

THE Freethinker

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One thing there is worth a great deal, to pass thy life in truth and justice, with a benevolent disposition even to hars and unjust men.—MARCUS AURELIUS.

“Blasphemy” at Leeds.

WRITING upon this case is one of the most awkward tasks I ever had to perform. The difficulty is, not so much what to say as what not to say; especially as two men are in prison under the Blasphemy Laws, and one naturally does not care to criticise them as freely as if they were in a state of freedom and could answer for themselves.

The two defendants in the Leeds case were Mr. J. W. Gott, who has long been known as a Freethinker, and Mr. T. W. Stewart, who has recently sprung into notoriety. The former is not an elegant propagandist, but he is an honest man; the latter is something of an enigma.

Mr. Stewart told me a number of romantic things about himself when he called upon me at the *Freethinker* office some weeks ago. I kept a straight face and let him talk, just to see how far he would go. On hearing from him that he was earning £1,000 a year, and that he had spent £500 in promoting Freethought during the last year or two—and comparing it with what I had previously heard of him from trustworthy sources—I came to the conclusion that he was suffering from some malady which made him practically irresponsible. And when he told me of his great powers of oratory, I came to another conclusion; namely, that he would in all probability make a very ill defence of himself at his trial. All the advice I had to give him was dead against what he was obviously bent on saying and doing.

Mr. Stewart gave evidence in his own behalf at the Leeds Assizes. He described himself as President of the Free Thought Socialist League and of the British Secular League; two societies, as far as I can ascertain, that have no existence outside his grandiose imagination. Persons in London who have known him for some years smile at the account he gave of his business pursuits. A Freethinker of trustworthy judgment, who was in court, informs me that Mr. Stewart's address to the jury was haphazard and without persuasiveness. Instead of pouring oil on troubled waters he poured petrol on a conflagration. He was dare-devil enough, my correspondent allows, and he took his sentence manfully; but the defence of Freethought merited a better effort. His throwing about of his arms—his management of his voice, alternating between a shriek and a whisper—his reading nauseous Bible texts—his whole performance, in short, was calculated to rouse opposition in the minds of the jury. And it did. They looked the passions they could not express—except, alas, by their verdict. They expressed them there, without so much as leaving the box for a consultation.

Mr. Stewart was evidently more impelled by his own egotism than by an enlightened love of a great cause. I told him, when he called upon me, that he was nothing, that I was nothing, that the cause was everything. There is only one way of defeating the Blasphemy Laws, and that is by resisting their

application with all the courage, energy, skill, and patience at our command; striving to prevent the jury from agreeing on a verdict of guilty, and making a good impression (as far as possible) upon the judge, the court, the press, and the public. A conviction and a sentence simply encourage other prosecutions. I hear that the example of the Leeds police is likely to be followed in other parts of Yorkshire in the early future.

Mr. Stewart's “blasphemy” was not very novel. The portion that was most objected to consisted of his own version of a famous comic passage in *Ingersoll*, which was far from an improvement on the original. My own satirical sentence to Mr. Justice North, when his lordship sentenced me to twelve months' imprisonment on account of the *Freethinker*, was also laid under tribute. I thanked his lordship,—who acted more as a prosecuting counsel than as a judge—and told him that the sentence was worthy of his creed. Its novelty gave it force. But I could have dispensed with Mr. Stewart's flattery in repeating it, with an addendum of his own, which no more improved me than his decorations improved *Ingersoll*.

Mr. Gott read a defence, said to have been written for him by a colleague. I am told it was a good defence and well read. But juries do not like listening to essays, and I am not surprised that they were not impressed. They quickly found Mr. Gott guilty too. But I do not understand why the judge gave him four months' imprisonment. Perhaps he thought the stolid Yorkshireman was likely to go on “blaspheming” a great deal longer than the excitable Kelt, and gave him the extra month by way of anticipation.

I called a special meeting of the National Secular Society's Executive for Monday evening. There was a good attendance, including Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Heaford, Moss, and Davies, who might be regarded as indirectly representing the Freethought platform and press. It was resolved, of course, to protest against the revival of the Blasphemy Laws at Leeds. It was also arranged that the President should keep an eye on Leeds with a view to possible wise action there by the N. S. S. in the early future. Much consideration was given to another matter. Mrs. Stewart had written to me for personal assistance, and I had sent her an interim cheque. I had also learnt that the collecting mania at Leeds had become a scandal. Several persons were posing as “treasurers” of funds. The Executive therefore resolved that the N. S. S. would provide (if acceptable) for the financial needs of Mrs. Gott and Mrs. Stewart during their husbands' imprisonment, on condition that no other public funds were kept open for the same purpose; and that Mr. John Grange, a man of great ability and integrity, should be asked to act as our distributor on the spot. On that point, then, there is no reason whatever for apprehension.

A few words as to Mr. Justice Horridge's summing up. He laid down the Common Law of Blasphemy quite correctly. He told the jury that people have a right to discuss religion freely, as long as they “conform to the decencies of ordinary debate.” He kept telling Mr. Stewart that his opinions did not matter,—it was the “words he had used” that he

was being tried for. Yet there was a flaw in his lordship's logic. He spoke of "things which were sacred to a large majority of the people." What becomes then of the reality of free discussion? If one man's opinions may be discussed anyhow, while another man's opinions may only be discussed as if they were sacred, it is evident that privilege and disability still exist.

We are glad to welcome the following criticism of the trial and sentences of Messrs. Gott and Stewart, which appeared in the *Yorkshire Observer* the next morning:—

"Blasphemy is vulgar and in bad taste, but one cannot say that it is vicious or immoral. And what is blasphemous in one man's judgment is allowable in the opinion of another. We once heard a distinguished and much-respected Nonconformist divine from the platform of the Manchester Free Trade Hall give a forecast of a Judgment Day dialogue between the Deity and the Archbishop of Canterbury—it was in the height of the agitation against Mr. Balfour's Education Act—and while many thought nothing of it many more were shocked and offended. We do not know precisely the degree of the blasphemies proved against the men who were sent to prison at Leeds Assizes yesterday, but the offence reported in any detail seems to have been such a conversation as we have recalled, though in much grosser terms. It may be that if the Manchester police had prosecuted the eminent divine he would have been found guilty of blasphemy and imprisoned. That would have depended upon the views of the jurymen—and it is a disquieting circumstance with regard to yesterday's jurymen that in the midst of one defendant's defence they 'did not wish to hear any more.' We are confident that two hundred and sixty years of reflection since Milton wrote 'Arcopagitica' has not led the English race to a conviction diametrically opposed to his in such matters. Opinion is not culpable and should not be punishable. 'Truth needs no policies, no stratagems, no licensings to make her victorious.' Good taste and the innate reverence of the British people are sufficient safeguards against the evils of blasphemy. The old law against that ecclesiastical offence does not carry the public conscience with it, especially when it results in the imprisonment of men whose crime is the language in which they have expressed their views; and, as Hooker said, 'Laws they are not which public approbation hath not made so.'"

That is an excellent sentence—"Opinion is not culpable and should not be punishable." But it is punishable while restraints are imposed upon its friends in discussion which are not imposed upon its adversaries.

For a paper like the *Nation* the following protest is rather striking:—

"We note with astonishment that Mr. Justice Horridge, whom we associate with some early up-bringsings in Liberalism, has sentenced two men at Leeds to three and four months' imprisonment for offences against the Blasphemy Laws. So far as we can gather, one of these defendants spoke of the Deity in a way in which honored lights of the Church of England occasionally refer to Him when they wish to mark the distinction they draw between the God of the Old and the God of the New Testament. These gentlemen speak indirectly and with proper refinement of phrase and meaning; the Secularist, who is now in prison at Leeds, spoke as heated 'Freethought' lecturers often speak. He also appears to have quoted from the writings of Ingersoll, whose profane wit still, we suppose, circulates in the United States to the tune of hundreds of thousands of copies of his books and pamphlets. Such sentences seem to us an outrage. The Blasphemy Laws are obsolete, and if a judge is forced to act upon them, he ought to do so with the knowledge that the public regards the punishment of honest opinion with dislike and contempt. We hope that the Home Secretary will promptly release these men."

Certainly the Home Secretary should promptly release the two "blasphemers." Unfortunately, there seems little room to hope that Mr. McKenna will act any better than his predecessors.

In view of the *Nation* leaderette, the *Yorkshire Observer* returns to the question as follows:—

"We are glad to notice that the *Nation* is with us in our protest against the conviction and imprisonment of two men at the Leeds Assizes last week for the mediæval offence of blasphemy. We do not minimise the offence

of the blasphemers; to us it is hateful and abhorrent. So is Tariff Reform, which an ingenious lawyer might easily show to the satisfaction of an English Judge to be a blasphemous reflection upon the good purposes of the Creator towards mankind. But we should never think of imprisoning Tariff Reformers because they disagree with us in opinion. If we clear our minds of cant we shall have to recognise that this was the narrow ground upon which the Leeds blasphemers were convicted—a mere difference in opinion crudely and offensively expressed. The common law, under which we take it that the men were indicted, allows flogging 'with indignity'—that is, at the cart's tail—for blasphemy, and we almost wish that Mr. Justice Horridge had ordered both the defendants to have so many strokes with 'the cat' in a public procession from the Town Hall to Upperhead-row, and so many more on the way from Briggate by a circuitous route back to the Town Hall; for then the enormity of the whole thing would have been brought home to the people with appropriate violence, and we should have heard no more of the blasphemy law. We very much fear that both our Judges and our magistrates give sentences of imprisonment flippantly and frivolously; they speak and set in operation a machinery of pain and ruin and death. The blasphemers, too, open their lips and speak, but their words die upon the air and leave no sting but in the trained memory of a hardened policeman."

The last two sentences are very fine. The writer is a humanitarian and a wit.

Readers of the *Freethinker* will be pleased to see another comment on the Leeds "blasphemy" case—from the *North Eastern Daily Gazette*:—

"The blasphemy prosecution at Leeds is to be deplored. It is not creditable to British justice. Both the judge and the jury ought to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves, and the prosecutors more so still. We have no sympathy whatever with the methods and matter of the man who was convicted. We admit, too, that to use taunting language regarding the deepest convictions of large sections of the community is not conducive to good order. If a Protestant were to go to a Catholic centre and denounce the most cherished beliefs of Catholics we should hold his conduct reprehensible. Its natural tendency would be to promote anger and a disturbance of the peace. But in the Leeds case there was no evidence whatever of a tendency to create disorder. The crime was an attack on the Christian religion. The language used was stupid and vulgar, but the attack was a thing which ought to have been treated with contempt. In reality the words chiefly complained of involved an attack only on certain antiquated notions, not on Christianity at all—on notions which supply purely theological tests for conduct and ignore the great ethical tests. In cultured language, as strong and disturbing statements have been made in Presbyterian Synods. By the prosecution a type of street oratory which ought to be treated with contempt is brought into prominence, the orator is converted into a martyr, and Christianity is identified with notions that are caricatures of it. We hope there will be an appeal against the grossly unjust sentence or that the Home Office will at once order the release of the prisoner. As to the second charge against another man for the publication of a blasphemous pamphlet we can say nothing, as the character of the pamphlet was not revealed; but we must say of all such prosecutions that they tend to propagate the very opinions for the suppression of which the antiquated law was constructed."

I should be delighted to print similar extracts from other papers, if they exist and Freethinkers will send them to me.

It is pitiable to see how the London newspapers—even the "Radical" newspapers—have taken this "blasphemy" prosecution so quietly. Party passion is stronger than ever, but principles appear to be at a discount. It is not a question of the ability, the social status, or even the the character of the "blasphemers." Better men may, in quite conceivable circumstances, easily suffer in the same way. No heretic is safe, except by the sufferance of the police, if he may be brought before twelve Christian jurors and a Christian judge, declared guilty of "blasphemy" if they do not like his "style," and sent to prison like a common criminal. The only way out of the trouble is to abolish the Blasphemy Laws altogether and make "the decencies of controversy" the same for all controversialists.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Logic of Disestablishment.

THE promised Government Bill for the Disestablishment of the Church in Wales raises once more the question of the relations of the modern state to religious belief. Upholders of the Established Church have for weeks been filling the columns of their journals with letters of protest and warning. There has been much talk of robbery, and some grave warnings as to the disasters likely to accrue if the measure becomes law. Nonconformist journals have adopted, on the whole, a quieter tone. They feel confident that the Church in Wales will be disestablished, and every Freethinker will agree with them that it ought to be. Churchmen accuse Dissenters of being animated, in their attack on the Church in Wales, by envy and greed, and Freethinkers will be able to accord them a large measure of agreement on this point. The Freethinker, as is not unusual in such cases, is in the position of being in agreement—partly, at least—with both of the main parties in the dispute. Some outsiders may even suggest that the controversy illustrates the old saying that honest men hear the truth when other people quarrel.

In truth, the Freethinker, because he is a Freethinker, is really the only one who can appreciate the logic of both parties—when they are logical—and who can also draw from their positions certain conclusions that neither party seem to have the wit nor the courage to deduce. When the Churchman accuses Nonconformists of taking all the State patronage and State help they can get, and being quite ready to take more, the truth of the charge seems to be too obvious for dispute. Nonconformist bodies are helped by the State, as religious organisations; they are "on the rates" equally with Churchmen, although the cash assistance is not equal in both cases. They, equally with Churchmen, maintain laws that positively and negatively favor their religious opinions, and resist all attempts for their abolition. On the other side, Dissenters are unquestionably correct when they assert that the State has no legitimate right to bolster up a form of religious belief, and declare that to be the religion of the State. The State should remain perfectly neutral in matters of religion, leaving its members free to choose any religion, or to go without one, concerning itself solely with the secular relationship that may or ought to obtain.

Mutually exclusive as are the positions of the genuine Nonconformist and the convinced Churchman, there is sound logic in both. But neither position is in itself ultimate. One follows from a certain conception of the State, the other from a particular conception of the nature and value of religion. The curious thing is that the religious Nonconformist, in asking for State neutrality in matters of religion—and State neutrality means the non-interference of the State, if it is to be genuine—is asking for something that cuts the ground from under his feet and plays directly into the hands of Freethinkers.

Fundamentally, the position of the upholder of a State religion is based upon the conviction that religious belief is absolutely essential to the right ordering of life, and that the State is expressing this in a corporate capacity by establishing and endowing a particular church. The State is thus religious because its members are religious. If it is said that as a matter of fact all the members of a State are not religious, it might be replied that neither are all its members truthful. But this does not abolish the right of the State to impress upon its members the duty of truthfulness, and to set an example in that direction itself. But Nonconformists also profess to believe in the supreme value of religious belief. They are quite at one with Churchmen in declaring that without religion individual and social life must deteriorate. On what logical ground, then, can they demand that the State shall be neutral in religious matters? If religion is really essential to the right

ordering of life, is there not as much justification for the State teaching religion as there is for it creating and endowing a system of elementary education? The only ultimate justification for State action in any direction is that the welfare of the State demands it. How, then, can we make a profession of belief in the supreme value and importance of religion, and at the same time ask that the State shall remain neutral in relation to it? Might we not as reasonably say, "We believe in the value of honesty; but, as there are some who do not, we demand that the State shall be neutral between the burglar and the householder?"

The Nonconformist is thus in a hopelessly illogical position. He does not believe in the unimportance of religion, and he does not really believe in the complete neutrality of the State. It is not the latter conviction that is at the bottom of his anti-Establishment activity; it is a sectarian desire to dethrone a religious rival. He does not believe in the Established Church being where it is; he does believe in some other Church, or Churches, being there in its place. Historically this is all that Nonconformity has really aimed at. Their widest claim has been liberty to worship as they pleased; but that the State should be truly and sanely secular has never been their desire, nor have they consciously done anything to secure this end. Their aim, in its best aspect, has been that the State should not favor one religious sect more than another—an impossible thing, since the State cannot interfere in religious matters without a profession of preference in one direction.

Logical opposition to a State religion must rest upon the advisability or the injustice of the State interfering with religious opinions. The claim must be that the functions of the State are purely secular, and that so long as an individual carries out his secular duties properly it has no further concern with him. But this, as we have seen, rests upon the assumption that religion is not, what all Christians declare it to be, essential to the proper ordering of life. Religion becomes a matter with which the State should have no concern only when we treat religion as a matter of individual opinion, which a man may disregard altogether without its affecting his value as a social unit. Short of this, the State has the same right to interfere in matters of religion that it has to interfere in matters of sanitation or education.

Historically there are two causes that have contributed to the modern demand for the separation of Church and State. The first in order of time is the growth of sects. If only one form of religious belief existed, and if all people accepted this as true, the limits of Church and State would be identical, and there could not well arise a demand for separation. There would be no feeling of social injustice aroused. The sense of injustice arises when, from a number of sects, the State selects one and harasses the others. Dissatisfaction begins, and later an elaborated political discontent originates the theory that the State should steer an impartial course between competing religious bodies. But impartiality can only obtain under the almost impossible conditions that the religious sects shall be very few, very large, and equally balanced in political and social strength. Such a condition of things has never yet been witnessed, and as a matter of fact it has never been more than a case as to which religious body should play the part of tyrant.

The later, but more powerful, cause making for the separation of Church and State has been the growth of religious unbelief; or, if not definite unbelief, the quasi-unbelief implied in the position that religion is an interesting subject, an ingenious speculation—one that may be true, but which we can get on very well without. The real separation of Church and State means the secularising of the State. Anything short of this resolves itself into a mere device for benefiting one sect at the expense of other sects, or at the expense of the community at large. People have grown into believing in the sepa-

ration of Church and State because they have grown out of believing in religion. A nation of believers could not avoid fighting for religion as an integral part of its institutional life. To a nation of unbelievers such a position would be an obvious impossibility. And these are the only two really logical positions. If a man believes in the value of religion he should be an upholder of an Established Church in some form. The religious Nonconformist, in clamoring for Disestablishment, while repeating the common formula that a desirable existence is impossible without religion, shows a complete inability to appreciate what conclusions follow from his avowed premises. And when he, in addition, accepts State aid and supports legislation in the interest of religion, he evidences that cant and hypocrisy with which Dissent has been usually credited.

If Nonconformists are really in earnest in their cry for Disestablishment, that is, if there is any vital principle connected therewith, what they must really fight for is the complete secularisation of the State. This is the only rational basis for the Disestablishment of *all* churches, and it is one that is modern in expression and in line with the best tendencies of modern development. Such a conception could have no place in early societies, because the idea of a collective responsibility to the tribal or national gods still obtained. Splendidly tolerant as was ancient Rome, it still maintained a certain national responsibility in matters of religious belief. The Roman Catholic Church maintained this idea, although by its setting up the claim that the Church was above the State it kept the two legally distinct, and so incidentally paved the way for a truer conception of things. The Protestant Reformation—retrogressive here, as in so many other directions—set up, for the first time in the history of Christian Europe, a State Church, and made a profession of a particular creed compulsory on all. This has been undermined in turn by the steady growth of secular science and secular civilisation, and to such an extent that even religionists recognise that religion is a private affair, one with which the State has no legitimate concern.

Logical Disestablishment will, therefore, go much further than the deposition of a particular church. Those who really and rationally believe in State neutrality in religion must believe in the exclusion of religion from all State functions and from all legislation. They must insist on the non-interference of the State positively and negatively. The State, that is, must not only cease to legislate with a desire to enforce religious opinion, it must also cease to legislate with a view to obstructing opinions that are antagonistic to religion. If anywhere, the world of opinion is the one sphere in which the State must stand rigidly impartial, protecting all and favoring none. Finally, Disestablishment must be not only for the adult, but also for the child. Every argument that tells against the State teaching religion to adults, tells with equal strength against it teaching religion to the child. The plea that parents require it for their children is wholly irrelevant. It is a question of whether it is one of the things with which the State should concern itself. If the answer is Yes, the case for established religion is practically conceded. If the answer is in the negative, anything short of the complete abolition of religious teaching and ceremonies in all branches of national life, from the throne down to the school, is a surrender of principle and a display of hypocrisy.

C. COHEN.

Theology in a Fog.

ONCE again Christmas is close at hand, and the Churches are getting ready to celebrate what they fondly describe as the most momentous event in history, namely, the birth of the world's Redeemer. Already the proprietors of religious newspapers are endeavoring to derive commercial profit from the

occasion by issuing double numbers at double prices, several of which are now in circulation. Generally speaking, the most noticeable feature of the Christmas number is its significant silence on what is assumed to be the supreme subject. Sensational stories of miraculous conversions abound, but the problems that surround the orthodox doctrine of Christmas are almost entirely ignored. The truth is that the Churches are afflicted with a spirit of unrest, arising from a deadened faith, and producing the conviction that the less said about perplexing questions the better for all concerned. This spirit of unrest sometimes expresses itself in peculiarly awkward and provoking ways, with the result that the leaders scarcely know what to say or do. All that they are certain of is that things are not well with them, and that they are suffering from a perfect "confusion of futility." As a specimen of the difficulties by which they are being confronted we may take the following:—

"What must be our attitude toward Redemption and the Atonement if we adopt the scientific view that the Fall was really a fall upwards? If man is better now than he has ever been, and not only kept his first estate, but is actually improving upon it, why should the Son of God give his life in order that man should once more recover this first comparatively undesirable estate?"

This difficulty is absolutely insurmountable so long as the Christian faith is retained in any of its conventional forms. No tolerably orthodox Christian can be an evolutionist, any more than a thorough-going evolutionist can be a Christian. If evolution is true, Revelation is false. To an unprejudiced mind this is as plain as a pikestaff; and perfect honesty necessitates a choice between the two contradictory systems.

In the early days of evolution the divines perceived that logical necessity with the utmost clearness, and without a moment's hesitation they condemned evolution on the simple ground that it was irreconcilable with Scripture. Their position was intelligible and straightforward, and one is not surprised at the bitterness with which they resented the teachings of science. But the divines of to-day are of a totally different mettle. Sensible of the triumph of science, they cannot afford to oppose it with any enthusiasm, and so they try to come to terms with it by dropping or modifying certain articles of their own creed. Having done that to their own satisfaction, they pose as scientific theologians who embody ancient beliefs in terms of modern knowledge; but ancient theological beliefs cannot be expressed in terms of modern knowledge except at the cost of doing violence to reason. For example, a redeemer is a person who recovers, regains possession of, restores to a former estate, something or someone that is lost. To speak of the Redeemer of the world is to presuppose that the world is in a fallen and lost condition; and on consulting the New Testament and ecclesiastical authorities we learn that Christianity glories in being a religion that can save, recover, restore, redeem a race of sinners "lost and ruined by the Fall." This implies, as the Shorter Catechism puts it, that "God created man, male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures," an estate from which, the Catechism continues, "our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell by sinning against God." But science, which has thoroughly investigated this point, can find no trace whatever of that happy first estate, nor of any specific fall from a higher to a lower estate. If science is right, the world has never stood in need of the Savior or Redeemer so minutely portrayed by theology. Well, our twentieth century divine concurs in that scientific deliverance by playing the trimmer in the following manner:—

"The Christian conception is that, as man came from the hand of his Creator, he was innocent, but he was not perfect; he did not realise as yet the ideal manhood, and ere he attained it he must undergo a long discipline and grow thereby in knowledge and wisdom. Primitive man was only man in the making. He was innocent—

that is, there was no flaw in the material; and the Creator's purpose was that he should develop sweetly and harmoniously 'unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,' the Archetype and Ideal of humanity."

The belief in man's original perfection is thus surrendered at the bidding of science. Prior to the discovery of evolution no man of God had ever dreamed of doubting its truth. The Westminster Assembly of Divines was fundamentally mistaken when it agreed that "God created man in his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness"; he made him imperfect, but innocent. Science is correct in its interpretation of existing facts, and theology cannot utter a single word against it. The only fault of science is that it is not sufficiently farsighted to see that the course taken by the evolution of the human has been wholly different from the one God purposed that it should have taken. Listen to this ingenious but fallacious reasoning:—

"Science, interpreting merely the present facts, recognises nothing abnormal in the development of humanity but only the orderly process of evolution; whereas theology postulates an interruption of the process. Man alone of all this world's creatures is endowed with the perilous prerogative of self-determination; and the Scriptures declare that he has set his will in defiance to the will of his Creator. And this is the Fall—not a declension from perfection, but a departure from the paths which have led to perfection; not the marring of God's finished work, but the thwarting of his purpose in the making of it."

Such is the method by which science and theology are said to have been reconciled; but it is the method of shameless cowardice, resorted to merely to cover up complete defeat. The doctrine of the Fall has been smuggled away to a region of which science has no cognisance, and of which the theologian is equally as ignorant.

As this absurd doctrine of the Fall is likely to be echoed in many a pulpit during the next few weeks, let us examine it for a moment. In the first place, think of the light in which the Deity appears in it. He, an absolutely perfect Being, is represented as turning out an imperfect piece of work, and, then, as endowing it "with the perilous prerogative of self-determination," in consequence of which it very quickly went to pieces. Is it possible really to believe in such a wicked Creator, a Creator without a single scrap of a conscience? Fancy his expecting an imperfect man, with a free will of his own, to develop sweetly and harmoniously unto a perfect manhood! Though imperfect he was yet innocent; and if imperfectly made, he remains innocent to this day. In the second place, how ineffably silly it is to imagine that a finite, imperfect creature was yet strong enough to thwart the purpose of the infinitely perfect Creator in the making of him. Simply to state such a heresy is to refute it. In the third place, the whole doctrine is the product of an unbalanced imagination. There is absolutely no foundation for it in fact. Indeed, all the facts known to us flatly contradict it. It is incredible that any sane person could verily believe that the beastiality, barbarism, and superstition still rampant in the world are but "so many phases of the degradation to which humanity sank by its self-willed departure from the Creator's purpose." These horrid words occur in Professor David Smith's Correspondence Column in the *British Weekly* for December 7; and they stand in open contradiction to the clear testimony of evolution. The etymology of "beastiality" alone completely exposes the diabolical character of Dr. Smith's view. Whatever beastiality manifests itself in mankind is an inheritance from the lower animals. It is cruelly false to assert that "everywhere in the wide Universe order and harmony prevail, save only in the life of man." Has the Professor never studied natural history, specially the habits and customs of ferocious beasts? Is he not aware that every evil practised among men is also present, in some form or other, in the lower animals? All evils are but symptoms of imperfect social adjustment, the guilt spoken of by Dr. Smith

being simply a theologically engendered emotion, or, rather, a thoroughly wholesome human feeling perverted under the influence of supernaturalism. Man is not "an outcast and an exile who has fallen from his first estate"; he is, rather, a native of the earth on which he dwells, who has decidedly risen from his first estate. He is slowly learning to adapt himself to the condition of his higher estate; and the adaptation consists largely in working out the beast that still clings to him—"moods of tiger and of ape"—and working in the man that is to be. In other words, man is an animal who has managed to push himself ahead of all his comrades by the superior size and educability of his brain.

The Redeemer is as great a myth as the Fall. The only redeemer of the world is the sun which has never yet failed to warm it into newness of life once a year. While the Churches are singing the praises and engaging in the worship of a mythological God-man, there are thousands of people who will avail themselves of the coming season to get closer to Nature's heart, to study her laws with renewed enjoyment, to obey her mandates with increased enthusiasm, and to find in her fellowship their supreme delight. She is our mother, and if we are not at home with her we are orphans indeed. Behind her operations there is no recognisable purpose whatever; but we, her children, have developed sufficient intelligence to enable us to cherish the purpose of perfecting the race to which we belong by serving one another in love.

J. T. LLOYD.

At a Spiritualist Seance.

WE were thirteen in number, including the medium, although I do not suggest that the so-called unlucky number was in any way connected with the fiasco of the sitting. The gathering was a representative one, despite the absence of the Principal of Birmingham University, who had been invited, but was unable to attend. The company, however, included two officials of the Society for Psychical Research, three medical men of eminence, and a conjurer and public entertainer of world-wide renown.

The cabinet, which was composed of mosquito netting, was fastened on light wood uprights, which, in turn, were fixed to the centre of the room of the Maida Vale flat where the seance was held. It was carefully examined by all present and approved by the experts. The medium was searched in an adjoining room and a guarantee given by the searchers that this part of the performance had been strictly carried out. This, however, we afterwards ascertained was not the case.

"Business" commenced almost directly the medium was seated and locked inside the cabinet. He was placed "under control" by two "spirits" in succession. The first claimed to be the spirit of one known on earth as "Dr. Whitcomb," who expressed great anxiety lest the medium should be searched after the seance. He also raised a strong objection to my presence, on the ground that he wished no notes to be taken of the proceedings for publication. The other members of the company, however, overruled this objection, and my pencil and note-book, therefore, still remained and were used. The second "spirit" was that of a Dr. Denton, a well-known author of days gone by. The inflections and gestures were the same in each case, and each "spirit" spoke equally bad grammar and made the same mistakes in pronunciation. Then a Hindu took possession of the medium, but he quickly rendered himself scarce when it was discovered that one of the members of the gathering understood Hindustani and addressed the "control" in that language.

We were then asked to sing, and made a gallant attempt to do so. The singing was presumably intended to smother the fumbling movements of the medium within the cabinet, which those of us sitting nearest could distinctly hear. A bird's nest and two

small bird's eggs were successively and proudly produced by the medium as "apports." One egg was said to be that of a Hindu bird and the other of an English blackbird. The nest was easily collapsible. The medium asserted that the "controls" had been to India within the previous few minutes to fetch the nest and to the Canary Islands to fetch the eggs. I ascertained the next day that the whole paraphernalia could have been purchased within a few hundred yards from the flat where the séance was held.

After a third "apport," I noticed what appeared to be an escape of a whiteish grey garment between the medium's jacket and trousers, and immediately drew the attention of the conjurer, who was sitting on my left, to the fact. The medium glanced in our direction, and at once asked for the lights, which had been turned on, to be extinguished. When they were again kindled a few minutes afterwards, the garment, whatever it was, had been restored to its proper place.

Directly the séance was over, and the cabinet unlocked, the medium hastily swallowed some brandy, which he asked for, or, rather, the "control" had done so for him, rushed from the room and the flat, and deputed a man-servant to fetch his collar, studs, and tie, which, in his haste to get away, he had left behind.

Incidentally, we learned that the medium, who was on a visit from Melbourne, received a fee of four guineas a sitting, which may account for "Dr. Whitcomb's" anxiety and solicitude that all present should attend at least three or four séances at half-a-guinea a time.

DUDLEY WRIGHT.

Acid Drops.

The Common Serjeant, Sir F. A. Bosanquet, has been airing his views on marriage at the Old Bailey. We don't know why he should think them of any importance to anyone but himself, but since he has uttered them from the bench they call for some criticism. He observed that registry offices served the purposes of bigamists, as the notices posted up there carried very little publicity, and the ceremony there had "none of the solemnity which ought to accompany marriage." But whose fault is that? Civil marriages increase in England, and religious marriages diminish. So far so good. But it is the settled policy of the authorities and the religionists in this country to make civil marriages as unpleasant as possible. The parties have generally to sneak up a back street into a miserable little office and run the gauntlet of perfunctory officials, who speak and act as if they were booking clerks for Pickford or Sutton. There is not only a want of solemnity, there is a want of decency, and the poetry of marriage disappears altogether. John takes Mary to wife, and Mary takes John as her husband—and there's so many years for perjury and so many years for bigamy, with magistrates and maintenance orders in the background. And there you are, don't you know? And what more do you expect in a Christian country? Well, the people who marry civilly do expect something more, and in time they will get it, in spite of the mean and contemptible opposition of the clergy and their friends and supporters. They expect that, as marriage is a contract (and a great deal more) meaning so much to them, and meaning so much also to the State, they shall not be married in a hole-and-corner fashion, but in a suitable public building with proper surroundings and a decent ceremony. What is requisite is the impressiveness of a most important social function. To deny that to the ever increasing number of men and women who will not go to church to be married is a base and detestable effort to humiliate them. We do not say to degrade them, for the degradation is all on the other side.

The Common Serjeant asked those "in high places" (bless them!) to "consider whether it would not be well that in England, as in other countries, marriage should be solemnised with more deliberation, more publicity, and with real notice to those who knew the parties." This is what we have contended for in the previous paragraph. But the method in other countries goes farther than the Common Serjeant seems prepared to go. It is only the civic marriage that is performed by the State. The religious ceremony, being private and personal, can be added (or neglected) at pleasure.

Ministers of religion should not be allowed to marry people *legally*, but only *spiritually*. All legal marriages should be performed by the State. Those who want the double marriage, so to speak, should employ their own clergyman and have the godly deed done in the church or chapel they prefer.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is not a fool, but he can play the fool—as we suppose every man in his position must. In the first number of *Our Empire*, which is the odd title of a new monthly "Magazine for Sunday Schools," there is a "Foreword" signed by "Randall Cantuar" and dated from Lambeth Palace. We don't think we ever read worse drivel. Just look at this:—

"The very name, 'Our Empire,' sets us thinking about the privilege of being sharers of the greatest and most wonderful citizenship that the world has ever seen. And, week by week, as we thank God for the great trust of that membership, we resolve afresh that we will try to help in making it a Christian Empire, a living thing, loyal some day at last in God's good time through and through, to Jesus Christ our Captain and our King. Perhaps no other force exists on earth which could do so much to bring that about as our Sunday Schools could, if only we are all bent upon using to the utmost that wonderful opportunity, and so making our Church-membership and our Empire-membership live and glow as one firm, strong, bright, hopeful bond of fellowship in glad obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Silly-Billy style of this passage is simply wonderful. Certainly the Archbishop is a clever man to achieve it so successfully. And what shall we say of Randall Cantuar's suggestion that Sunday-schools are going to Christianise the British Empire, with its vast population of Brahmans, Buddhists, and Mohammedans—on whom a hundred years of costly missionary work has made no sort of impression? Dr. Davidson must know that his suggestion is all fudge. But every priest is able to talk fudge with a solemn face.

"Glad obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ" is a pretty expression. But the Archbishop forgets that, glad or otherwise, he himself has never attempted such obedience. He has £15,000 a year—he lives in a palace—he has a seat in the House of Lords—and in State processions he goes before the Prime Minister. How does he reconcile all this (and more) with the Lord Jesus Christ's words: "Take no thought for the morrow," "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth," "Woe unto you rich," "Blessed be ye poor"? We should like to see "Cantuar's" explanation.

The colored people of South Africa have an organisation known as the "African Political Organisation," whose principal object is the furtherance and protection of the non-whites in S. Africa. We understand that it is led by some really able men, who have received their education at Christian institutions. Yet they are not quite as sweet on Christianity as the British missionaries would like. This South African organisation publishes a paper called the *A. P. O.* In the number dated October 7, 1911, there is an editorial article which shows how much political, social, and moral value the educated native attaches to the Creed of Christendom. The article is so interesting, and so important, that we venture to reproduce it *in extenso*:—

"One of the most remarkable characteristics of modern so-called progress is the insatiable greed for national territorial acquisition. Italy is set on having Tripoli. Germany is envious of French powers in Morocco. Russia has been silently and steadily pushing on her boundaries further over Asia for decades. Great Britain has been remorselessly advancing her claims by the establishment of protectorates over native territories in Africa, which style of control is gradually converted into the assumption of absolute dominion, and means the sneaking dispossession of the aborigines of their land as well as their rights. This spread of what is known as Christian civilisation is as remorselessly cruel in its effects as it is irresistible in its silent strength. The usual order of events is the advent of the Christian missionary with his promises of eternal blessings to the benighted savages. He is followed by the trader with his bag of trinkets and his whisky flask. Then comes the soldier ostensibly to protect the native, but really to force him into submission to the white man's method of governing the land he has stolen. The aboriginal wakes up too late to find that he has lost his land as well as the means of defending himself. He has been bribed into the acceptance of a religious creed, which promises him a small pocket-handkerchief allotment in some peaceful realm of bliss after death in return for his forfeiture of his rights to some square miles of this earth. No wonder if the native in future discredits the missionary. If he but half understood the course of events in the past history of his brethren, he would never permit a white man, whether missionary, trader, or soldier, to set foot in his country."

It is delightful to a Freethinker to see these ideas and sentiments published—and apparently with acceptance—for

the victims of the missionary—rifle—and land-stealing combination.

As an illustration of the decline of Christianity and the spread of Mohammedanism in South Africa an item which recently appeared in the *Cape Argus* is noteworthy. The first mosque, we are told, was opened at East London—an important port on the Indian Ocean—in the chapel recently owned by the Second Baptist German Church. The Second Baptist German congregation having become defunct, the Mohammedans purchased the chapel and converted it into a mosque after an elaborate process of fumigation and exorcism.

The dear *Daily News* maintains its policy of absolute silence with regard to the prosecution of Freethought advocates. Not only does it pass no comments, it admits no reports. One would have thought that the "Blasphemy" prosecution at Leeds was calculated to draw its attention. Nothing of the sort, however; "mum's the word" still. Yet the *Daily News* is the political organ of the Free Churches and the "Nonconformist Conscience." It has vastly degenerated since our own prosecution in 1882-1883—and the Free Churches have degenerated with it. They used to have some idea of liberty, not exclusively for themselves; they have no such idea now, and they will probably go on in that way to the end of the chapter. To borrow a phrase of Beaconsfield's—they are not only dead but damned.

Having sent two Freethinkers to prison for ridiculing Christianity, the Leeds Christians are continuing their brave and spirited defence of their faith. The Free Church Council, for instance, is carrying on, by means of an organised Visitation Committee, week-end calls at all homes in the city, with a view to finding out if the people attend any church and the children any Sunday-school—and subsequently, of course, to worry them into attending. This impudent proceeding ought to be resented, and we hope it will in many cases. We beg to observe that it won't be blasphemy to call these visitors Pious Paul Prys or Braying Busybodies or anything of that sort. *They* are not God.

The Church, according to the Rev. S. D. Jackson, of Cardiff, has no objection to Socialism, but it must be a Christian Socialism. Exactly; the Church has always shown that it has no great objection to anything so long as it is toned down to suit Christian teachings. The Church has no objection to Atheism—if it will only include the belief in God, a future life, and the divinity of Jesus. And this is about equal to all that is implied in the phrase "Christian Socialism." It means Socialism with all that is sanely Socialistic left out. In operation it resolves itself into sloppy, sentimental talk about the Fatherhood of God, love of man, and a number of fine-sounding phrases that are not worth, in practice, the paper they are written on or the energy exerted in expressing them. Very often Christian Socialism is no more than a bait set by knaves to entrap fools.

An example of how some people deal with the facts is furnished by the Rev. J. Morgan Jones. Mr. Jones says that whether the stories of the Virgin Birth and the legends connected therewith are true or not, they afford proof of the tremendous influence of Jesus upon the disciples and others. This might be so if the stories were invented to account for the influence of a personality. But there is no evidence that this is the case. It is, historically, not the interest in a personality that gives rise to the supernatural stories, but interest in the supernatural that fashions the personality and gives it the interest it possesses. The stories were already there, and they were associated with prevailing conceptions of natural processes. They were related of others besides the New Testament Jesus. To attach importance to the *person* about whom these tales were told is to mistake the nature of the problem altogether. This is a question that arises at a later stage, when the belief in the supernatural is declining, and people are looking for a human personality as a means of persisting in beliefs that owe their origin and vitality to a supernaturalism that is no longer tenable.

Mr. Jones thinks that Christmas offers a fine opportunity for the religious teacher. The story of Jesus may be told them in such a manner as to excite their interest. There are only two drawbacks. Some teachers complain that their conscience will not allow them to tell the story as historically true. That, says Mr. Jones, is making an absurdity of conscience, and sacrificing the welfare of the children. We do not quite see why conscience becomes an absurdity if one obeys its dictates, nor is it quite clear that the welfare of the child depends upon hearing the story of

Jesus told it as an historic event. Children do manage to grow up without it, and are apparently none the worse for the omission. The second disadvantage is that the children may ask the teacher if the story is really true. This, says Mr. Jones, is a request for more certainty, and the teacher should reply, "Yes, of course, it is true." And he adds, "At this age the Christmas stories should be told fully and almost recklessly, so far as the use of the imagination is concerned." In different words, we fancy we have come across this advice before in our reading of Christian history. In relation to adults, it is called "lying for the glory of God," and we quite fail to see why the principle, if right in relation to children, should be wrong in relation to adults, or *vice versa*. Mr. Jones is of the New Theologians, but when it comes to taking advantage of the innocence and ignorance of children, there seems little to choose between the old theologians and the new variety. And the moral is, that neither dare refrain from the unwarrantable exploitation of childhood if there is to be secured a future for their peculiar opinions.

The Middlesex County Council has decided not to grant permission for any Sunday entertainments whatever—whether for charitable purposes or not. This is no more than we have expected would happen. The cry that no profit should be made at Sunday entertainments was never more than a piece of sheer hypocrisy. It was only the thin end of the wedge. Once this was inserted, it became easy to drive the wedge further in. The *Christian World* says that those who find the "atmosphere of Sunday" destroyed by Sunday entertainments will rejoice at the decision. Doubtless; but it is precisely this rejoicing that proves the distortion of the social sense by Christianity. It is simply monstrous that any man, or any body of men, should go round poking their uninvited noses into entertainments that are admittedly harmless, and objecting to their continuance because they offend their religious susceptibilities. No one has any desire to follow the New Testament teaching to compel them to come in to these entertainments. *They* may observe Sunday in any fashion. In the home, or in the church and chapel, they may be as pious and as miserable as they please. All that others are asking is to be similarly let alone, so long as they do not contravene laws or canons of taste that regulate such displays on other days of the week. Only a morbid egotism, such as religion never fails to develop, can object to this. And a people who can tolerate such interference may well have called in question their right to the title "a free people."

There is danger in the presence of so many "prominent Nonconformist ministers" on the deputation that waited on Mr. McKenna with a view to promoting legislation for the suppression of "immoral literature" as well as "immoral advertisements" in newspapers. What these gentlemen are concerned at is not the suppression of *undoubted* "immoral literature," for the police have powers already for dealing with that sort of thing. No, these gentlemen want to stop the course of free discussion. "Immoral" in their dictionary means stirring up questions on which *they* claim to say the *last word*. A clerical member of the deputation told the Home Secretary that they wanted to put down "demoralising books, and especially the sex novel." There you have Christian bigotry naked and unashamed. Sex problems shall not, if they can help it, be discussed in works of fiction—or anywhere else. Sexual morality is all to be found in the Bible,—in the exquisite stories of Lot and his daughters, and Tamar and Judith and Onan, and the Levite and his concubine, and the loves of Aholah and Aholibah, and other narratives of the same pure and elevating character. Some of us think that any crusade against "indecent" literature should start with the Bible. But the clergy do *not* think so. They regard the grossest texts of their fetish book as purifying and ennobling for children. They grow alarmed when they see adults reading "sex novels." Their minds are so prurient that they lick creation at smelling "the flesh." What they really want, though, is to stop *thinking* on the part of the public. It is thinking that they hate, for thinking threatens their very existence.

That ineffable nincompoop, the Bishop of London, was on the deputation. He had his say, of course, for he is a perpetual babler. He was alarmed at the reduced birth-rate,—which we presume he does nothing to increase; and he fondly imagined—ninny that he is!—that the way to multiply the population was to suppress all Malthusian advertisements. He did not say "Malthusian," he said "disgusting"—a word which applies, of course, to everything that Dr. Ingram objects to. The fact is that these clerical reformers of the human species spoil everything they touch. Their only morality is restraint—their only

policy is restraint. "Thou shalt not" is the only ethic they understand. In a word, they are Christians—and priests.

How many Ministers of Education have the present Government had? Perhaps somebody will tell us. We have given up counting them. The latest of the tribe is Mr. J. A. Pease, and we notice that he is just as cocky as his predecessors, who all came to grief—as he will. Speaking at Cockermonth the other night, he admitted that "the religious difficulty interfered with the true progress of education," but at the same time "the Nonconformist grievance must be met, and he believed it could be done without banishing religion from the elementary schools of the country." So his predecessors thought and said, but the fate of their Education Bills proved that they were mistaken. Not to put too fine an edge upon it, the religious difficulty is simply the result of the old struggle, which has been going on ever since 1870, between Church and Chapel. Mr. Pease will never succeed in satisfying the Chapel party without dissatisfying the Church party—and *vice versa*. If he doesn't see this he must be as blind as a bat. We may change the metaphor, and ask what would satisfy both of two powerful dogs fighting over a bone which, from the nature of the case, cannot be divided? One would have to be left with the bone, or both knocked on the head, or the bone of contention taken away. The bone of contention in this case is religious teaching, and its removal means Secular Education.

Leslie's Weekly, New York, rebukes Senator La Follette, whose autobiography is now running in the *American Magazine*, for his admiration for Ingersoll. "His own State," *Leslie's* says, "dared not to place political leadership in the hands of the late Robert G. Ingersoll, and we hardly think this country will want to place itself under the guidance of a man who has found in Ingersoll his chief inspiration." This is meant as a spoke in the wheel of the Senator's presidential ambition. The article winds up in the same pompous style which is so common in orthodox circles. "We cannot believe that the American people are ready to turn over the destiny of the country to any man who frankly confesses that he received the inspiration of his life from Robert G. Ingersoll, the apostle of destruction and the advocate of annihilation." What is the difference between destruction and annihilation, except in spelling; and what does it matter to any person in the world what *Leslie's Weekly* cannot (or can) believe?

The Rev. K. C. Anderson has been for some weeks trying to get readers of the *Christian World* to the point of "Facing the Facts." Hitherto he has met with small success. He has been trying to get readers to see

"that the Higher Criticism, ever since it began its work on the New Testament, has been engaged in denying feature after feature in the New Testament portraiture of the Jesus which have made Him the Christ of the Church. The Jesus whom the critics present to us is a Jesus denuded of all supernatural features. And my contention is that this is *not* the Christ of the Church. I contend that the Liberal critics have failed to find a simple, human, natural Jesus in the New Testament. The Jesus of the New Testament is a Divine Being. The instinct of the Christian Church all along its history has been right in affirming the Divinity of the central figure of the New Testament. The discovery that Jesus was a man, in the same sense as Socrates, Alexander, Paul, and Napoleon were men—strictly within the range and limits of history—would be regarded by the great mass of the Christian Church as destructive of Christianity. What is vital in Christianity is wrapped up in the supernatural features of the New Testament which the Liberal critics set aside as mythical or legendary."

We are not surprised at Dr. Anderson's failure. We have found it no easy task driving these truths home to Christians, and we were at the work many years before Dr. Anderson discovered them. The issue is simple. The only Jesus that will do for Christianity is a supernatural or, as Dr. Anderson puts it, a "divine" being. And this is precisely the kind of being that modern scholarship and modern science finds it impossible to accept.

Dr. Anderson, however, falls into a curious confusion when he proceeds:—

"Had the belief been that the central figure of the New Testament was a man as Socrates was a man, Christianity would never have overcome the Græco-Roman world, and would never have brought civilisation in its train; but would have died, as many of the religions of that time died, and disappeared from the earth. It was the belief that the central figure was Divine, a Supernatural Being, a God Man, not a man as was Socrates or Alexander, that enabled Christianity to overcome the world."

Of course, had Jesus been accepted as a mere man, in the

modern sense, there would have no Christian religion. But the important thing to bear in mind is that religious teachers, in those days, were not always mere men. They were usually, more or less, supernatural beings. Demi-gods and semi-gods were quite everyday characters. And the character of the New Testament Jesus is, to the critical student, not a new character, or a new type of character, but one of an already large group of mythical characters. From this point of view, Christianity did not conquer the world at all. Certain beliefs, modified by their inter-action and other circumstances, were perpetuated under the name of Christianity. The problem for the historical student is simply to discover the conditions of this modification and perpetuation; which also involves a discussion of the means by which the more rational beliefs then existing were overthrown.

Rev. A. J. Waldron may be called a freak parson. He knows that the soul-saving business, as such, is pretty well played out; so he is constantly blowing his whistle on a side track. His latest idea, according to the *Daily News*, is to abolish crime by a mixture of prayer and medicine. He has heard of hypnotism and auto-suggestion, and he fancies these influences, with a judicious mixture of piety, will not only cure diseases but abolish crime. He refers to a hopeful case—a well-educated young fellow who has been a "wrong 'un" from his earliest days, having robbed his father, and robbed his employers in every situation, and is now "re-manded at the Old Bailey in a very serious case of theft and forgery." Excellent! This is a very good object for Waldron and his Emanuel Movement to practise upon. And we shall be glad to hear the result—in due course.

Hats off to the Rev. Tom Primrose Castley, who has resigned the living of Gailey parish, Penkridge, between Stafford and Wolverhampton, worth £290 a year and a residence—preferring to be an honest man instead of a well-paid hypocrite. Here is a portion of his farewell letter to his parishioners:—

"I find it absolutely impossible to assent to many of those doctrines which are supposed to form the foundation upon which the Church is built.

"Religion and theology are two very different things. Neither the Bible nor the Church can be infallible. An officer of the Church is bound by the doctrines of the Church. If he cannot loyally assent to them he must give up the charge.

"If the Church orders me as one of her ministers to proclaim certain things as facts which I do not in my own mind believe are facts, then the only thing is to give up my ministry. I cannot go on saying these things with all sorts of reservations in my own mind, apologising to God, as it were, for uttering in public and in formal language what I could not say privately and in my own language that I firmly and without hesitation believe.

"I certainly cannot go on receiving the Church's money under such circumstances. I cannot sacrifice my conscience for the sake of friends, money, or anything else."

Hypocrisy is a great evil which flourishes amazingly in England. Now there is only one way of stopping evil. Somebody must leave off doing it. So we lift our hat to this ex-reverend gentleman.

We take the following item from the *Daily News* (Dec. 5):—

"The Rev. A. B. Borton, vicar of Burwell, Cambridge-shire, announces in his parish magazine that after twelve months' effort he has failed to secure a curate, although the stipend provided by Cambridge University is £150 per annum. The vicar adds that a London agent has informed him that the amount offered was insufficient at the present day, and, the University having declined to increase the allowance, he appeals to his parishioners to guarantee at least an additional £20 annually."

So much for the "poor clergy." The clerical profession is as mercenary as any other. There are souls to be saved at Burwell, and not a single ordained and Holy-Spirit-filled gentleman looking for a job will lend them a hand for £2 a week. At that price the sinners of Burwell may walk to blazes "on their own."

Jesus Christ's public ministry lasted three years, and they crucified him. The Rev. J. B. Figgis' ministry (Brighton) lasted fifty years and they gave him a thousand guineas. Moral: hold on if you can.

In the Kibworth and Smeeton *Parish Magazine* the Rector deplors that "On a recent Sunday evening no Churchwarden or Sidesman was in Church to take the plate round, and there was no Collection." No collection! This is the end of all things.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday, December 17, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, London, W.; at 7.30, "The Shadow of Calvary."

January 7, Shoreditch Town Hall; 9, London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner; 14, Shoreditch Town Hall; 21, Glasgow.

February 18, Manchester.

March 24, Leicester.

April 14, Glasgow.

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 17, Liverpool.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 31, Harringay.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1911.—Previously acknowledged £327 12s. 8d. Received since:—W. R. Munton, £2; D. D. B., £2 2s.; W. Tipper, 4s. 6d.

G. A. WALTER (S. Africa).—Thanks for your letter and enclosed cutting. Glad you value the *Freethinker* so highly. Shall be pleased to see you when you pass through London in May. But don't call on us at a venture. Make an appointment. We don't live in London, and only come to town when we must.

W. A. KING.—Ingersoll's lecture on Shakespeare is very good. Birch's *Philosophy of Shakespeare*, published some sixty years ago, is sometimes met with second-hand. Churton Collins's *Studies in Shakespeare* contains some good remarks on the poet's scepticism. So does Karl Elze's *William Shakespeare*.

JACK BARTON (1) It is impossible to prove negatives. The writer in the cutting you send us from the *Montreal Daily Star* is careful to give no authority for his statements. History shows one of his statements to be untrue. There was no "religious freedom" to speak of in England fifty years ago, consequently England could not have carried it to Japan, which, by the way, like China, was never troubled with religious bigotry. The early missionaries in Japan were treated hospitably, and only came to grief when they meddled with politics and took the wrong side. (2) The "B. V." reference is simple enough when you take the lxx. as the seventy years mentioned in the Bible as man's normal long life. The rest is a decimal sum.

ARTHUR STORER.—We think Murray is the publisher.

D. D. B.—We quite understand. Valor without caution soon reaches the cemetery. Thanks.

"KERIDON" is delighted that Mr. Cohen's essays on Determinism are being published in book form. "Lloyd, he, and yourself," our correspondent adds, "form a fine constellation." There now!

T. D. MOORE.—There is this to be said, however. In former times they used to attack the leaders of Freethought. Now they strike lower down. They will soon be fighting the very camp followers.

J. HANS.—See paragraph. Thanks.

J. W. REPTON.—So your lady friend doesn't think "Acid Drops" acid enough. Well, they are written for many readers, not for one or two with a specially strong taste. After all, acid is not vitriolic. Acid drops are reckoned amongst sweetmeats. Besides, even to lose temper with adversaries is a kind of defeat.

J. T. EMBLETON.—Battles have to be fought with brains as well as courage. It is easy enough to kindle a destructive fire and leave it to others to put out the flames.

NORMAN MURRAY (Montreal).—Your attack on superstition may help. Your talk about the "philosophy" which raises you above other Freethinkers is a waste of breath.

J. MATSON.—Sorry to hear how religion spoiled your life, but glad to hear you find some consolation in reading the *Freethinker*, which has taught you more in eighteen months (you say) than you learnt in thirty years of religious inquiry.

W. R. MUNTON, subscribing to the President's Fund, says: "It is painful to notice the steady increase of the persecution of Freethinkers since Mr. Bradlaugh's death. I suppose they feel they no longer have a lion in the path. No freethinking M.P. protests." But is this the right explanation? The general wave of reaction throughout Europe has little to do with any one man's life or death. It has been spreading for more than twenty years. We have pointed it out again and again during that period. Yet there is a *per contra*. It is during that period that we have designed and established the Secular Society, Ltd., which has done, and is doing, so much for the financial welfare of the Secular movement. We may add that the worst feature of the case is the general loss of idealism and love of liberty. Even the Socialists, as a whole, care little about the latter. All the more honor for those who uphold the old flag!

W. TIPPER sends 4s. 6d. as an additional penny for each of the last 54 numbers of this journal. "I don't exactly live on the *Freethinker*," he says, "but I am inclined to believe it saves me from attacks of indigestion."

H. B. DODDS.—"Mimnermus" did not "denounce" Frank Harris for criticising Shakespeare. He objected to Harris's

theory as utterly inconsistent with the facts. Surely that is a rational position. Whether it is right or wrong is a question on which there may be different opinions,—without any call for ill feeling.

A. H. DEACON.—See "Acid Drops."

B. H. TUBBS.—Enclosures returned. It was not to be expected that the newspaper in question would insert your telling letter on the "blasphemy" cases at Leeds.

C. T. SHAW.—We don't know what your friend refers to.

J. PARTRIDGE (Birmingham).—Glad to hear Mr. Herbert Thompson had a good audience. We hope the Branch resolution *re* the Leeds case may appear in the local newspapers. Let us know if it does.

E. DALE.—You will see it has been useful.

W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always welcome.

E. B.—Much obliged.

R. JOHNSON.—Thanks for paper. The Manchester resolution against the Blasphemy Laws comes too late on Tuesday.

R. CHAPMAN.—You will hear again very shortly. We wish you all luck at S. Shields. We had the pleasure of seeing Mr. and Mrs. Peacock at Queen's Hall a little while ago, and were glad to see them looking so well. The cause at S. Shields will wait "S. M. P." as long as possible.

T. W. HAUGHTON.—Thanks for cuttings.

H. R. C.—You say you note our statement that Mr. Bottomley is not an Atheist, and ask us to inform you "what he really is." We regret that we cannot give you the information. We are not quite sure that Mr. Bottomley could give it himself.

J. JOHNSON.—We cannot deal with cuttings so late as Tuesday morning. Some of them will be useable next week. Thanks for good wishes, especially your wife's. We are always delighted to find Freethought spreading amongst the mothers of the race.

J. B.—Thanks for cuttings, though Tuesday is too late for fresh paragraphs. It is pleasant, as you say, to see the *Birmingham Mail* so liberal in publishing correspondence on the "Blasphemy" case.

J. PARTRIDGE.—We did not receive news of Mr. Parsons' death till late on Monday afternoon, nor particulars till we arrived home at 11.30 p.m., after presiding at a special N. S. S. Executive meeting in London. By no possibility could we arrange then to be away from the editorial chair the next day. It involved several letters and telegrams to make any arrangement at all for the funeral, and Mr. Lloyd left London early on Tuesday morning with rather inadequate instructions. We did all we could and had to leave the rest "to destiny." Birmingham "saints" will understand if there was any hitch—which we hope there was not.

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.

Mr. Foote hardly expected any audience at all on Sunday evening, considering the shocking weather which obtained all day and grew worse and worse after sunset. He was surprised to find so many present. Mr. Cowell made a good chairman, but he could not draw critics to the platform in such circumstances, the general public being, of course, so slightly represented. Prior to the lecture Mr. Foote spoke for some minutes on the Leeds "blasphemy" prosecutions. The lecture itself on "The Star of Bethlehem" was very much applauded.

The present course of Queen's Hall lectures will be wound up this evening (Dec. 17), when Mr. Foote will discourse on "The Shadow of Calvary."

Mr. Cohen delivers two lectures to-day (Dec. 17) for the Liverpool Branch at the Alexandra Hall. We understand that fresh police interference has caused a discontinuance of the sale of tickets for the present; the practice itself being

perfectly legal, only the police aim at governing England "on their own" as they nearly do already in America. In the circumstances the "saints" should contribute liberally to the collections. Mr. Cohen lectures at Birkenhead on Saturday evening, in the Co-operative Hall we believe. This is a propagandist effort of the Liverpool Branch.

Determinism or Free Will is the title of a book by Mr. C. Cohen, which is issued by the Secular Society, Ltd., and will soon be published by the Walter Scott Company. The price is to be one shilling. A full advertisement will appear in next week's *Freethinker*. The volume will be on sale early in January. We strongly advise Freethinkers to purchase a copy and read it again and again. It is a very able and lucid piece of work.

"I am sorry to tell you," a North British correspondent writes, "that I had to part company with my old friend and companion the *Freethinker* for want of funds. You may think that strange, nevertheless it is true. I've been lying ill this last nine months with consumption, and no prospect of getting better. Many a happy hour I had in bed reading your paper. If I had the means I would not have let it pass me for one shilling weekly. But I must go with the times. I hope your paper will always progress." Well, well! It is a hard world for many of us, though they say God made it. We have so much sympathy with our correspondent that we have ordered the *Freethinker* to be posted to him weekly. He shall have the comfort of reading it to the last.

The shareholders in the Manchester Secular Hall Company are earnestly invited to attend the Annual Meeting to be held this afternoon (Dec. 17) at the Hall in Rusholme-road at 3 o'clock.

Resolutions passed by N. S. S. Branches against the Leeds prosecution and in favor of the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws are of very little use appearing in our columns. They would be of far greater use appearing in the local newspapers. We are glad to see the Birmingham resolution published in the local *Daily Mail*, together with a number of letters on "The Blasphemy Case," several of them from the Freethought point of view.

The Annual Tea of the Newcastle Branch will be held on Boxing Day (Dec. 26) in the Co-operative Society's Guild Room, Darn Crook. Tea begins at 5 p.m. Afterwards there will be games, music, progressive whist, etc. The Committee expects members and friends to rally round them to make the function a success. Tickets (adults 1s. 3d., children 9d. and 6d.) may be had from the Committee, or from Mr. M. J. Charter, 76 Grainger Market, Newcastle.

One of our readers engaged on board an Atlantic liner writes: "During a conversation in the smoke room a couple of voyages back a very 'Christian' person loudly condemned the *Freethinker*, saying it was 'a rag,' etc. I promptly offered him one sovereign for every paper (daily, weekly, or monthly) he could name that contained in its columns an equal amount of brains,—providing he would give me the same amount if his selection proved inferior. Of course he backed out. The paper is indeed wonderful value for the twopence. I fail to see how you can carry it on and still keep up its unique standard." The explanation is that we and our colleagues are devoted to our work. We are in love with it. And there is no passion as strong as love. It is stronger than envy, stronger even than hatred. Money alone couldn't buy what is written for this journal.

Obituary.

We deeply regret to report the death of Mr. Horace W. Parsons, of Avon House, Hampton, Evesham, which occurred rather suddenly on Saturday morning, December 9. We have lost an old friend, the N. S. S. a vice-president, and the Freethought cause an ardent and generous supporter. Mr. Parsons spent the day with us when we last lectured at Birmingham. We met him again at Queen's Hall, London, on Sunday evening, November 26. He looked tolerably well then, and the report of his death took us by surprise. Mr. Parsons was a noticeable man of exceptional mind and character, who will be missed by all who knew him. He desired that the N. S. S. President should officiate at his funeral, but this being impossible on Tuesday the function was undertaken by Mr. J. T. Lloyd. We tender our sincere sympathy to Mrs. Parsons and her son in their bereavement.—G. W. F.

Religion and Reaction in Spain.

THE advent of Canalejas to power two years ago was hailed at the time as of happy augury for liberty of thought and sound political progress in Spain. It was not long before the whilom Republican turned traitor to his early principles and became at once the lackey of the throne and the lapdog of the altar. Under his odious regime the torture of prisoners has been revived, the censure has been in regular operation for the gagging of the press, and martial law, with its excesses and turpitudes, has been put into active operation in Spain with the connivance and blessings of Mother Church.

Under pressure of this kind, a Spanish Government can obtain any political results it likes when the farce of elections has to be played. This was seen quite recently in connection with the municipal elections in Spain which took place on November 11. A reign of terror was put into vogue. In certain centres the Republican journals were confiscated and their editors subjected to vexatious prosecutions. It became an unpardonable offence to talk, during the elections, of the inquisitorial tortures at Cullera, of the apotheosis of Ferrer at Brussels, or of the overthrow of the Portuguese monarchy. In one of the villages of Catalonia, still under the thumb of the feudal regime—at Alella, where Ferrer was arrested in 1909—the magnates of the locality had the indecency to impose upon the district the candidature of one of the ignoble members of the Somaten who not only arrested the Martyr of Montjuich but maltreated him in a variety of ways, and actually refused him a drink of water during the long journey from Alella to Barcelona. The odious conduct of these petty tyrants was circumstantially related to me by Ferrer himself in a graphic letter dated October 7, 1909, written from the filthy cell in which he was thrust on his capture. I cite this case just to show how little scrupulous is the present reaction as to its choice of instruments.

All these proceedings form part of the reactionary plan of campaign conducted by Canalejas, who will be gibbeted before the eyes of posterity as the evil genius of twentieth-century Spain. For Canalejas brings character, capacity, courage, and unscrupulous ferocity into play, on behalf of principles of government he cordially hates, and in order to prop up a regime that he thoroughly despises. It is this rare combination of gifts that render him such a dangerous foe for Radicals and Freethinkers to contend with. His capture by the monarchy of Spain and its ecclesiastical parasites is worth a whole army to the cause of reaction in Spain.

Canalejas came into power on top of a wave of indignation at the assassination by Maura of the founder of the *Escuela Moderna*. High hopes instantly were entertained of Canalejas, based on his well-known democratic principles. It was hoped that the grave injustice against Ferrer and his school system would be repudiated; that the *Escuela Moderna* and its ancillary institutions would be reopened, and that the Spanish people would, at least, be free to give themselves the benefits of education like other European democracies.

For two years we had been waiting for this, and now we know what we had long suspected, viz., that the existing regime is bitterly opposed to any lifting of the pall of ignorance that weighs on the souls of the Spanish people. As a matter of fact, the closing of the secular schools is being continued in a systematic manner throughout Spain. The clerical party are really in the heyday of their triumph, not because of any revulsion of feeling in their favor on the part of the general body of the people, but by reason of the reign of terror which the bigots are able to impose upon the country under theegis of the infamous Ley de Jurisdicciones,* with the guilty complicity of Canalejas.

* As to this Law, see Wm. Archer's *Life, etc., of Ferrer*, p. 179.

On the other hand, the Spanish Government, inspired by the Vatican and egged on by the Court, have been endeavoring, for a long time past, to exasperate the Portuguese Government to some overt act that might lead to a rupture between the two countries. The nefarious idea was to bring about an invasion of the new Republic. The Spanish Government allowed the plot to be matured on Spanish territory, and men and munitions to assemble on the frontier. The Portuguese priests and the Royalist conspirators have for a long time been hanging about the frontier of the two countries, recruiting all the rascallions and ne'er-do-wells at three pesetas a day, in the hope of organising fresh filibustering expeditions, which certainly would lead to no positive results, but might cause serious annoyance to the Republican Government at Lisbon. The reactionary Canalejas lent himself to the purpose with the zeal of a convert anxious to please his new masters and further his newly professed ideas.

In addition to its duplicity in practically conspiring against the liberties of Portugal, the existing regime at Madrid, with Canalejas at its head, has committed the greatest crimes against liberty of thought and speech at home. Not content with continuing, with odious aggravations and exaggerations, the worst excesses of Maura, Canalejas has clapped quite an army of his political opponents into prison, and every day witnesses some new outrage of the Government on personal liberty, on the liberty of speech, and of the press. The whole purpose of Canalejas seems to be to gag the freedom of his country, and to goad the Radicals and Republicans into revolution. No doubt the revolution will come in due course—of that there can be no question in the mind of any man who will read the signs of the times. For the present, the Freethinkers, Radicals, and Republicans of Spain are not likely to be such fools as to rush unpreparedly into a life-or-death conflict with the existing regime. Mere heroism and a deep sense of exasperation against intolerable injustice will not alone avail to win the modern battle of liberty. Until the preparations in Spain are as well and as fully matured as they were recently in Portugal, it will be premature to strike the blow of deliverance.

In the meantime, the policy of Canalejas consists in paralysing by terrorism, persecution, and torture the arm of revolt and disaffection. This part he is the better enabled to play by means of the weapons placed in his hand by the Law of Jurisdictions.

A topical illustration of this is furnished by the action of the Government in reference to the tortures inflicted on some eighteen or more of the political prisoners in Cullera and Cueca. When these horrifying allegations were first made they were denied as a matter of course. But the same denials were issued by the Spanish Government some years ago when the abominations at Montjuich first came to light, although at the time the mutilated bodies of the maimed and tortured prisoners, who in these matters generally happen to be Freethinkers, had been seen and examined, and the revolting facts placed beyond denial. At that time Canalejas was in opposition, and his democratic principles were naturally in full fragrance. He signalled himself then by a stirring speech in denunciation of the Inquisitorial methods of Spanish government, and uttered a sentence which became world-famous and has stuck as an indelible stigma upon the constitution of the country. His famous phrase was this: "The whole of Spain is Montjuich." To-day, Canalejas is verifying that phrase by every act of his Government. Whilst the tortured prisoners at Cullera are awaiting "trial" by the military courts, two eminent publicists, the Deputy Azzati and Barral, the six prison warders who gave them facilities for the examination of the bodies of the tortured men, and a large number of journalists who in the press have cried shame on the Government for disgracing the twentieth century with these horrors, are in gaol and will shortly smart under the drastic punishments which the Ley de Jurisdic-

ciones has in store for the men of independent mind who render themselves obnoxious to the mediæval rulers of modern Spain.

The tortures of the prisoners at Cullera arose out of the disturbances last September at Valencia, when a local magistrate was killed by the rioters. The disturbances were quelled with draconian ferocity; a state of siege was declared in Valencia, and a wholesale reign of terror imposed on all the working class and progressive movements in the city. The military fiscal has demanded five sentences of capital punishment and a long string of very severe penal condemnations for other prisoners. The farce of their trial was begun on December 6, and the result—a foregone conclusion, considering the constitution of the court—viz., the conviction of twenty-two of the prisoners, show that—at any rate, for the time being—it is still possible in Spain to torture your prisoners with impunity, to terrorise the general community into sullen quietude, to choose your victims and apportion their punishments in varying degrees of severity, and to establish the closest connection of sympathy and criminality between the altar and the throne, and exhibit the constant unflinching relationship of religion and revenge.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

The Bible and the Bishop.—II.

(Concluded from p. 795.)

SPEAKING of Cain and Abel, the Bishop observes that "if" (always if) "we accept the Bible account, we must admit that Cain was very unjustly treated"; a remark that cannot be contradicted. According to the Bishop, the "difficulty" is, "Who was Cain's wife?" But this is of little importance, the real question being, did "the Lord," that is, Almighty God, speak to Cain and curse him, as he is represented to have done (Gen. iv. 9-12)? The Bishop says he did, but that, to use his own words, is a "gratuitous assumption" on his part. One thing he is certain of—that the statement in the Bible that "the Lord set a mark upon Cain" is wrong, and that the translation should have been "God appointed a sign for Cain." Hebrew is a wonderful language, and can be made to mean anything by one who has a knowledge of it; but the Bishop must be an egregious egotist if he imagine that anyone possessed of common sense would believe that his translation is better than that which, for some three hundred years, has been accepted as an English masterpiece. Further, it is a scientific fact that such persons as Adam and Eve never existed, and therefore it follows, as a matter of course, that the story respecting Cain and Abel is a fable.

Respecting the Flood, the Bishop says (p. 35) that "few believe now in a universal Flood." Why so? Because science teaches as a fact that such a horrible catastrophe never occurred. But what about the Bible statement that "the mountains were covered," and that "all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land died" (Gen. vii. 20, 22). Either it is true or false, and the Bishop says it is false. But Christ said it was true. Here are his very words:—

"And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all" (Luke xvii. 28, 29).

One thing, however, the Bishop is certain about, and that is that there was an ark, and that Noah and his family were saved in it. Here is what he says (p. 40):—

"An ounce of fact is worth pounds of theory, and it is now a well-known fact that in 1609 one Peter Jansen built a ship of the exact proportions as used by Noah, only on a smaller scale; and, although he was laughed at by the ancestors of the very people who now think they could have managed the whole business so much

better than Noah, yet when it was launched it proved to be able to bear a third more freight than other ships of the same measurement, and sailed far faster. The result was that the Dutch built many others like it, calling them Noah's Arks, and they only ceased to be used after the close of the truce in 1621, because they could not carry cannon."

Here's a pretty yarn, but is anyone acquainted with shipping foolish enough to believe it? Any outlandish-looking vessel is always dubbed a Noah's Ark. The vessel built by Jansen was not of the same shape as, or exact proportions of, the ark built by Noah, for the simple reason that nobody knows what its shape and dimensions were. Besides, Jansen did not make the entrance to his vessel by a door in the side. Dutch schuyts are cumbrous-looking vessels, with flat bottoms, so as to stand upright upon the beach, and are built for weight-carrying and not for speed. A Dutch schuyt is, and always has been, a marine tortoise; and would carry not only such cannon as were cast in the reign of James the First, but such as are now placed upon Dreadnoughts.

The Bishop says, p. 48, that "it is curious how many Old Testament difficulties are caused by the deliberate or unconscious neglect of that ordinary common sense in dealing with accounts in the Bible which we freely use in dealing with any other history." It is still more curious that the Bishop should have made such an admission. "Supposing," says he, speaking of Lot's wife, "that we were to read that someone in the high Alps was overtaken by a snowstorm, fell into a deadly stupor, and became a pillar of snow, we should not suppose that the writer was using anything but a picturesque expression to express a perfectly possible and, in fact, not even an uncommon occurrence." Well, if someone were so overtaken and "fell into a deadly stupor" he would not become a "pillar of snow," but, instead of standing up, as pillars invariably do, he would fall to the ground, and every trace of him would soon become obliterated.

The Bishop simply evades the difficulty, which is, "that two angels were sent by the Lord" to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah with "brimstone and fire from heaven"; that they did so destroy these cities and their inhabitants; and that Lot's wife, when endeavoring to escape, "looked back and became a pillar of salt" (Gen. xix. 1-26). Would not any man of common sense treat these events, so circumstantially described, as being more even than "uncommon occurrences?" Why does the Bishop evade this difficulty? Has he forgotten that Christ, speaking of these events, said, "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.....Remember Lot's wife?" (Luke xvii. 28, 29, 32).

One would have thought that the marvellous events which are narrated in Exodus would have stirred up the Bishop's intellectual faculties, but this is far from being the case. "Is Exodus true?" he asks; and he answers by saying (p. 49) that "every new discovery either of inscriptions or of Egyptian habits, or of buried cities, serves to confirm the substantial truth of the account it gives." But what these "new discoveries" are he fails to state.

"God," says he (p. 50):—

"Works miracles, but it seems to be his will to work so far as may be by natural means, and the plagues are all of them either scourges peculiar to Egypt or punishments which Egyptians would peculiarly have felt. Egyptian jugglers still catch a serpent by the head and make it stiff and motionless as if changed into a rod; still, when the Nile and the canals are full, the abounding moisture quickens myriads of frogs and toads, and when the fresh inundation reaches the mud of last year's overflow, gnats and flies innumerable burst forth from their pupæ; and locusts, borne along helplessly by the wind, are still a scourge dreaded above all others."

All this is very pretty, but in no sense is it edifying. And in what sense does it substantiate the statements as to the terrible plagues which culminated in the slaying by the Lord at midnight of a certain day "of all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from

the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, unto the first-born of the captive in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle" (Ex. xii. 29). "Oh! but it does," says the Bishop, for "we find that Menepthah, the Pharaoh of that date, did lose his eldest son during his lifetime." What of that? Even if it were so, it does not prove that his eldest son, and all the other first-born, were smitten by the Lord at one and the same moment of time.

In the opinion of the Bishop the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites, and the drowning of the Egyptian Army therein (p. 56) "is not such a very incredible story after all," for "if we believe in God at all, then surely we can believe that he can use the powers of Nature, which are his own creation, to work out a moral purpose." It is all a matter of "if we believe." Well, what man of common sense believes that "about 600,000 men on foot, besides children, and a mixed multitude, with their flocks and herds and very much cattle" (Ex. xii. 37, 38) "went through the sea on dry ground" (Ex. xiv. 22) in one night; and that in the "morning watch the Egyptians pursued and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and horsemen," and that "the Lord overthrew the Egyptians; there remained not so much as one of them"? (Ex. xiv. 23, 27, 28).

As for the talking donkey, the Bishop accounts for it by saying that "Balaam may have given a meaning to the natural sounds of the ass, just as the augurs at Rome gave a meaning to the noise of the geese on the Capitol."

Respecting "the sun standing still upon Gibeon, and thou Moon in the valley of Ajalon" (Josh. x. 12), the Bishop says that "the true explanation is that Joshua besought God that the black clouds of the storm driving up the pass from the sea ought not to be allowed to blot out the sun, and thus bring night prematurely before his victory was complete; and when the sun shone out again from the tempest, and the moon stood clear in the sky, his prayer was answered" (p. 63). But what about "the Lord casting down great stones from heaven unto Azekah, and they died; they were more which died from hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword" (Josh. x. 11). What astuteness!

These are the difficulties referred to by the Bishop, but there are many others of equal importance of which he has not taken the slightest notice. There is the story of the "falling down flat of the walls of Jericho when the people shouted with a great shout" (Josh. vi. 1-20); the story of Elijah and the widow and her son being miraculously fed, and of Elijah bringing back to life the widow's dead son (1 Kings xvii. 1-23); of Elijah calling down "the fire of the Lord," and consuming the dead bullock and all else (1 Kings xviii. 21-38); of Elijah calling down fire from heaven and killing 102 soldiers (2 Kings i. 9-12); of Elijah and Elisha smiting the waters of the river Jordan and passing through them on dry ground (2 Kings ii. 8-14); of Elisha curing Naaman of his leprosy, and causing the disease to cleave unto Gehazi (2 Kings v. 1-27); of Elisha causing iron to swim (2 Kings vi. 5-6); of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego passing through a fiery furnace unharmed (Daniel iii. 16-26); of the casting of Daniel into the den of lions, and the shutting by God of the lions' mouths (Daniel vi. 16-22); and of Jonah, who lived "in the belly of a great fish three days and three nights" (Jonah i. 15-17), an event which Christ speaks of as being literally true. Of these and other similar difficulties the Bishop makes no mention. Why?

What a fallacious little book it is, and as fallacious as it is pretentious. The Bishop is evidently in full accord with the clergyman who recently declared that he is "God's Fool." That the Bishop is but a "blind leader of the blind" is beyond all doubt, for, as logic declares—"On those mysterious points which are inscrutable to man, the learned can have no advantage over the ignorant and simple, for in utter darkness the strongest sight and the weakest are on a level."

J. W. DE CAUX.

Correspondence.

WITCHCRAFT, BROWNE, AND MARLOWE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I have not said Sir Thomas Browne led or was abreast of the best thought of his day; the position would be untenable. "Atheist" makes clear what I had assumed every reader of the *Freethinker* would know. I am at one with him that the doctor's evidence would have been wholly different if he had embraced the opinions voiced then by some bold writers, and recognised now as being the superior view. Thus he knew of Atheists and Atheism, but he remained a Christian, and wrote his best known book to remove the widely held idea that medicine and Atheism were two terms significant of the same thing. He did not prove his contention. The intuitive reasoning—if I may use a phrase apparently containing contradictory terms for want of better—of the people, had seen that medicine was an impious interference with the decrees of the Christian Deity, and, being incapable of conceiving any other and differing deity, accused the medical practice of being Atheistic. Sir Thomas Browne resented the imputation, whereas my readers and myself in this matter will agree that the common people's conclusion was right, and the doctor was wrong.

In any discussion on the affairs of this life phenomena—the subjective response to the stimulus of the absolute—must be assumed to have reality. Had Sir Thomas Browne reasoned on his knowledge of witches he may have come to the conclusion that he knew nothing; yet he may have arrived at the same conclusion had he reasoned on any subject. Hume somewhere says the only logical conclusion is scepticism; but everybody leaves this scepticism when he leaves his study. The doctor's knowledge was extremely limited. He was surrounded by opinion that explained certain phenomena by witchcraft. The law postulated and punished it. He had as much reason to diagnose it as part of the ailments as he had the natural illness. It was a matter of experience, and his experience was as full in the one case as the other. I admit he made a calamitous error. Medical men to-day can explain the aggravated symptoms. But because he made an error by following his own knowledge instead of the knowledge of our day, or the negations of his own, he does not become a hypocrite or a malignant persecutor.

That the doctor did analyse his personal evidence as to witches may be inferred from his *Common Errors*. In combating an error, if it was possible, he narrated the incident of an experiment, conducted by himself, testing the subject-matter. In some cases that was impossible. Thus he had to argue a priori in disproof of the peculiar odor of the Jews. Probably neither he nor his readers had Jews to practise on even if Jews were willing to submit to the test of smell. He could, and in all likelihood did, investigate cases of witchcraft, and came to the conclusion that they were not common errors, but demonstrated truth.

I sincerely hope no reader of the *Freethinker* will understand I stigmatise Kit Marlowe as drunken or dissolute. Christian malice has accused him as being both. The undoubted facts are he was a brilliant dramatist, whose plays held the stage up to the time of our grandfathers. He was beloved by his associates; all of whom who mention him do so eulogistically. His publisher wrote eulogising him. To escape the plague, he left London—as did nearly everybody—and was stabbed and killed in a tavern at Deptford during a brawl which centred about a prostitute.* The tavern and the prostitute are enough basis for a huge superstructure of malicious calumny which has gathered around his name. The calumny is due to his Atheism, of which there is no doubt. His plays are sufficient evidence. The petition for his prosecution is hardly evidence of anything. It accuses him of using vile language in relation to the persons and tenets of Christianity, which would be reprehended by Freethinkers as rigorously as by Christians. A foul-mouthed scoundrel, whose table-talk was made repulsive by the employment of detestable terms, as credited him by this petition, would certainly not have gained the praise and friendship of the men who testified to his personal excellence. We accept the "blasphemy" charged in the "Petition," because it is found in his plays. For the rest, we reject the document as worthless. The matter did not come to trial until after Marlowe's death, and we have neither the witnesses for the prosecution nor the defence. Marlowe was maligned because he was an Atheist, and I intervened in this discussion because I thought Sir Thomas Browne was written slightly of because he was a Christian.

* The earliest account we have was published seven years after the event, and written by a puritan.

The infinite, in relation, must appear to the finite capricious. Were the Christian Deity a reality, his acts would appear to us as impossibilities. Hence Christians, diving deep into the meaning of their faith, have said, "I believe, because it is impossible."

I have tried to say all that can usefully be said from my point of view in this matter, and, unless the Editor signifies his view as to the desirability of this discussion continuing, it will end, as far as I am concerned, here.

W. J. LIVINGSTONE-ANDERSON.

PRICE OF DAMNATION.

Judge Hiram C. Flack, of West Liberty, said the other day, speaking of the notorious disfranchised vote sellers of his native Ohio:—

"Some of these men, I understand, even claimed that they didn't know it was wrong to sell one's vote. They were worse than the voters of Cashel.

"All the voters of Cashel used to sell their votes, and a reform candidate once got the preachers of the town to preach against the sin of such scandalous conduct.

"The day after the sermons the reform candidate said to a party leader:

"Well, how will the election go?"

"It will be close and difficult and expensive, sir," was the reply.

"What do you mean?" said the candidate.

"Well," said the party leader, "the boys didn't understand that vote selling was a sin before, and they always let their votes go at \$2 apiece; but now they know eternal perdition is awaiting them, I understand that every man jack of them has put up his price to \$4."

SOMETHING JUST AS GOOD.

A well-known revivalist, whose work has been principally among the negroes of a certain section of the South, remembers one service conducted by him that was not entirely successful. He had had very poor attendance, and spent much time in questioning the negroes as to their reason for not attending. "Why were you not at our revival?" he asked one old man whom he encountered on the road. "Oh, I dunno," said the backward one. "Don't you ever pray?" demanded the preacher. The old man shook his head. "No," said he; "I carries a rabbit's foot."

OVERLOOKED HIM.

Two lawyers before a probate judge recently got into a wrangle. At last, one of the disputants, losing control over his emotions, exclaimed to his opponent:

"Sir, you are, I think, the biggest ass that I ever had the misfortune to set eyes upon."

"Order! Order!" said the judge gravely. "You seem to forget that I am in the room."

HER APPALLING DISCOVERY.

Little Doris, four years old, had to "stand in the corner" for being naughty.

After some moments of perfect silence, Doris was observed intently examining the fingers of her left hand; then tragically she exclaimed: "My God! No two alike!"

ORTHODOX.

"If St. James's Bible was good enough for St. Paul, it is good enough for me." This was the emphatic protest of a New England deacon against the reading of the Revised instead of the King James version.

BRIGHT BOY.

"Aren't you afraid you will catch cold on such a night as this, my boy?"

"No, sir. Selling papers keeps up the circulation."

REFLECTIONS OF A SAGE.

Solomon regarded his wives. "No," he remarked, "I am quite sure woman suffrage would break up the home."

Adam: "I wish we hadn't eaten that apple. Ever since then you have been complaining that you haven't a decent hat to wear."

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

QUEEN'S (MINOR HALL (Langham-place, Regent-street, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The Shadow of Calvary."

OUTDOOR.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (The Green): 7.45, E. Burke, "The Claims of Theology."

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.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRKENHEAD (Co-operative Hall, Catherine-street, Grange-road): Saturday, Dec. 16, at 8, C. Cohen, "Benefits of Unbelief."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, Class; 6.30, Max, "The Chicago Anarchists."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, J. Fraser Hewes, "Human Vivisection."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): C. Cohen, 3, "Man and his Soul"; 6.30, "What the World Pays for Religion."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, Fred Morgan, Recital from Charles Dickens' Christmas Stories ("Chimes," etc.).

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Secretary—MISS E. M. VANCE.

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

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

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

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

The Society's affairs are managed by an elected Board of Directors, consisting of not less than five and not more than twelve members, one-third of whom retire (by ballot) each year,

but are capable of re-election. An Annual General Meeting of members must be held in London, to receive the Report, elect new Directors, and transact any other business that may arise.

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