics. Unfortunately, the young gentleman was afflicted with consumption. He was rapidly getting worse all of the time, and after a few weeks the progress of the disease was so rapid that he had to give up the job, but he was supported by his sweetheart at an expense of £8 a week, which paid for his board and the doctor's bills. He died after a few months' suffering, and it was then that the other actresses at the theatre sympathised with the young lady, telling her that had he lived she could not possibly have thought of marrying a man with consumption, and that now the poor fellow was out of his suffering she should cease to worry, and would soon be able to pay off her debts. But the young lady was not altogether satisfied; she went to the priest to find out how Patrick was getting on in the other world, and she was greatly astonished to find that notwithstanding that he was a very good and devout Catholic he had not got into Heaven, but had been landed in Purgatory, and the priest told her that he was in a very painful and dangerous position. He said, so long as he is in Purgatory we can do something for him, but once he is out of Purgatory we can do nothing. He therefore advised the young lady to lose no time, but to make a determined effort to get the soul of

her lover out of the fires of Purgatory; so we find that for months the young lady was contributing £4 a week to the priest for this purpose. Therefore, it cost her more to take care of poor Patrick after he was dead than it did while he was alive. If the poor gipsy fortune-teller, with a baby on her back, was put in prison for receiving a sixpence from a servant girl, and for telling her a story that made her extremely happy for the whole week, certainly on the same scale of justice the priest would have received a life sentence for extorting money under false pretences from the actress; especially as the actress, unlike the servant, didn't get any fun out of it at all. It is only too evident that "The law is a hass."

I have a friend who is a magistrate in Ireland. We will call him Mr. June, not because that is his name, but because his name is the same as one of the months of the year.

Mr. June is a Protestant, and it so happens that the Roman Catholics in Ireland do not like to trust their co-religionists in money matters. It therefore follows that my friend, Mr. June, has acted as the administrator of many estates belonging to Catholics. On one occasion the deceased left £100 to pay for Masses for extracting his soul from the rather high temperature of Purgatory, and no sooner was Patrick in his grave than the local priest turned up to claim the money, but my friend, Mr. June, said: "I find that the estate is not worth anything like what it was supposed to be worth. I find that there are more debts to pay than we anticipated, and that the amount that the widow will receive will be much less than was expected. Therefore, it is my duty as the administrator of the estate to protect the widow as far as possible."

"But," said the priest, "Patrick was a very good fellow; we all know that; and certainly when we consider that he left £100 to get his own soul out of Purgatory, it ought to be got out forthwith. It certainly is not fair to leave him suffering in Purgatory, as he has already paid for being extricated."

But my friend was obdurate; he would not give the money, at least at that time. He, however, asked the priest "How many Masses he could say for £100?" The priest replied that he could say 100. My friend then asked if 100 Masses would be quite sufficient, and the priest assured him that as Patrick was a thoroughly good man and a devout Catholic, that 100 Masses would be quite sufficient.

"Very well," said my friend, "come back in three weeks, and we will see what can be done in the matter. I have the interests of the widow to look after."

The priest protested in the most vehement manner. According to his way of thinking it was an unspeakable crime to allow Patrick to suffer in Purgatory for three weeks when he had already appropriated the money himself to be liberated. Still my friend insisted, and it was finally agreed that the priest should return in three weeks.

At the end of three weeks he turned up promptly, and reiterated that it was certainly a very shabby trick to allow Patrick to remain such a long time in Purgatory.

"But," my friend said, "he is out. You told me that 100 Masses would be amply sufficient, so I thought I would go to headquarters. I communicated directly with Rome and was told that they were quite ready to say 100 Masses for the sum of £4; so you see I have saved £96 for the widow."

When the priest protested, my friend produced the papers in which it was certified that 100 Masses had been duly said for the repose of Patrick's soul. Therefore, as 100 Masses were all that were necessary, and these had been said in Rome, the headquarters of the Church, there could be no question about it, Patrick's soul was out of Purgatory and the widow's share of the estate was increased by £96. Still the priest was not happy.

When I was living in Paris some thirty years ago, Don Carlos, the Spanish pretender, died. His mother came to Paris and paid 100,000 francs to have

100,000 Masses said for the repose of his soul. We may infer from this very large number that his mother, who ought to know, considered him a very wicked sinner. The priest who received this large sum of money had no trouble in subletting the Masses to country priests at half a franc each. He, therefore, made 50,000 francs out of the transaction, which is not bad.

Why is it that the priests who pretend to benefit people after they are dead are not proceeded against for fraud? It is because "The law is a hass."

A few years ago Russian swindlers induced some of the Russian farmers to dispose of their farms and purchase from them (the swindlers) very much larger and better farms on the planet Jupiter, and these swindlers were proceeded against and sent to prison because the law in such cases in Russia is not a "hass," although a very decided "hass" if it is a question of religion.

HIRAM S. MAXIM, Knt.

The Virgin Birth of Christ.

PRESUMPTION is always in favor of the natural. It is rational to believe that any baby has two parents. This is taken for granted when a woman seeks an order for maintenance against the father of her illegitimate child. The magistrate never supposes a possible alternative. It never occurs to him that the child may be the offspring of a supernatural being. There is a father somewhere, and the father is a man.

Every natural presumption is universal. It applies without exception. The onus of proof lies upon those who assert the contrary. If a man has been buried, the presumption is that he will lie quietly. Those who say that he still walks about must prove the allegation. The certificates of the doctor and the cemetery are sufficient on the other side. Similarly, when a baby is produced in long clothes, the presumption is that it came into the world in the ordinary manner. A mother on earth and a father in heaven is unnatural. Every child of woman born has a father on this planet, and if he cannot be found it is not the fault of biology. It is simply a case for the police.

It is presumable, therefore, that Jesus Christ (if he ever lived) came into existence like every other little Jew of his generation. Those who say that his mother was a woman, but his father was not a man, must prove the statement. They should also explain why a mother was necessary if a father was dispensable. A half miracle is doubly suspicious. It is as easy to be born without one parent as without two. Why then did Jesus Christ avail himself of the assistance of Mary? Why did he not drop down ready-born from heaven? He is said to have returned there as a man, after burial. Could he not also have come from there as a baby, without birth? Why was the plain natural mixed with the uncertain supernatural, to the subsequent confusion of every honest and candid intelligence?

Until we have evidence to the contrary, we are justified in saying that the father of Jesus was a man, and probably a Jew. Celsus, in the second century, twitted the Christians with worshipping the bastard child of a Jewish maiden and a Roman soldier; and the same idea is found in the *Sepher Toldoth Jeshu*—the Jewish Life of Christ. But we shall not believe this aspersion on Mary without cogent evidence. Still, there is nothing in it of a supernatural character. It may be libellous, but it is not miraculous. Whether a soldier or a carpenter, the father of Jesus was a man.

There is plenty of proof of this in the New Testament, and proof that the man was Joseph. And this proof is all the more striking and convincing because it has clearly been left in the "sacred books" to the detriment of the Church doctrines.

Several passages show that the countrymen of Jesus, his neighbors, and even his brothers, believed him to be the son of Joseph. In "his own country"—that is, in Galilee—the people were offended at his pretensions, and exclaimed: "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?" (Matthew xiii. 55, 56). Luke (iv. 22) represents them as saying: "Is not this Joseph's son?" John (vi. 42) gives their words: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph?" Other passages might be cited, but these will suffice. They show that the people of his own countryside, the people in and about Nazareth, regarded him as the son of Joseph.

Philip, the fourth apostle, after being called to follow Jesus, meets Nathaniel, and says he has found the one

written of by Moses and the prophets—"Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John i. 45). Not one of the apostles, in person, ever utters a doubt upon this point. The brothers of Jesus (John vii. 5) did not believe in him, and on one occasion (Mark iii. 21, 31) they tried to put him under restraint as a lunatic; which is quite irreconcilable with any knowledge on their part of his supernatural character. Mary herself (Luke ii. 48) speaks to Jesus of Joseph as "thy father."

All these passages, with others which we omit, are very awkward for the orthodox. They prove conclusively—that is, if the Gospels are to be regarded as at all historical—that the neighbors of Jesus, his brothers, and even his mother, treated him as the son of Joseph. Nobody at that time appears to have known anything about the Holy Ghost.

It is a curious fact that in the newly-discovered Syriac Gospels, which the Rev. J. Rendel Harris regards as certainly "superior in antiquity to anything yet known," it is distinctly stated that "Joseph begat Jesus, who is called Christ." The farther we go back the more is the natural birth of Jesus a matter of common acceptance. Our second Gospel, which is generally supposed to be the oldest, opens with the public ministry of Jesus. There is not a word in it about his childhood, nothing about his having been born of a virgin mother. Paul's "authentic" epistles, which are older still, are just as silent about the supernatural birth of Christ. Neither is there a word about it in the fourth Gospel, which the orthodox say was written by John, the most beloved and intimate of all the twelve apostles. Positive and negative evidence abounds that Jesus was the son of Joseph, as well as of Mary, and born precisely like other children. The story of his supernatural birth, with all its far-reaching doctrinal issues, depends upon the authority of Matthew and Luke; and what that is worth we will proceed to investigate.

Let us first take Luke. There are many traditions about him which we are at liberty to disbelieve. He is said to have been a physician and also a painter; indeed, the Catholic Church, with its usual effrontery, exhibited pictures of the Virgin Mary pretendedly drawn by him, or at least as copies of his original paintings. According to one tradition, he suffered martyrdom; according to another tradition, he died a natural death at the age of eighty-four. His death occurred at several different places. His tomb was shown at Thebes in Beotia, but travellers have found it a comparatively modern structure. The number of countries in which he is said to have preached the Gospel is a tribute to his prodigious and even preternatural activity. He is alleged to have been converted by Paul, of whom he became the constant companion; a view which is reflected in the Acts of the Apostles. It has even been maintained that he wrote the third Gospel at Paul's dictation. According to Irenæus, he digested into writing what Paul preached to the Gentiles. Gregory Nazianzen says that he wrote with the help of the great Apostle. All this, of course, is very precarious; but it is sufficient to show that Luke was not a personal follower of Jesus. He wrote down as much as he remembered of what Paul remembered of what other people had told him. His exordium puts him outside the category of eye-witnesses. He relates, not what he knew, but what was "most surely believed," on the testimony of those who handed down the information, and who "from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word." It is perfectly certain, therefore, that Luke could have had no first-hand knowledge of the supernatural birth of Christ. He merely recorded what was then the tradition of the Church, which is not adequate evidence to support a miracle, especially one so astounding that a famous old English divine, Dr. John Donne, declared that if God had not said it he would never have believed it.

The historical authority of the third Gospel is in a still worse plight if we accept the conclusion of the majority of modern critics, that it was not written by Luke, nor by any person living in the apostolic age, but is a production of the second century, and of unknown authorship. Who can credit a staggering miracle on the authority of a document written God alone knows exactly when, where, and by whom?

Let us now turn to Matthew. What the Gospels tell us about him is trifling. He was a Jew and a publican—that is, a tax-collector. On one occasion he entertained Jesus at dinner (Matthew ix. 10). And here endeth the story. All the rest that is told of Matthew is tradition. He was a vegetarian, he preached the Gospel extensively, he died a natural death, and he also suffered martyrdom. Even his martyrdom was ambiguous, for he was burnt alive and also beheaded. The earliest writers, such as Papias and Irenæus, say that he wrote the *logia*, or sayings, of Christ in Hebrew. But our first Gospel is a complete history, from the birth of Jesus to his ascension; it is also written in Greek, and by someone who was not conversant with the Hebrew language.

Whatever may have been written by Matthew is universally allowed to have perished. But the orthodox have pretended that, before it was lost, it was translated into Greek, and thence again into Latin. They are unable to say, however, who made the translation, or even *when* it was made; nor can they tell us why the translation was preserved, and the inspired original allowed to perish.

Matthew *may* have written something, but it is for ever lost to the world; nor is there the slightest evidence that our Greek Gospel is a translation from it, but much evidence to the contrary. In the judgment of all competent critics, our first Gospel, like all the others, is not of apostolic origin. It cannot be traced back beyond the second half of the second century.

So much for the authorship and authority of Matthew and Luke. Now let us take them as they stand, and examine what they say.

Each of them gives a genealogy of Jesus, right up to Adam—a gentleman who never existed. There is a considerable difference, however, in the two genealogies; which proves that they were not derived from a well-kept family pedigree. They are doubtless as imaginary as the pedigrees made out at the Herald's Office for modern gentlemen who are knighted or ennobled.

As the Messiah was to be of the blood of David, and Joseph belonged to that "house," both Matthew and Luke trace the family descent through *him*. But if Jesus was *not* the son of Joseph, he was not really of the house of David, any more than Moses was of the house of Pharaoh.

It is extremely probable, as Strauss argues, that the genealogies of Jesus were compiled before our Gospels were written, at a time when the supernatural birth of Jesus was not entertained. He was then believed to be the lawful son of Joseph and Mary, and the genealogies were compiled to show his descent from David, which was requisite to his Messiahship.

Luke speaks of Jesus, in his genealogy, as "being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph." This is a very eloquent parenthesis. As was supposed! By whom? Why, by the very persons who ought to know; by the countrymen, neighbors, and brothers of Jesus. They supposed him to be the son of Joseph, but they forsooth were mistaken, and their blunder was corrected long afterwards by a gentleman who was not even a Jew, and never lived in Palestine.

Having to represent Jesus as *not* the son of Joseph, but a child of supernatural birth, both Matthew and Luke give us circumstantial narratives of his entrance into the world. On some points they agree, on others they differ, and each relates many things which the other omits. Evidently they were working upon various sets of traditions. And just as evidently the whole of these birth-traditions were unknown to Mark and John, or considered by them as false or doubtful, and not worth recording.

Matthew starts with his genealogy, which Luke reserves till the end, and then plunges into the middle of his subject.

"Now the birth of Jesus was in this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost."

Wait a minute, Matthew! Not so fast! You, or any other man, can tell that a young woman is with child, but *by whom* is quite another matter. Let us see what you *know* on this subject. And for the sake of argument we will suppose you one of the twelve Apostles. As for Luke, he is out of court altogether; it being impossible for him to give more than hearsay, which no court of law would admit as evidence.

From the very nature of the case, Matthew could not have had any personal knowledge of who was the father of Jesus. Whether it was a man, or a ghost, or any other being, Matthew was not in a position to know more than he was told. Well then, who told him? Unluckily he does not inform us. We have therefore nothing to rely upon but his own authority, which (we repeat) from the very nature of the case is absolutely worthless.

No one has a right to say that Joseph told Matthew. Even if he did, he could only say that he was *not* the father of Jesus. He could not say who *was*. At least he could not say so with any certainty. Nor was it a matter on which he was likely to be loquacious.

It may be argued that Matthew derived his information from Jesus. But there is no evidence of this in the Gospels. Jesus never called attention to any miraculous circumstances in connection with his birth. Even if a private conversation be alleged, as at least possible, what is its value? Jesus himself was no authority on the subject. It is a wise child that knows its own father. How could Jesus be aware, except by report, of what occurred nine months before he was born? It may be objected that he was God, and, therefore omniscient; but this is begging the very question in dispute. We must begin the argument with his manhood, and go on to his godhead afterwards, if the evidence justifies

the proceeding. It will never do to bring in the conclusion to prove the premises.

The only person who knew for certain was Mary. Did *she* tell Matthew? It is not alleged that she did. According to Luke, Mary "kept all these things." She does not appear to have told even Joseph. Is it probable then that she told a third person?

Matthew states that Joseph, finding Mary as ladies wish to be who love their lords, before he had married her, and certainly without his assistance, was "minded to put her away privily." He did not like the look of affairs, and he "thought on these things." No doubt! We are not disposed to quarrel with this part of the narrative.

Joseph's brain could not stand much thinking. He was better at dreaming. It was in a dream that he was ordered to take his flight into Egypt, in a dream that he was told to return to Palestine, and in a dream that he was warned to avoid Judæa and go into Galilee.

How natural, then, that "the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream," telling him to marry Mary, and informing him that the approaching little stranger was the progeny "of the Holy Ghost."

We had better reproduce the exact words of this angelic intimation:—

"Behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived of her is of the Holy Ghost" (i. 20).

Just reflect on the absurdity of this message. Had anyone, whether man or angel, told it to Joseph, he would naturally have exclaimed: "Who on earth is the Holy Ghost?" Joseph had never heard of such a personage. The Holy Ghost was not then invented. Even in the Acts of the Apostles (xix. 2) we read that Paul found "certain disciples" at Ephesus who had "not so much as heard whether there be a Holy Ghost"—and, on the orthodox chronology, this was fifty or sixty years after the dream of Joseph.

Is it not perfectly clear that this story of the supernatural birth of Christ was made up long afterwards, and entirely amongst the Christians, who had accepted the Holy Ghost as one of the persons of their Trinity? The very language put into the mouth of the angel betrays the concoction. Joseph was simply a Jew; the time in question was before the birth of Christ; and to talk to a Jew of that period about the Holy Ghost would have been mere nonsense—utterly unintelligible.

However, we are told that Joseph was perfectly satisfied, though he could hardly have been enlightened. He married Mary, and fathered her prospective baby; but for some time he was only her nominal husband. "He knew her not," says Matthew, "until she had brought forth her firstborn son."

We dare not, in *this* article at least, dwell upon the extraordinary indecencies in which Christian fathers and divines have indulged with regard to the occult part of this affair. There is no reason why their pious obscenities should not be exposed, but we shrink from doing it in an article which is intended for readers of both sexes, of all ages, and of every degree of education.

What must be said here is, that the birth of a savior from a woman and a god is far from being a speciality of the Christian religion. It was common in the religions of antiquity. Even historical characters were sometimes assigned a semi-divine origin. Alexander boasted his descent from the god Ammon; Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, was born exactly like Jesus Christ; and even in the most cultivated age of the most cultivated city in the world, the disciples of Plato declared that Ariston was only his putative father, his *real* father being the god Apollo. This legend prevailed in Athens while Plato's nephew was still living. And the most curious coincidence is that, in words very similar to those of Matthew, Diogenes Laertius, in his *Lives of the Philosophers*, relates that Ariston, being warned in a dream by Apollo, deferred his marriage, and did not approach his intended wife until after her confinement. Indeed, the Greek word translated "till" in Matthew i. 25 is the very same word used by Diogenes Laertius in relating the legendary birth of Plato.

Orthodoxy has pretended that Mary remained a virgin all her life, in spite of the birth of Jesus; that Joseph was *always* her nominal husband; and that Jesus had neither brother nor sister. They have made "first born" mean "only born," and "till" to cover, not only the period of her miraculous pregnancy, but all the time afterwards. Language, like common sense, has been mercilessly twisted in the interest of dogma.

It is perfectly clear from the New Testament that Jesus had natural brothers and sisters. We have already quoted the passage in Matthew (xiii. 55, 56) in which four of his brothers are mentioned, with a reference to "his sisters."

Paul himself (Galatians i. 19) states that when he went up to Jerusalem he saw Peter and "James the Lord's brother." Paul never learnt on the spot, and at the time, what the Church discovered at a distance, and long afterwards; namely, that brother James, like all the others, was a *cousin* of Jesus. It is astonishing what a lot has been found out about "the Savior" by Christian divines, which was utterly unknown to the "inspired" writers of the New Testament.

Accepting the dogma of the miraculous birth of Jesus, without a tittle of evidence from any valid witness, the "fathers" of the Christian Church carried it to its highest degree of intensity. Mary was represented as a virgin from birth to death; Joseph was represented as an old man, who was merely her guardian; finally, he also was represented as a life-long virgin. Epiphanius allowed that Joseph had as a former marriage; but this was too much for the fastidious faith of Jerome, who stigmatised the supposition as impious and audacious; and from that time it became a point of orthodoxy to regard the "brothers" of Jesus as his "cousins."

It is not claimed, however, that these "fathers" were inspired, nor is the claim advanced on behalf of their successors in the subtle art of divinity. We are therefore free to take our notions from the New Testament, and the following conclusions may be deduced from it beyond a reasonable doubt: (1) That Jesus was the son of Mary, (2) that Joseph was her husband, (3) that Mary and every one else spoke of Joseph as the father of Jesus, (4) that Jesus had four brothers and an unknown number of sisters, who were all reckoned as the natural offspring of his own father and mother.

We are thus forced back upon the argument we have already elaborated. All the natural, historical, and undesigned evidence is in favor of Joseph having been the father of Jesus. In support of the contrary position we have certain statements in the first and third Gospels, which are discredited by the complete silence of the second and fourth Gospels, as well as by the complete silence of Paul; and still further discredited by the fact that these statements—in themselves so marvellous and so loosely woven—are made by two really anonymous writers, neither of whom was in a position to know anything whatever about the subject, who could only relate what they had heard at second-hand, and who do not even hint that they derived any information from the *only person*—namely, Mary—who was in possession of the facts.

This difficulty, which has never to our knowledge been adequately emphasised, is at least perceived by Bishop Gore. This writer admits that the miraculous birth of Jesus "does not rest primarily on apostolic testimony," and that it was "not part of the primary apostolic preaching." The apostles "had no knowledge given them to start with of his miraculous origin," but when they came to believe it [whenever that was!] they "must have been interested to know the circumstances of the Incarnation."*

Canon Gore thus supports our contention that the twelve apostles who were constantly with Jesus for the space of three years, and who must surely have seen the members of his family, never heard a word, during the whole of that time, which led them to doubt that he was the natural son of Joseph.

Our further contention is also supported by this eminent preacher. "There were two sources," he says, "of original evidence, Joseph and Mary." Just as we do, therefore, he narrows the inquiry down to the question whether we "have their testimony in the opening chapters of St. Matthew and St. Luke." And let the reader observe that no notice whatever is taken of the absolute silence of Mark and John, whom we cannot imagine to have been less interested to know the circumstances of the Incarnation than the other evangelists.

"Read St. Matthew's account of the birth," says Canon Gore, "and you will see how unmistakably everything is told from the side of Joseph, his perplexities, the intimations which he received, his resolutions and his actions."

"Unmistakably" is a big bold word, but it only expresses the certitude of the writer's own judgment. The author of the first Gospel does not allege, or even hint, that he received any information from Joseph; and if what he relates "has all the marks of being Joseph's story at the bottom," we are still in the dark as to its authenticity, for Canon Gore admits that "we cannot tell by what steps it comes to us"—which is the most important point in the whole investigation.

Luke's narrative is said to have "all the appearance of containing directly or indirectly "Mary's story." But "appearance" is a very vague word in an argument, and in this

case it means no more than the personal impression of an individual reader. There are no links between Mary and the writer of the third Gospel. He relates what was "believed" at the time he wrote, and is dependent on what was "delivered" down by the original "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." Such a confession deprives him of all independent authority. What he relates *may* be true, but its truth depends on the accuracy and veracity of his informants. Who these persons were is left in obscurity; and certainly it is an unwarrantable strain upon the language of his exordium to include Mary amongst them.

Bishop Gore does not seem satisfied with his own argument, for he goes on to say that it is "a perversion of evidential order to begin with the miracle of the virgin-birth." We must first learn to accept the "apostolic testimony" and gain confidence in the "evangelical narrative," and then we shall have little difficulty in believing the mystery of the Incarnation. We must begin, that is, with minor wonders, and advance to major wonders in our successful practice of credulity; which is another way of stating the aphorism of Cardinal Newman, that evidence is not the *proof* but the *reward* of faith.

G. W. FOOTE.

BIGOTRY.

Believe as I believe, no more, no less;
That I am right, and no one else, confess;
Feel as I feel, think only as I think;
Eat what I eat, and drink but what I drink;
Look as I look, do always as I do, [you.
And then, and only then, I'll company with

That I am right, and always right, I know,
Because my convictions tell me so;
And to be right is simply this, to be
Entirely and in all respects like me;
To deviate a hair's breadth, or begin
To question, doubt, or hesitate is sin.

I reverence the Bible, if it be
Translated first and then explained by me;
By churchly laws and customs I abide,
If they with my opinion coincide;
All creeds and doctrines I admit divine
Excepting those that disagree with mine.

Let sink the drowning if he will not swim
Upon the plank that I throw out for him;
Let starve the hungry if he will not eat
My kind and quality of bread and meat;
Let freeze the naked if he will not be
Clothed in such garments as are made for me.

'Twere better that the sick should die than
Unless they take the medicine I give; [live
'Twere better sinners perish than refuse
To be conformed to my peculiar views; [move
'Twere better that the world stand still than
In any other way than that which I approve.

AMERICAN ASCENSIONISTS.

Haste wife, put on the Ascension robe
You made last Christmas tido,
Christ's second coming shakes the globe
And Heavenward you must ride.

Strange signs are in the noon-day sky
Of ghastly orange hue,
Like verdegriis the grasses lie,
Your nose is wondrous blue.

O husband dear, how can I float
Full sixteen stone or more?
I thought we were to go by boat
Unto the happy shore.

I dread a sudden rise in life,
Exposed in muslin things,
At least you'll try to find your wife
A pair of decent wings.

Don't leave me sprawling in the dirt
When the last trump is heard—
Get in and doff that blooming shirt,
The Ascension is deferred.

"That's what I call a finished sermon," said a lady to her husband as they walked home from church. "Yes," he replied; "but, do you know, I thought it never would be."

A clerical gentleman ordered Farrer's *Seekers After God* from a Chicago bookseller, who wrote back, "No such persons in Chicago."

* Bishop Gore, *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (Bampton Lectures for the year 1891), pp. 77, 78.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.**OUTDOOR.**

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 3.15 and 6, F. A. Davies, Lectures.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, C. Cohen, a Lecture; 6, a Demonstration.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (The Green): Outing (Chingford). Meet "Two Brewers," Ponder's End, 10 a.m.

FINSBURY PARK: 11.30, W. Davidson, a Lecture.

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Highbury Corner): 12 noon, Ivan Paperno and Walter Bradford. Newington Green: 7.30, Ivan Paperno, a Lecture. Highbury Corner: Wednesday, at 8, Ivan Paperno, a Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road): 11.30, W. J. Ramsey, "My Prison Life."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill): 3.30, Mrs. Boyce, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford): 7, E. C. Saphin, "Christian Truths Untrue."

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Jolly Butchers Hill, opposite Public Library): Annual Excursion.

COUNTRY.**OUTDOOR.**

MANSFIELD, NOTTS (Market Place): Joseph A. E. Bates—Sunday, at 7.30, "God and the Modern Perspective"; Monday, at 7.30, "The Great Enigma"; Tuesday, at 7.30, "Christianity and Pagan Mythology."

RIPLEY, DERBYSHIRE (Market Square): Joseph A. E. Bates—Thursday, Aug. 24, at 7.45, "Kingcraft—Past and Present"; Friday, at 7.45, "The Tragedy of the Cross."

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

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

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