

THE Freethinker

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You may find all access to any species of philosophy, however pure, intercepted by the ignorance of divines.

—BACON.

The Coal Strike.—Some Aspects.

THE poorest and meanest of all contributions to human welfare is that of the clergy. Other men rack their brains over public policies, and when one predominates the men of God "bless it and approve it with a text." That is their share of the labor. On the same principle the heads of the Anglican and Nonconformist Churches (the Catholics seem quiet for once) ordered, or recommended, the offering up of special prayers to God to avert the impending coal strike. We believe the supplications were to have gone up to God in one great stream last Sunday; but God's reply was one of anticipation,—he let the strike begin before the praying machines got into working order for their performance.

We are writing for the moment as if the clergy were a really respectable body of men, and as if their "God" were an actual existence. On this assumption it is wonderful how very 'umble—'umbler than Uriah Heep—the clergy bear themselves at such crises. They introduce their prayers so tentatively, and they say so little when their prayers are not answered at all or answered quite contrarily, that people can hardly be angry with the poor creatures. It wouldn't do, of course, to blame "God," and "Please, sirs, it wasn't *our* fault"—they seem to say. They disarm wrath. But how? By virtually confessing themselves a lot of useless pretenders.

We hope the people of this country will note the ignominious rôle which the Christian preachers of every denomination play on these occasions. Their position is one of absolute nullity. They are worse than the learned gentlemen that Napoleon had with him in Egypt, and whom, when the fighting was imminent, he placed in the middle of his army—with the camels and the asses.

Direct messages from God have ceased. There are no more tips from heaven, as Mr. Stead once called them. No prophet steps forward with his "Thus saith the Lord,—and if he did no one would believe him. He would only be a general laughing-stock, and lucky if he were not sentenced to two or three months' imprisonment for obstruction, or inciting to a breach of the peace, or even for blasphemy,—for it must be remembered that the Peculiar People are punished for treating their sick children according to New Testament prescriptions.

All the clergy want now, all they can ask, all they can expect, is a place in the procession, a share in the chorus—what the man in the street calls "a look in." With that, and their comparatively fat salaries, they have to be content. But O what a

fall was there! What a miserable descent from the old days when the Church was as powerful as, and sometimes more powerful than, the State! All that is left of the ancient glory is the fact that the Archbishop of Canterbury still takes precedence of the Prime Minister at public functions and in public processions.

As for the "God" of the clergy, what can one say except that he is worthy of them. Thomas Carlyle complained in his old age to Mr. Froude that "God does nothing now." He might have said it fifty years earlier (or a thousand years earlier) with equal truth. A God who never *does* anything never *did* anything. That is axiomatic. There is no trace of "the finger of God" in the present business. The mine owners ignore him, the miners ignore him, Mr. Asquith ignores him, Parliament ignores him. We don't see a good word for him, or a mention of him, in the "respectable" newspapers. Even the dear *Daily News* treats him as a foreigner who has no legitimate concern with our internecine quarrels. The *Daily Mail* itself maintains the very same attitude.

Is it any wonder that Thomas Hardy writes a poem on "God's Funeral," and that the editor of the *Fortnightly Review* gives it the place of honor?

"God's Funeral." There you are. The murder is out. The death has long been known, and now for the burial.

Had the phrase come from *our* pen it would have been rank blasphemy. Coming from Thomas Hardy's pen it is another matter. He is one of the immortals already. English bigots dare not touch him any more than the Russian Government dared to touch Tolstoy.

Were this "God" aught but a creature of man's uninformed and undisciplined imagination, what opportunities he would have of striking beneficently into human affairs. All problems are more complex now than they were in Bible days. The simplicities of even the best advice in "Holy Writ" are of no use in the social and moral complexities of to-day. A revelation which is out of date is worse than useless. We want a new one. And the "God" who worked meaningless miracles, according to the Old Book, should work a few pregnant miracles now, if only to demonstrate his existence. Mr. Asquith has failed to settle the coal-trade dispute. Jesus Christ might come again and end the strike. He did nothing useful in Palestine; we are not aware of his having done anything useful since. Cannot the clergy stir him up to do something useful now? They cannot. He is only a phantom as they are only frauds. And they know it.

When the Christian superstition is cleared out of the way we shall all be guided by a new morality—a morality erected on sociology in the light of evolution. There will be no strikes or lock-outs then.

G. W. FOOTE.

Man's Desire for God.

AMONG the many phrases made to do duty in the religious world, none are harder worked than the one at the head of this article. It assumes various forms, but in substance they are identical. Sometimes it is expressed in a negative form, in the shape of a denial that any such being as an Atheist exists. Indeed, Mrs. Philip Snowden once made the remarkable declaration that in all her movements in the Labor world she had never met an Atheist. This was certainly something worth recording, as it argued a phenomenal shortsightedness on the lady's part, or a miraculous reticence on the part of others. From the pulpit it is a stock saying that the human spirit cannot rest content divorced from God, or humanity is pictured as during the whole of its history painfully groping after the true God. At missionary meetings whole races of savages—although they may have scores of gods of their own—are represented as suffering from a God-hunger that only the Christian Deity can satisfy. And the Rev. R. J. Campbell, in that philosophic way of his that serves as a cover for the voicing of shallow platitudes, once laid it down that all the actions of men—good, bad, and indifferent—were only so many attempts to realise the God within.

Facts, they say, are stubborn things, and cannot be ignored. Ultimately, this may be true; in other respects, in the sense of their commanding attention, the maxim needs serious qualification. For the statement that man desires God really has little in the shape of fact to support it, and yet the superstition flourishes. It may be tolerably easy, given fitting opportunities, to impress upon a developing mind the belief in God; but it is a common experience that the greatest watchfulness and the most strenuous exertions are required if the belief is to be maintained. Probably about 50,000 men are professionally employed to see that this particular belief does not languish. A much larger number expend their amateur energies in seconding these professional endeavors. Newspapers and publishers both live in considerable terror of public opinion—the more stupid aspect of it, that is, for no decent person ever feared the intelligent portion. Society votes adverse criticism of the belief "bad form," and the ponderous shortsightedness of judges endorses the decision. And yet, with all this care to keep the belief active, there is no complaint more common than that people need constant stimulation if they are to realise the truth that God exists, while the number that definitely profess themselves to be without either the belief or the desire steadily increases.

This is the more remarkable from the weight of teaching and tradition in favor of the God-idea. If the belief in God represented a late or ultimate stage of mental development, it might be assumed that many had not yet reached the point of believing. But the reverse of this is the case. The belief in gods is as old as human history—much older, in fact, if we only reckon history as coincident with written or sculptured records. And society, as far back as we can trace it, has been consciously arranged with full provision for the maintenance of this belief. An army of men have been specially set on one side for its cultivation and perpetuation. Those who opposed it have been ruthlessly suppressed. Its acceptance has been made the condition of social, civic, or political advancement. Literature has had its censorship in its interest. Education has been made to subserve it. There is no other belief that has received such an amount of extraneous support, and none that has shown less ability to persist in its absence. The phenomenon of rejection is thus the more remarkable and the more impressive because it has occurred in the face of every possible obstacle, legitimate and illegitimate. And unprejudiced reflection is bound to conclude that the evidential value of the tens who deliberately reject the belief in Deity is far greater than that of the thousands who still

retain it. It is a conclusion reached in the face of the dead weight of tradition, training, and social coercion. And a conclusion of this kind ought to challenge attention and command respect.

There is no reason whatever for assuming that man ever had, or has now, apart from education, any desire for God. The belief in gods begin because men assume that the facts of their experience point to their existence. They are facts to be faced, as disease and famine are facts to be faced. If the gods could be abolished, there is nothing in the psychology of the primitive mind which would lead us to assume that this would be regarded as an undesirable thing. Primitive man has his gods of health and of disease, and desires the good will of the one equally with that of the other. He desires their favor because he believes in their existence; he does not believe in their existence because of some innate desire for their being. And the work has to be done over again for each generation. The belief in God is a part of the environment equally with language; and each generation has to acquire it. What kind of a belief in God would a child in a modern environment have if it were not impressed by teachers upon its plastic intelligence? How little would be the belief in, or desire for God, is indicated by the clerical complaint that in the absence of religious instruction we should develop a nation of Atheists. Granted; but in that case what becomes of the desire for God? Is it any more than a consequence of education? Having been taught to believe in a God, that they need a God, and have a strong desire for God, the vast majority go through life expressing themselves in accordance with their instruction. The child rules the man, as the past rules the present.

A great deal is said of the pain many people feel in giving up the belief in God. Well, there are many people, the majority, perhaps, to whom the birth of a new thought is always more or less a painful process. But, apart from this, it is not the giving up the belief in God that men find so painful, so much as the sundering of social relations which it often involves. In ordinary cases, if a man changes his opinions in politics, or if he rejects the Lamarckian for the Neo-Darwinian position in biology, there is no family council held at which he is lamented as a lost soul. No one finds a change of opinion in these directions makes any serious inroad on the harmony of domestic or social circles. But in religious opinions, a drastic change of opinion, more often than not, does involve a break of this kind. A man is forced to seek a new circle of friends, often domestic friction results. His whole social career and outlook is changed. The interested and quite mythical association of character with religion comes into play, and he is treated as a less morally worthy man than he was before the change. It is all these circumstances that make the rejection of religious opinions a painful process—not because of the opinions themselves, but because of their purely incidental associations. It is not the belief he is giving up that causes pain, but the social consequences which the religious world takes care he shall not forget. Place the formation and rejection of religious opinions upon the same level as other opinions, and there is no reason for assuming that the change would be any more painful in the one direction than in the other. Religious people say it ought to be a painful process to give up one's religious beliefs, and to the best of their ability take good care that the result shall accord with their prediction.

If man really possesses a desire for God, an organic need for belief in a Deity, why all this expressed fear concerning the growth of Atheism? Why are the clergy so fearful of allowing their people ready access to Freethought or anti-Theistic literature? I never yet heard of an Atheist who tried to prevent anyone reading a sermon. Why is it necessary to teach children to repeat formulae about believing in God long before they are old enough to understand what it is they are being taught? Above all, why is

it that all over the civilised world the drift is away from the belief in Deity? Men do not need constant supervision and instruction in order to restrain a strong and "unconquerable" desire. At most, it only needs direction. But here is an assumed desire that not only needs guidance, but elaborate protection for fear it shall disappear altogether. This is a positively unique phenomenon. There may be various degrees of strength in the manifestation of a desire, but so far as it is a human quality, all men possess it. Religion is the one case, apparently, in which a human quality can be absolutely got rid of by a growing number of human beings.

The explanation, we are informed, is that we have allowed our religious natures to atrophy, or alternatively, as the lawyers say, our religious natures have not yet developed. This is quite a comforting theory to the religionist, since it makes every believer a superior person—a kind of superman in the intellectual world. The only drawback to its acceptance is that it is not true. Atheism cannot represent a case of arrested development for the simple reason that most Atheists have been where the religious man now is. The religious man's yearnings—and squirmings—after God are not strange to the Atheist. He has had them himself; and he has grown out of them, as he hopes the Godite will himself one day outgrow them. Nor is it a case of atrophy; for there is nothing to atrophy. There is no single power or quality of the mind exercised in connection with religion that is not exercised in connection with other matters. Godism does not call into existence new qualities, it merely uses—by perversion—qualities already existing. The Atheist, with no desire for God, is at least as much a man as the person who believes himself consumed by such a desire. Generally, he is more of a man; because he is expressing human qualities in a human relation. He is neither the degraded nor the undeveloped representative of a species that receives complete expression in the Godite, but the representative of a more completely self-conscious human nature. That is why all over the civilised world Atheism is growing. And its growth is an illustration of the truth that having once created the gods, no small portion of human energy is expended in achieving their destruction.

C. COHEN.

God and the Industrial Unrest.

MANY years ago Mr. W. T. Stead visited Chicago and found that it was an exceedingly wicked city. Its flaunting vices shocked his sensitive nature and drove him to the conclusion that they could be accounted for only on the assumption that Christ was absent. He immediately wrote a book, entitled *If Christ Came to Chicago?* in which he drew a lurid picture of the horrible immoralities and corruptions practised by certain sections of the population and winked at by the authorities. His contention was that the advent of Christ into the notorious city would cleanse it of all its impurities. It never occurred to him to ask why the Savior of the world had neglected such an important community, and allowed it to become a byword among the nations. The book proved a perfect godsend to the preachers everywhere. Innumerable sermons were delivered, with Stead's title adapted to different localities. The men of God suddenly realised that, though they were present, their Master, who alone could do the work, was absent. When he came everything would be speedily set right. That strange motto served the pulpit for several years, and even now one occasionally comes across it. But a new fashion is insidiously slipping in which is likely to enjoy a momentary popularity. Instead of "If Christ Came?" implying his absence, to-day's preacher employs this title, "If Christ Disappeared?" implying his presence. Formerly the pulpit said, "What an ideal city London would be if the Redeemer came to it"; but now it says, "What an

awful pandemonium there would be in London if the Savior were to leave it." Speaking at Newcastle-on-Tyne, the Rev. Stanley Parker is reported to have said that the disappearance of Christ from that town "would mean the practical destruction of justice, liberty, and philanthropy." "Blot out Christ," he cried, "and might would be right, the strong would trample on the weak, honesty and truth would be of no account in business, the Law Courts, or social relationships." According to Mr. Parker, Newcastle is a city that can boast of the presence of Jesus Christ, who is "the most influential personality" within its gates. "His influence," the report continues, "was immeasurably greater than that of British Statesmanship, teachers, speakers, and the press. If Christ disappeared the loss would be incalculable. Newcastle would lose the stimulating influence of the noblest ideal and the greatest religious teacher." In short, if Christ went, Newcastle and hell would be synonymous terms.

Such twaddle is beneath contempt, and it would be silly to take the slightest notice of it were it not for the deplorable fact that it is so frightfully common. All preachers indulge in it to a greater or lesser extent. Whether as sensationally put by Mr. Guy Thorne, Mr. Harold Begbie, and Mr. Stanley Parker, or whether as more quietly and moderately expressed by Mr. J. Morgan Gibbon and "J. B." of the *Christian World*, it is equally cant and noisy bombast, resting on nothing more substantial than professional prejudice and bigotry. Judging alone by such loud assertions as those that fell from Mr. Parker's lips, one would infer that every Christian country is the abode of justice, liberty, philanthropy, and perfect happiness. Newcastle ought to be an ideal city, since Christ's influence in it "is immeasurably greater than that of British Statesmanship, teachers, speakers, and the press combined." As a matter of fact, Christendom has very little to thank Christianity for, and its fancied pre-eminence over Heathendom is now seen to have been the dream of ignorance. What has Christ done for the portion of the world supposed to be his very own? What has God done for the world at large? They are both represented as being all-powerful as well as all-loving and all-gracious, and as cherishing as their supreme purpose the complete salvation of the entire human family; and yet in this nineteen hundred and twelfth year of the Lord Christ the world still groans and travails in pain under a crushing load of unrighted wrongs and unredressed grievances and galling oppressions. Great Britain is often proudly spoken of as the most Christian country under heaven, and in confirmation of that speech we are in the midst of a bitter and prolonged conflict between employers and employed. Had Christianity been true the conflict could never have arisen. Innumerable times has God been invoked to step in and settle it justly, to the satisfaction of all concerned. The two Anglican Archbishops have issued a special form of appeal to the Almighty, which all Church people are exhorted to present at the Throne of Grace. In this prayer there is no direct allusion to the industrial troubles; but it is beyond all doubt that if God, for the sake of his Son, will but do the things he is therein asked to do, the troubles will spontaneously cease. Dr. Armstrong Black preached in London the other Sunday, and "in his prayer referred indirectly to the coal strike, and asked that there might be better relations between masters and servants." The President and the Secretary of the Free Church Council also have requested the Lord, in a direct manner, to end the coal war. Dr. Brown's prayer was comparatively modest, and Dr. F. B. Meyer's was more modest still, if possible. Mr. Meyer's heart failed him for fear, for he doubted the Divine Being's ability to do anything in the matter. O the mockery of it all! Nothing is more firmly established than God's masterly inactivity. Those who plead with him to intervene know right well that absolutely nothing will ever come of it.

Mr. Meyer preached a sermon on the present crisis, at the very commencement of which he expressed,

not the hope that God will graciously terminate it, but "thankfulness that the best brains in the kingdom are trying to disentangle the knot." He treated the agitation as a specific stage in social evolution, as "only the sign and symptom of a much deeper movement, which means the building up of a new theory of society." He showed how feudalism succeeded slavery, and commercialism feudalism, and how commercialism, being founded upon competition, has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Then he wound up thus:—

"We are on the eve of one of the greatest revolutions of history. We are to see a reconstruction of society. We may defeat one combination after another, but the hour is near in which society must be reconstructed on a new model."

But where does God come in? Directly, nowhere; but Mr. Meyer drags him in indirectly through the Church. He takes no part in the reconstructive process himself, but is conceived as delivering this message to his Church: "This is your golden opportunity, seize it with boldness, and turn it to your own advantage." God relies on his Church, and if she fails him now, "the people will achieve its end by force, and leave the Church on the rubbish heap." Well, that is where the Church is already, and has been for some time; and Mr. Meyer knows it. Her advice is never sought on any question whatsoever. Neither party in the present strife has appealed to her for guidance. Neither the mine-owners nor the miners have suggested the appointment of so many leading divines as arbitrators. On the one hand, we have the utter silence and inactivity of God, and on the other, the colossal impotence of the Church, proving conclusively that both the faith in the former and the claims of the latter are illusory. It is doubtless true that many, perhaps the majority, of both owners and workers, are professing Christians; but they treat the problem as a purely economic one, which must be solved solely on the basis of economic justice between the two parties; and it is a fact, however regrettable, that no social progress has ever been achieved except through a painful and long-continued struggle.

The emphatic fact is that the heavens make no response to the appeals of earth, and that the earth only wastes time and breath in framing them. Even so pronounced a supernaturalist as Sir Robert Anderson is obliged to confess (*The Silence of God*, p. 5) that "in vain do we strain our ears to hear some voice from the throne of the Divine Majesty. The far-off heaven where, in perfect peace and unutterable glory, God dwells and reigns, is *silent*." The freethinking and pessimistic author of *Ecclesiastes* (iv. 1) looked life full in the face and said:—

"Then I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and behold, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter."

At the present time a great deal of praying and talking is being done in the Churches, the praying being to a god that never answers, and the talking chiefly about a god who never acts. Sometimes the Catholic Church is angrily denounced as "the Great Lying Church," and sometimes the polite description is applied to the Anglican communion, while the Nonconformist bodies are dismissed as frauds. That is how the different Churches characterise one another. There is, of course, but one true Church, and each sect claims to be that one. But we regard all Churches alike as essentially lying, in that they pretend to be what history proves they are not, and to do what history shows has never been done at all. It follows from this that all Churches alike are obstacles to human progress. There are good men and true within them; but they also furnish a sphere for the worst characters on the face of the earth. Only the other day we read of a well-known solicitor who had fled the country after swindling innocent and too-confiding clients of £25,000, who had trusted him because he was a highly-respected officer in a Christian Church. He

has been brought back under arrest, and will probably be soon a convict, as he richly deserves to be. God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost are merely objects of belief, who have never done a single thing to justify the belief. The worst of it is that faith in such wholly imaginary beings often tempts a man to play the fool. For example, a popular minister was called from an American Church to the pastorate of a London one. He made up his mind to accept; but when he intimated the fact to his old Church the members loudly protested, and offered very alluring inducements to remain. His reason for desiring a change were perfectly natural and intelligible, and when the people realised what they were, they good-naturedly acquiesced in his decision. This change in their attitude was so sudden and unexpected that he believed it was brought about by a supernatural wisdom vouchsafed to him in answer to prayer. The only rational conclusion is that belief in the supernatural is a hindrance rather than a help, and that the sooner we get rid of it the sooner will the golden age arrive.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Ferrer Decree.

THE recent Decree for the restitution of Ferrer's property is already the subject of legend and misapprehension. Some of the curious ideas afloat about its nature and purport are clearly the offspring of invention, and some are certainly based on hearsay and misunderstanding. In the latter category may be placed the statements in Mr. Archer's letter of February 20 in the *Daily News*. We may at once put aside as relatively unimportant the correction he made of the original (and erroneous) statement, based on the defective early reports, that the Decree was one made by the Supreme Civil Court. The subsequent publication of the Decree showed that the Court was the Supreme Military Tribunal, and this was rectified by Mr. Heaford's article of February 16 in the *Star*. That rectification, by assigning the Decree to its proper authorship, viz., to the very tribunal that originally tried and sentenced Ferrer, really added to the significance of the judgment, which, *pro tanto*, overrides the original direction of the military court which sentenced Ferrer to death and confiscated his property to pay the damages caused by the insurrection.

Mr. Archer's other statement, viz., that "the judgment professes to be founded on some technical point," is vitiated by the fact that Mr. Archer's view was formed in admitted ignorance of the full text of the Decree. The full statement of the grounds of the Decree contained in the *Freethinker* of February 25 entirely disposes of that statement. So far from being based "on some technicality," whatever that may mean, the judgment is based on the language of the military and penal codes, the specific sections of which are duly cited in the Decree, and is moreover drawn from the therein recorded fact that "Ferrer was not condemned in any of the judgments rendered independently of that for which he was executed."

If one integral part of Ferrer's sentence is technically inadmissible, then the full sentence becomes suspect. The sentence, in its entirety, imposed on Ferrer "as author and chief of the rebellion" (I now quote the language of the court), the punishment of death, "condemning him, moreover, to pay indemnity for all the damages and losses caused by the burnings, sackings, and deteriorations of the roads, railways, and telegraphic ways which happened during the rebellion, all the property of Ferrer Guardia to be applied towards the extinction of that civil responsibility until the amount thereof shall be declared." The "civil responsibility" of Ferrer now being declared *nil* by the Decree of December 29, 1911, and that after all the *dossiers* arising out of the numerous trials of prisoners connected with the burnings, sackings, and destructions of July, 1909,

had been reviewed by the court, the remaining portion of the sentence—that of death—stands logically, if not legally, on no reasonable basis. Its turn will come next for reversal.

Mr. Archer's letter states that the summary he has seen "leaves it wholly incomprehensible why, if Ferrer was guilty, any part of the Barcelona sentence should have been reversed." All Ferrer's friends share that feeling of astonishment, and, whilst naturally disclaiming all responsibility for placing the sentence of 1909 into harmony with the Decree of 1911, they contend that the breach now made in the original judgment logically paves the way to the ultimate legal rehabilitation *in toto* of the Martyr.

The element of legend has, of course, put in an appearance since the Decree was made. Mr. Wyndham Bewes, for instance, whose address in the Temple proclaims him to be a lawyer, in a letter to the *Daily News* declares that there is no such thing as confiscation of a convict's property in Spain—and this in spite of the fact that the Barcelona sentence actually declared Ferrer's goods confiscated towards payment of indemnity for burnings, destruction of property, and other losses! He further declares "that the order reversed was for enforcing payment of the costs of the prosecution." On this fantastic view two observations may suffice; first, that Mr. Bewes admits he has not seen the full text of the Decree, and, secondly, that if he had he would have seen that the embargo now removed was originally imposed, not in respect of "costs," but for payment of indemnity for damages caused by the events of the July, 1909, insurrection.

Senor Cristobal Litrán, who, jointly with Mr. Heaford, was appointed testamentary executor under Ferrer's will, has had to contradict similar legends which are floating through the Spanish press. As these in due course will be rehashed and served up in this country, it may be just as well to refer to some of them, here and now. Legend number one is that Ferrer's goods have been restored because originally they were "illegally confiscated." This ill accords with the doctrine of "costs." The one legend springs from the Spanish Catholics, and the second looks like an emanation from an English Catholic source. Another legend is that the restitution was made "by way of indulgence." A further legend is that the testamentary executors *solicited* the indulgence of Ferrer so far as affected the inheritance of his estate. These and further legends may be found refuted by Senor Litrán's article in *El Progreso* (Barcelona) of February 21.

It is common ground as between Mr. Archer, Mr. Bewes, and the undersigned that the recent Decree does not expressly touch the legally adjudicated question of Ferrer's guilt. But on that point it is material to emphasise the fact that the question of Ferrer's innocence was not within the purview of the court in the recent case. The only point for the court's decision was whether Ferrer's property could be applied in satisfaction of the sentence of indemnification. Its Decree that the embargo is to be removed and the property restored to the heirs reduces Ferrer's guilt as "chief of the rebellion" to virtual nullity.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

Disillusion.

ONE of the saddest and most melancholy phases of a man's life is that period when truth, with its healthy freshness, has no part in his being. Nurtured amidst surroundings which have never permitted the incursions of individualism, his youth has been one steady round of saintly repression. With a thousand taunting fingers pointing to what is religiously wicked, and with distorted ideas of what is good, the path to asceticism is the only way out of the jungle of theology. Upon this path he may remain until the end of his life. In the present day,

however, the forces playing round for scepticism are more numerous than ever they were; like lightning on a dark night they illuminate the road which will eventually lead to right knowledge. No one can look upon the janglings and the religious adjustments which are constantly taking place and class them as anything but useless efforts to patch a leaky ship. To the youth or man, disillusion may come in a hundred ways. Maybe a snatch of a Pagan poet, a new drama, which all the respectable papers flay or ignore, or an acute attack of mental nausea when the hypocrisies of religion become apparent, will cause the sudden bursting of bonds forged at his birth.

Then, and not before, he becomes a free man. Looking backward, he sees wasted years in the hopeless endeavor to harmonise life with nature through God, about whom archbishops are as ignorant as beggars. He sees the wild state of ferment caused by the imposition of artificial virtues on the one hand, and the buoyant and natural forces of nature on the other, the conflict of which lead to distraction and extreme unhappiness. At that time the shady woods of philosophy were not discernible for the trees of theology.

Over the springtime of his youth the breath of these pernicious teachings have blown like a wintry wind from the north-east. The doggerel of dogmatics have sent a withering discord between himself and the world; natural endowment for the good and service of mankind have been almost blighted by the gospel of humility and the prattlings about sin and wickedness.

It would not be a wide statement to make that this probation of misery undergone by sensitive souls gives to Freethought much of its energy.

In one who has been imposed upon by the black army the spirit of resentment burns strongly when once the scales of superstition have fallen from his eyes.

Former submission to doctrines of impossible promises now assumes the shape of active opposition.

Freedom from bewildering jargon gives his mind the necessary breadth to take in the beauties of Shakespeare, whose writings now are as applicable to human life as they were when written some centuries ago.

With the advent of mental emancipation, he can approach the God-like liberty of Shelley or appreciate the burning and exalted genius of a Swinburne.

Such fiery and ardent spirits as these scorch the robe of orthodoxy, and can never be fully understood until the Bible is treated as literature—not until, in fact, the wholesome light of truth has revealed all the wretched and dismal spots of fallacy in the organised failure called Christian ethics.

And, with faith displaced by reason, with superstition vanished, he can now lead a healthy, rational life of service and noble endeavor.

In this slight sketch, however imperfect, I have endeavored to put before the reader facts, painfully true, which are to be found in the life of many who are unable to reconcile themselves with the religious influence into which they are born.

I have not considered those who take to it as a profession, or those who play the hypocrite for financial gain; they are outside the scope of an article of this description.

What I have borne in mind is this irrefutable truth: that the more delicately tuned a mind may be, so, with more disastrous results, does this canker of religion rend and destroy. If it were possible to get a correct report of crimes committed under the influence of extreme religion, that alone would condemn it as one of the greatest obstacles in the path of progress.

The herculean spadework of Freethought is still heavy; but to those who have labored in the field the signs are distinctly encouraging.

Human nature needs repose, and a period of quiet and immunity from the distressing doctrines of saintly Dives would give it all the finer qualities which ennoble character. The heaven so beautifully

pictured would then be brought from the sky to the earth, the harmonies of celestial beings would resound in the homes, and then Christianity would be nothing but a page of Machiavellian history.

J. W. REPTON.

Acid Drops.

Why will magistrates ventilate their (often foolish) personal opinions on the bench? Mr. De Grey, at the South-Western Police Court, had a man called Leslie Boyne before him, charged with using insulting words whereby a breach of the peace might have been committed on Streatham Common. The speaker was described as an Atheist,—which Mr. Muskett apparently thought was enough to prove him guilty of anything, without further evidence. He also described himself as an Atheist; at any rate, he said his subject was Atheism. Mr. De Grey remarked, "I do not know what that means." The prisoner rejoined, "I am an Agnostic." Mr. De Grey thereupon added, "Anything atheistical is so ridiculous. When a man says he is an Agnostic I understand him." One would like the worthy magistrate, since he has gone so far, to go a little further. He might tell us *what* he understands by "Agnostic" and what he understands by "Atheist," so that we might see what difference there is between them. For our own part, we have never seen a definition of *Agnosticism* which differentiates it in any essential way from *Atheism*. As to *Atheism* being nonsensical, we beg to inform or remind Mr. De Grey that Bentham, James Mill, Shelley, Godwin, Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, and Swinburne were all Atheists; and the least of them had at least as much sense as a Stipendiary Magistrate. In any case, we fail to see that Mr. De Grey's religious views are of more importance *in court* than those of any other person who happens to be present.

Mr. Muskett, solicitor for the Treasury, who conducted the case against the "Agnostic-Atheist" on this occasion, talked like a common ruffian,—if we may trust the following report from *Reynolds'*:

"Prisoner's remarks were of a disgraceful and insulting character. The crowd became so threatening that someone suggested the duck pond, and he [Mr. Muskett] was not sure whether that would not have been the proper place for such a man. It would have taught him a lesson."

Here is a solicitor, conducting a police prosecution for inciting to a breach of the peace, deliberately inciting the Streatham Common orthodox mob to the very same offence. Mr. Muskett ought to be thoroughly ashamed of himself. But we are afraid he has extremely little of that emotion, actual or potential, left in him now, after so many years of his peculiar practice in police-courts. He is not even original in this instance. A local paper long ago suggested throwing Boulter into the pond; the cry was eagerly caught up by the Christian hooligans, and has done duty ever since.

The Salvation Army announces its annual "Self-Denial" week for March 9-16, and there will be the usual appeal to people all over the country. As is also usual, there is the customary emphasis on the poor, the homeless, the drunken, etc., calculated to give the unwary the impression that the money collected goes to relieve destitution. What the public does not know, but what ought to be known, is that by far the major part of this money has always gone to financing, not the social, but the religious part of the work. If the public knew this to be the case, the response, we imagine, would not be very large. Commissioner Higgins says that the wonder of the fund is that, with the exception of a small portion given to the local corps to cover the expenses of collection, the whole goes into the general fund. This is, we believe, quite true, and it is this that provides the occasion for misleading the public. For headquarters gives very little for the relief of destitution. The "social work" it engineers has to pay, or it is dropped. A perfectly straightforward movement would let the subscribers know with absolute frankness how much went to religious propaganda *abroad*, and how much to relieve destitution at home. But that is not the way of the Salvation Army. It prefers to float a religious propaganda, of the crudest character, upon a pretended policy of social salvation. No wonder the Salvation Army says "God bless the poor and the homeless"; they are its greatest and most profitable asset.

The Rev. C. W. Andrews says of the London Wesleyan East End Mission, "After diligent inquiry I only found the record in our Mission of one Jew converted to Christianity."

We consider the Wesleyan Mission ought to feel proud. Many cannot boast of even one. And when they get one he is apt to disappear after awhile.

A "Perplexed Priest" writes to the *Church Times* wondering whether the different forms of social activity in which Churches are engaged really does anything to check the growth of unbelief. Well, when one comes to reflect, it does seem difficult to realise in what way a whist drive can remove doubts of the Resurrection, or how a dramatic performance can prevent people doubting the divinity of Jesus. There is, in religious circles, a conviction that these things do so operate, and the readiness of young men to avail themselves of a billiard table or other adjuncts of the "Institutional Church" is cited as evidence of the weakness of Freethought. If "Perplexed Priest" has many like himself in the Church, there is some hope yet for the religious mind. It is really a great advance if clergymen can develop to the point of realising that opening a reading room does not prove the reality of miracles, and the establishment of a Boy's Brigade, will not stop people doubting the inspiration of the Bible. Only "Perplexed Priest" must go slowly. He cannot expect all parsons to be such mental dare-devils as himself.

The Institutional Church is, in fact, only one of the many, all more or less dishonorable, forms for prolonging the life of organised Christianity. A frank and open appeal to people on purely religious grounds would meet with little response. People are far more interested in the social aspect of life than they are in the religious aspect, and all preachers are aware of the fact. In spite of all that Christianity could do the social consciousness has developed, and all the Churches are busy exploiting it. In one direction they are preaching a Christian Socialism, which means the subordination of Socialism to Christian teaching. Where it is not politic to do this there is much interest shown in social questions, and we are presented with a social Christianity. Then, as young people are not attracted by Christian doctrines, they must be bribed with concerts, games, and a hundred and one other things. It is all part of the same game—the exploitation of a social consciousness that Christianity has done nothing to help, and a deal to injure.

Previous to the coal strike, numerous official prayers were offered that it might be averted. After the strike commenced, that is, on Thursday and Friday, prayers were offered that it might be brought to a speedy conclusion. One can always get an answer to prayer by going the right way to work.

There is a Protestant paper called the *Menace* published at Aurora, Missouri. The *menace* which it opposes is the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. Incidentally it has published some strong things about convents, which are no more under public inspection in America than they are in England. This has aroused the special indignation of Father Foley, of Quincy, Illinois, who has written a letter on the subject to President Taft, calling upon him to help the Catholics to stop these "most infamous and diabolical slanders of the purest and noblest women in our fair land." Which, by the way, is all nonsense, for the *Menace* does not attack *individual nuns* but the *system of nunneries*. President Taft, however, who cannot afford to affront the Catholic Church in any way whatever, has forwarded Father Foley's letter to the Postmaster-General, who can, if he pleases—without any public trial whatever—prevent the *Menace* from going through the United States mails—which is the only way in which such publications can be distributed in that country. Of course, the *Menace*, enjoying as it does a circulation of some 75,000, is up in arms against Father Foley's impudent proposal, and there promises to be a big fight. Father Foley himself edits the *Western Catholic*, but he doesn't mean to trust in fair play and free discussion. He wants his own journal to be favored by the Postmaster-General and the *Menace* virtually suppressed by that official. Things of this kind are done in the United States. The Post Office, established only to carry the mails, usurps quite another function, with the open or tacit approval of the great bulk of the citizens. It exercises a censorship over the mails. Any book or periodical can be killed by the fiat of a public official whose proper function is something entirely different. Yet the great Republic puts up with this; nay, likes it. The "bird o' freedom" holds his head down and never emits a single scream. There is no protest left in him. He is sick unto death, and sagacious people (there are a few left in America) are expecting his early funeral.

Another lady who declines to say "obey." This time a Miss Bessie Moss, a suffragist leader of Richmond, Virginia.

She was to have been married at an Episcopal church, and being very wealthy and belonging to the best set she gave instructions to the rector that the word "obey" should be omitted from the marriage service. But the man of God would not take her ladyship's orders. An appeal was then made to the Bishop, who upheld the decision of the rector, and Miss Moss had to go off and get married in a common Baptist chapel. We fear she must feel only half spliced. In any case, these little comedies tend to bring the religious marriage ceremony into discredit—which we hail with a good deal of satisfaction.

Miss Gabrielle Ray, of theatrical and picture-card fame, is one of the best advertised ladies in England. The papers gave her an extra-special advertisement in connection with her marriage—or rather her projected marriage, which was to take place at St. Edward's Catholic Church, Windsor. Everything was ready for the interesting ceremony, including the expectant bridegroom and the usual crowd of sightseers. But the bride did not put in an appearance. After everybody had been kept waiting in the dark for a couple of hours a message arrived that Miss Gabrielle was too unwell to attend. Not intentionally, of course, but as it happened, the lady got another fine advertisement, and was almost as much in evidence as the coal strike. It is to be presumed that Miss Gabrielle is a Catholic, and with Catholics marriage is a sacrament. The upshot was that she was well enough to be married on the morrow.

How much real Christianity fell below the better aspects of the old Pagan world was incidentally illustrated the other day by Sir John Macdonnell. In a course of lectures on historical jurisprudence, Sir John dealt with the trial of Servetus, and compared it with that of Socrates. Both trials, he said, involved error, "but in the trial before the Athenian tribunal were none of the elements of brutality, savagery, and personal spite conspicuous in the other. In the theocratic democracy there may have been a higher standard, but the trial speaks of a lower life." There is the case against religion in a nutshell. Society tends to become de-humanised as it becomes theocratised. Without God there is some chance of a better human feeling and human notions of justice ruling. Introduce God, and it becomes an indication of fervent religious belief to regard these as of trifling account. No wonder Bakounine said if there were a God it would be necessary to destroy him.

"Battle With Anarchists." That is how even the *Daily Chronicle* headlines a report of the robbers in a motor-car who have been causing such a sensation in France. Why the *anarchists*? What does our contemporary know of the social and political convictions of these men—or whether they have any convictions at all? It is high time that a term which might be applied to Thomas Paine, Shelley, Herbert Spencer, and (say) Prince Kropotkin should cease to be applied to every murderous thief who tries to live at the expense of his fellow-men.

Peterborough Cathedral library has been robbed for some time of valuable old books. That such thefts could go on for months and years argues a great want of proper attention on the part of the Cathedral authorities. They are now trying to discover the thieves. Of course the Lord knows who they are, but he says nothing—as usual.

Dr. Scott Lidgett believes there is urgent need for a restatement of Christian truth. He says there is now a vast accumulation of physical, historic, psychological, and sociological knowledge, and the Scriptures need interpreting, and reinterpreting in the light of current knowledge. This is, on the whole, good advice. But Freethinkers are the only ones who persistently and consistently act on it. The whole of our propaganda is nothing more than the application of current knowledge to religion, and a restatement of religion in the light of that knowledge. What Dr. Scott Lidgett says is one thing, what he means is another, and quite a different thing. What he really means is that Christians must manipulate modern knowledge and Christian beliefs so that the conflict between the two shall not be obvious. It can mean nothing else, for there is clearly little use in our first finding out what is true, and then redressing that truth in a religious guise. No one gains by that method, except the preacher. The really Christian attitude is to interpret modern life by Christian teaching. If Christian teaching has to be continually revised by current life and thought, we can very well dispense with it. This ought to be plain enough, even to a Methodist preacher.

We have received further accounts of Bishop Welldon's lecture at Manchester on Secularism. He declared, for

instance, that "the absolute assertion of knowledge that there was no God was foolish." But he did not say who makes that assertion. It is certainly not made in any official statement of Secularism that we ever saw,—and we fancy we have a better knowledge of such literature than Bishop Welldon possesses. As to Secularism being "fatal to the highest products of the human intellect," the assertion is ridiculously cheap. Bradlaugh was a bigger man every way than Bishop Welldon. But that may be called a too personal comparison. Very well, then; we will take three works mentioned by the Bishop himself—*Paradise Lost*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *In Memoriam*. The authors of those works were Christians. The one name of Shakespeare outweighs them all. We may also name Shelley, Byron, Swinburne, Meredith, and Hardy. What orthodox poets has the Bishop to set against these heresiarchs? The plain truth is that Bishop Welldon is talking nonsense.

With regard to morality, Bishop Welldon allows that individual Secularists are as good as individual Christians, but he contends that you must "judge society on a large scale." Well, if you do that, what do you find? Take the general statistics of crime. It is professed Christians that fill our prisons. The rarest of gaol-birds are Freethinkers. And a well-established fact is that ninety-five per cent. of the inmates of our prisons have been Sunday-school scholars.

A correspondent of the *Times* points out that Bishop Butler's celebrated—justly so—sermons were preached in one of the smallest churches in London. He also is of opinion that they would not fill a large church to-day. We quite endorse this opinion; but the important thing is, not that a large Christian audience could not be got to listen to such sermons, but there is no present-day preacher who could compose them. Certainly, a Church that elects a man like Winnington Ingram to the Bishopric of London could not. And the other Churches are in the same street. The level of the clergy—intellectually—has been steadily sinking since Butler's day, and it has not touched the lowest point yet.

It is amusing to watch the comedy played between the War Office and the dignitaries of both Church and Dissent with regard to "Sunday shooting." The clergy see very well that Sunday shooting is a grave danger to church attendance. The War Office, on the other hand, sees that Territorials must learn to hit something with their rifles. The War Office reply to the clergy is a tongue-in-the-cheek rigmarole. Sunday shooting shall not be encouraged,—neither can it be discouraged; but a church parade or other religious service shall be provided for the Sunday shooters—if they care to have it. Ay, there's the rub!

Mrs. Besant has been changing her attitude towards the woman suffrage movement; indeed, she seems to be throwing out hints that she wouldn't mind taking its leadership. That would be impossible, of course, if she were still an Atheist; but she has a religion now, such as it is, and this fact puts her in the running. All you want, in the general break-up of Christianity, is some religion or other; just as Sir Henry Drummond Wolf told the House of Commons once that Charles Bradlaugh had no God at all whereas they (Christians, Jews, or nondescripts) all had some God or other. We are not astonished, therefore, at the following item in Monday's *Daily News* :—

"MRS. BESANT ON 'HEROISM.'"

"Lecturing at Queen's Hall last night, Mrs. Annie Besant made reference to the militant section of the woman suffrage movement. She declared that it did not matter whether the people concerned were right or wrong, whether they succeeded or failed, whether their judgment was accurate or foolish. These things would touch the question of immediate success or failure, but they did not touch the character that was being built by the heroic sacrifice and splendid devotion which was sending gentle, refined, and cultured women to the police court and the prison."

This may be sound Theosophy, but it is a most extraordinary view of human character. It doesn't matter whether you are wise or foolish, or right or wrong; what you have to do is to build up your character; and if you destroy other people's property as a means of building it up, there is no harm done; your character—*your* character—is everything, and the end justifies the means. We doubt if Mrs. Besant will practise what she preaches this time.

Mrs. Besant's view of Woman Suffrage, even in the old days, never did her much credit. In the very early 'eighties, when Mr. Foote was writing a good deal in the *National Reformer*, one article of his was returned to him; not on account of ill-writing or lack of interest, but because it dis-

pleased Mrs. Besant. Her view of Woman Suffrage was the orthodox one, that women who paid rates and taxes should have both the municipal and the parliamentary vote,—and only those women. Mr. Foote's article incidentally chaffed that idea. He pointed out what a nice thing it was that George Eliot should vote for parliamentary candidates, as a spinster or a widow, and lose her vote directly she married Mr. Cross. This was pricking the bubble too severely. Mr. Foote believed then, as he has believed ever since, that Woman Suffrage should mean *Woman* suffrage; that if women vote at all they should vote as human beings; and that the mothers rather than the spinsters should come first (if there was any first) in the voting procession. Mrs. Besant was for giving the vote to a propertied section of women who happened to be "on their own." Now she goes to the other extreme. She teaches that if a woman feels that way she should go out and break somebody's windows—*anybody's* will do—just to build up her character. Never mind the value of the glass or who suffers the loss. The lady whose character is being built up doesn't ask for the bill of damages. "Base is the slave that pays."

The steward of the native location in Krugersdorp is doing six weeks' imprisonment. At the church service on Christmas Day a woman worshiper, owing to her state of health, was unable to stand when the rest of the congregation did, and remained seated from beginning to end. As she left the church the steward was so angry at her sedentary performance that he struck her with half a brick and then knocked her down with his fist. Being summoned before the Krugersdorp magistrate, Mr. L. Honey, he did not deny the assault, but said "it was the law of the church that everybody had to obey his orders." The magistrate held, however, that church law couldn't override the civil law, and gave this muscular Christian a lesson that he will probably never forget.

According to the *Daily Mail* (so perhaps it isn't true) an old lady of seventy-eight, Mrs. Frances Paget, of Brightwell, Farnham, Surrey, who left £2,070, was able to recite the Book of Psalms from memory. She'll have a rough time in heaven if she starts reciting them to David—as *his*.

Some distinguished Christians are capable of very silly utterances. Lord Hugh Cecil, for instance, told the recent mass meeting of Churchmen at the Albert Hall that he "would rather see another form of the Christian faith established in this country than see the principle of the national recognition of religion abandoned altogether." We wonder if he includes General-Booth-ism, Christadelphianism, Peculiar-People-ism, and Christian Science—as well as the Catholic and Nonconformist Churches. Fancy Archbishop Meyer, Bishop Bramwell Booth, Archdeacon Sylvester Horne, and Canon R. J. Campbell! Lord Halifax, at the same meeting, said that Welsh disestablishment would be such an act of spoliation that the nation should insist on the King's refusing his consent to the measure. The great and glorious British Constitution may go to the devil when lordly gentlemen find it stands in their way.

Rev. John Larking Latham, vicar of Lydden, Kent, left £11,512. There's no "blessed be ye poor" about this.

How they love one another! Rev. W. Sykes, vicar of Hillsboro', a strong anti-Ritualist, paid a visit to the Church of St. Matthew, at Sheffield—from which two wooden images were removed recently by Wyclif Preachers. Mr. Sykes was first asked to cease taking notes, and then asked to leave the church. Mrs. Sykes was subsequently invited to join her husband outside, where she was assailed by several High Church "ladies" who knocked her hat off, and obliged her to take refuge in a chemist's shop. What would be said if Freethinkers indulged in such vulgar antics?

The *Church Times* calls attention to a consequence of Church disendowment that appears to have been neglected. One of the first things to feel the crippling effects of disendowment, it says, would be the Missionary Training Colleges. What one religious paper calls, with unconscious satire, "the romance of missionary work," would be seriously curtailed. And yet we fancy the nation would survive the disaster. We should, it is true, have to hit on some other reason for exploiting helpless races, but we dare say human ingenuity would prove itself equal to the task.

Rev. R. J. Campbell has been preaching on "The Invisible God," from which it appears that he will have no more to do with the "God" that Mr. Bernard Shaw tried to impose

upon City Temple audiences, the "God" who only becomes aware of himself through man. Mr. Campbell was in better health when he more than half agreed with Mr. Shaw. Since his breakdown he has become more humble—and more in need of support and consolation. Listen to what he says:—

"To say that God does not know himself now, that, in fact, he does not exist now except as a blind unconscious force dimly awakening in man into what may some day be a self-conscious universe, is to give poor humanity a stone when it asks for bread. We want God, but this is not the kind of God we want! We want a God who knows the end from the beginning, who neither fumbles nor fails, a God who feels and cares, a God who looks out upon the world with the kind eyes of Christ, and who is able to satisfy all our cravings and fulfil all our aspirations."

A very nice God! But where is the evidence that he exists? Mr. Campbell's ideas of proof are pitifully pathetic. He "wants"—and what he wants must be. Otherwise the universe is very unkind to him. And how can anybody or anything be unkind to Mr. Campbell? And now what does Shaw think of it all? It would be pleasant to get his answer.

Mr. Campbell is as naive as a child. He says he has "hours of close personal communion, seasons of exceptional uplift and illumination," when he is "specially sure of the Master's presence." This only means, of course, that he has special hours of excitement, and that the excitement follows the line of his prepossessions. Mr. Campbell regards it as a revelation.

Dr. S. K. Hutton's *Among the Eskimos of Labrador* states that there is no serious crime in that land, and no prisons and no police; the people being kindly, courageous, and capable of any self-sacrifice for the public good. When an evil arises, nearly always through their contact with Europeans, they seem able to deal with it with promptitude and success, as the following extract from Dr. Hutton will show:—

"The Drink Evil began in 1907. Several men got drunk. The elders called a meeting of the men. 'This new habit is bad,' they said; 'it will ruin the people; let us cast it out.'

"And cast it out they did.

"'Kajusimavit,' they said, 'the mind of the People is made up—the brewing and drinking must cease.' The evil was abolished; and so by their own wish the Eskimos became what they had always been, a teetotal nation."

Just as rapidly has the "Heathen Chinese" dealt with the opium traffic. Christian England has been two or three hundred years already dealing with *her* Drink Evil, and seems likely to devote another two or three hundred years to the same task.

"Enid" of the *Referee* (Mrs. T. P. O'Connor, we believe) said in her last week's article:—

"Have you ever noticed what great importance the teachers of the Occult place upon the getting of money? First, of course, it is the getting of money for themselves."

Exactly. The whole character of the Occult species is hit off to a nicety at the end of Browning's *Sludge the Medium*.

A dangerous text for a preacher: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door."

Sir Thomas Clouston is representing Swinburne as a victim of the drink habit. Considering the age he lived to, and the work he did, there must be some mistake about this. Perhaps we can throw a little light upon it. We knew several friends of Swinburne's in the late 'seventies, and we dined *en famille* with one of them one night. When we were alone with this gentleman, in his den which served as the smoke room, we noticed that he helped himself liberally from the whisky decanter. Taking up the stiff glass of grog in a strong hand, which belonged to a robust body, he said something about "Swinburne's drinking." We smiled but said nothing. One half the whisky in that glass of grog would have turned Swinburne into a raving madman. A stimulant to his vivid nature meant an overset. To his more bovine critic it meant a gentle titillation. So much for Swinburne's drinking. Sir Thomas Clouston might leave it alone.

Rev. A. Newman Guest, vicar of Stantonbury, near Wolverton, according to a long account in the *Northampton Mercury*, is so High a Churchman that he ought to apply for admission to the Catholic Church. Already the children call him "Father." Luckily they are no authority on that point.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday, March 10, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, W. at 7.30, "Robert Blatchford and William Shakespeare."

March 17, Queen's Hall; 24, Leicester.

April 14, Glasgow; 21 and 28, Queen's Hall, London.

To Correspondents.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—March 10, Manchester; 31, Queen's Hall. April 21, West Ham.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1912.—Previously acknowledged, £93 7s. 11d. Received since:—W. Wells, 5s.; W. Bean, 10s.; G. Bowes, 1s.; G. Blyton, 1s.; J. Dunlop, £1; D. Wright, 5s.; Richard Johnson, £5; G. White, 10s.; M. Deas, 10s.

G. BLYTON writes: "My newsagent showed your paper and now sells three instead of one. I look forward to the *Freethinker* on Friday night, which I spend in reading it."

RICHARD JOHNSON, a Manchester veteran, forwarding his annual subscription to the President's Honorarium Fund, says he is sorry to see it going along so slowly, and hates to see it running through the whole year in the *Freethinker*. He hopes those who intend to subscribe will do so at once, and thus let the appeal rest during the second half of the year. Our old friend is pleased with our last week's article on Bishop Welldon and is circulating copies of it judiciously.

E. T. JARVIS (Johannesburg).—Glad to hear you have read the *Freethinker* for seven years and still look forward to it with more interest than ever. Cutting has been useful in "Acid Drops."

M. E. PEGG.—See paragraph.

W. P. BALL.—Much obliged for cuttings.

C. W. MARSHALL.—Will make use of it and return promptly.

E. B.—Directed as desired. Thanks for cuttings.

J. KING.—The English language could not be written or spoken as you suggest. Have you never heard of such a thing as pedantry? The sentence with George Eliot's name in it is perfectly correct, and the words are in the proper order for conveying the writer's meaning to the reader. You are technically right in the next two cases, but the trouble with the singular is that it must have a gender (he or she) which the plural escapes. Paragraphs have sometimes to be written in a hurry, which prevents classical composition and leaves no time for revision. We may add that your correction of the sentence from George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* seems to us hypercritical. Something may be understood in such cases. If the lady had sold herself to her husband, it follows that he paid her, and the repetition, merely for the sake of explicit correctitude, is lumbering and unnecessary.

J. DUNLOP.—Thanks for wishing us "health and happiness"—and helping us to secure them.

G. WHITE.—We note your wish for "a generous response" to the appeal for the President's Fund.

MEMO.—You say we were "always blind." Why waste your time then in trying to enlighten us?

T. M. MOSLEY.—David Hume's place as a thinker is perfectly assured. Huxley called him the greatest thinker of the eighteenth century, even though it produced Kant. What the Rev. Mr. Ballard says either about Hume or Huxley is not worth attention. Thanks for good wishes.

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 Shop 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's two lectures at the Queen's (Minor) Hall on Shakespeare should prove attractive. The first of these lectures, to be delivered this evening (March 10) will deal with Mr. Robert Blatchford's recent articles in the *Clarion*, mainly in relation to Shakespeare, but partly in relation to Shelley and other modern English poets. The second lecture will deal with the difference between Shakespeare's teachings and those of Jesus as reported—or alleged to be

reported—in the New Testament, and show that the greatest of all poets was as far as possible from being a Christian. Mr. Foote will, as usual in his Shakespeare lectures, read many illustrative passages.

Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner follows Mr. Foote at the Queen's Hall with a lecture on the romantic falsehoods that still remain in circulation about her father—the great Charles Bradlaugh.

South Lancashire Freethinkers are reminded that Mr. J. T. Lloyd lectures twice—afternoon and evening—to-day (March 10) at the Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, Manchester. We trust they will do their best to secure him the large meetings he ought to have in such a centre of population, not only by attending the lectures themselves, but also by trying to induce some of their friends and acquaintances to attend. It is too expensive to advertise widely in the Manchester district. What the Branch can afford may be effectively supplemented by the "saints" acting on the advice we have just given them.

The South Shields Branch begins to-day (March 10) a series of Sunday meetings at the Victoria Hall Buildings, the lecturer being Mr. Elijah Copeland, who will deal with Dickens' characters. The following Sunday the subject of Buddhist Influence and Ethics will be dealt with by Mr. Joseph Bryce. The proceedings open with musical selections. Tyneside Freethinkers are earnestly invited to attend—with as many of their friends as possible.

"The *Freethinker*, edited by Mr. G. W. Foote, President of the National Secular Society, is reproducing from the *Examiner* our lecture on 'The Spirit of Revenge in the Bible.' We gladly acknowledge the graceful compliment Mr. Foote pays us. Always at the forefront in its enunciation of Freethought principles, the *Freethinker* was never a greater force than it is at the present time. The trenchant writing of the Editor, and the forceful, clear, and up-to-date criticisms of Messrs. Cohen and Lloyd, form a stream calculated to disintegrate the hardest theological rock."—*Examiner*, (edited by W. W. Collins), Christchurch, New Zealand.

A Canadian subscriber, in renewing, says:—

"My wife and I spend some happy hours over the *Freethinker*, and we are very grateful to her father who first brought it to our notice and also made us a present of a year's subscription. I would like to write to the editor later on, if he has time to look at such things."

We are always pleased to hear from our readers, especially in distant parts where it often means so much to them.

There is nothing to mourn in the death of our old friend and veteran Freethinker, Mr. John Helm, of Port Hope, Ontario. He was nearly a hundred years old. Death at that age is no cause for tears. We may now say that it was Mr. John Helm who sent the £50 anonymously last year to the President's Honorarium Fund. The Port Hope *Guide* says of the deceased: "His lifelong philanthropy won universal respect, and few men leave behind them such genuine regret. His loss to the community will be irreplaceable."

Personal.

WHEN the coal strike began I saw the possibility of my being held up at Liverpool on the Monday; and if I had been held up there I might have been held up for weeks. I decided, therefore, not to lecture at Liverpool on Sunday, but to stand by my paper, which always has the first claim upon me. This decision I conveyed as early as possible to the President and the Secretary of the Liverpool N. S. S. Branch. It cost me a good day's earnings, for the President (Mr. Hammond) telegraphed me on Monday morning: "Should have had overflowing meetings. Crowds turned up. Much regret expressed. Held meeting evening and explained. Am writing." (The letter has not arrived yet.)

I made a mistake as it happened, but anybody can be wise after the event. I gave the strike leaders more credit for brains (and something else) than I give them credit for now. I made sure the coal strike would develop in more than one direction on Monday morning.

The trouble such as it might have been would have been serious; the trouble such as it is may easily be remedied. I can visit Liverpool when the strike is over. Meanwhile the "saints" there will know I acted for the best.

G. W. FOOTE.

Jesus Christ, a Historical Person.

I HAVE been reading a pamphlet with the above heading. It has been written by Mr. A. H. Tabrum, a member of the Hampstead Evidence League, and is intended to refute an assertion by Mr. A. Hyatt that "no such person as Jesus Christ ever lived." I purpose now to criticise it. And, in doing so, I shall bear in mind the dictum of the Bishop of London that "an ounce of fact is worth pounds of theory" (see the Bishop's *Old Testament Difficulties*, p. 40).

Now, let it not be forgotten that the Jesus Christ here spoken of is the Jesus Christ of the four Gospels—that is, that he was a *being that had no earthly father, that he turned water into wine, walked on water, drove devils out of various persons, raised the dead, and, finally, after having been crucified and buried, that he rose from the grave, ascended into the air, and disappeared behind a cloud.*

All this is what has to be proved by those who assert it to be true. But Mr. Tabrum does not even attempt to do so. He assumes that the life-story of Jesus Christ as told in the four Gospels is true, and simply quotes passages from the works of various modern authors which, he thinks, corroborate his view. But even when they seem to do so they are valueless, for they are mere *opinions, as his own are—this, and nothing more.* The writers whom he quotes could not possibly know anything of Jesus Christ beyond what they had read of him; anything, therefore, that they may have expressed regarding him can in no sense be taken as evidence that the Jesus Christ of the Gospels had *ever lived.* The question which Mr. Tabrum keeps repeating is wide of the mark. Instead of asking "If Christ had no real existence will Mr. Hyatt account for such a passage in such a famous essay?" his question should have been "On what indisputable fact have these writers formed the opinions they have expressed?"

As for the ancient historians whom he quotes, they also in nowise recognise the person of whom they speak as being the Jesus Christ of the Gospels. One example will suffice. Tacitus, the Roman historian, who lived during the latter part of the first and the early part of the second centuries, tells us that one "Christus, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal by the Procurator Pontius Pilate"—this, and nothing more. Where is the proof that Tacitus, when he spoke of "Christus," meant the Jesus Christ of the Gospels? And even if that were the case, his evidence would be worthless, because he could only have spoken from hearsay, he not having been born until long after the date at which the Christ of the Gospels is represented to have been crucified.

Next, as to the Gospels themselves. Where is the "ounce of fact" that the statements therein regarding Jesus Christ are true records of actual facts? For, as a matter of fact, the Gospels are to be read *not spiritually but literally*—as plain statements of *sober facts, and not as legendary fictions.* Is it not so? Let us consider the point.

It is beyond dispute that the *writers are unknown.* Indeed, the Gospels are introduced by the words "according to," which prove that they are merely copies made by nobody knows who of statements that are supposed to have been uttered at some time or other by the Evangelists in question.

As to the period when the Gospels were written there is a remarkable statement by the writer of Matthew. He concludes his statement respecting the "bribing of the watch" with the following words: "So they took the money, and did as they were taught; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day" (Matt. xxviii. 15). "Until this day!" What does that mean? "This day" means, of course, the date at which the Gospel was written; and "until this day" must mean that, at that date, a great length of time had elapsed since the events narrated had occurred.

Bishop Faustus, a celebrated Christian of the fourth century, frankly declared—and challenged Augustine himself to answer his statement—that "it is certain that the New Testament was not written by Christ himself, nor by his apostles, but a long while after them, by some unknown persons, who, lest they should not be credited when they wrote of affairs they were lightly acquainted with, affixed to their works the names of apostles, or of such as were supposed to have been their companions, and then stated they were written "according to them" (Lardner's *Credibility*, vol. ii., p. 221). Until the year 325 these Gospels were not specially recognised by the early Fathers as being superior to a mass of other writings on the same subject. In that year they were admitted into the canon at a Council of bishops held at Nicea, and presided over by the Emperor Constantine. The admission was by vote—by the voting of men, all of whom were grossly superstitious, while many were utterly illiterate. Fancy the *divine origin* of a writing being determined in such a manner!

Pappus, however, in his *Synodicon*, tells us that the canon was fixed in quite a different manner. He says that the manuscripts (books, as we understand them, were not in existence in those days) were placed *under a table*, and that prayers were then offered up asking that those that were of divine origin should separate themselves from the rest—the result being that those which purported to have been written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John jumped upon the table, whilst the rest remained beneath it.

This statement is not so absurd as it appears to be; for it shows that the author was possessed of sufficient common sense to know that supernatural occurrences can only be proved by supernatural evidence—that is, by evidence of precisely the same nature as the occurrences themselves. These tales teach us that in those days superstition of the grossest description prevailed, and that not the slightest value can be attached to the opinions of men who so acted. Whether, therefore, the Gospels be fact or fiction can only be determined by reference to their contents.

What are these contents? Are they not stories of supernatural events—of events that are repugnant to reason and common sense because they are subversive of the forces, miscalled laws, of Nature? How should these stories be treated? Let me illustrate the point.

We read in Roman history that, on a certain occasion, there suddenly opened in the Forum a "gulf which the augurs affirmed would never close up until the most precious things in Rome were thrown into it"; that thereupon a heroic man named Curtius "leaped with his horse and armor boldly into the midst, saying that nothing was more truly valuable than patriotism and military virtue"; and that "the gulf immediately closed and Curtius was never seen after." With whom does the *onus probandi*—that is, the task of proving this story to be true—rest? With the historian who wrote it, or the student who reads it? With the historian, of course. Let us dissect the story, and use experience and common sense in arriving at a conclusion.

That a "gulf suddenly opened in the Forum" we may readily believe, for we know that such gulfs have been on various occasions caused by earthquakes. We can also readily believe that a man named Curtius did leap therein, for we know that fanatics have often courted what they believed to be a glorious death. But what sane man believes the concluding part of the story—that the gulf closed up at the disappearance of Curtius, and did so because of his so-called heroic act? Not one! Why? Because experience tells us that such an event never occurred, and common sense teaches that it is altogether incredible.

Apply this reasoning to the Gospel legends. That, according to Tacitus, a man named "Christus, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal by the procurator, Pontius Pilate," and that he was

buried in a tomb in a garden we may well believe, because such an event is not a very rare occurrence even in these days; but that this "criminal," after having been buried for three days, came to life again and rose from the dead, requires proof of the most unexceptionable character, because experience teaches us that it is altogether incredible. Is the necessary evidence forthcoming? It is for those who believe such statements to prove their truthfulness.

It is said "that there are valid reasons for the conclusion that the four Gospels are not pseudonymous, but the genuine productions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John." Even if it were so, it would only prove that the statements were the productions of the four Evangelists, and *not that the statements were true*. But what are the "valid reasons"? Let us see.

It is said that the earliest of the Gospels was written sixty-four years after the birth of Christ, and the other Gospels not long after; but there is no evidence for this statement. The Apostolic Fathers—Barnabas, about 71; Clemens Romanus, about 96; Hermas, about 100; Saint Barnabas, about 107; Polycarp, about 108; and Papias, about 116—knew nothing of them, for they never referred to them. Nor were they referred to, even incidentally, by Justyn Martyr, about 140; Tatian, about 172; or Hegesippus, about 173. Iræneus, at the close of the second century, was the first who mentions the names of the Evangelists; whilst Origen, who died in 252, was the first to catalogue the manuscripts of the New Testament. This collection was adopted by the ruling party in the Church at the Council of Laodicea in 363; and this, says Paley, "was the first known authoritative declaration" on the subject. Be it observed that this "authoritative declaration" as to the *documents* in nowise proves that the statements in them were true. But where is this famous "collection"? It is not in existence—it disappeared hundreds of years ago, if ever it were in existence. Ordinary Christians are under the impression that the originals of the New Testament are extant; but they are not, nor even first copies of them. As a matter of fact, the so-called "copies" from which our translations are derived were made hundreds of years after the Council of Laodicea. During the Dark Ages every copy filtered through the fingers of the monks, whose sole object was the enhancement of the Church. And monkish forgery was so general and inveterate that Jean Hardouin, a learned French Jesuit, who died in 1729, aged 88, contended that the *whole of the writings* ascribed to the Christian Fathers were *monkish forgeries*.

These writings, whether forgeries or not, crystallised round the "Christus" of Tacitus, and around him in all probability the fables of the New Testament were gathered; much in the same way as the solitary existence of Alexander Selkirk upon the island of Juan Fernandez inspired Defoe to write his world-famous *Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*.

That such a being as the Jesus Christ of the Gospels never lived is beyond all doubt, for such a being could never have told an untruth. Here is the proof:—

The writer of the "Gospel according to St. Matthew" tells us that Christ said to his disciples:—

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory..... Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled" (Matt. xxiv. 29, 30, 34).

Since that prophecy was uttered 1882 years have passed away, and not one generation, but scores of generations, have lived and died—and yet it has not been fulfilled, and now can never be.

With the Jews, therefore, I say "Christ is not risen"; and, for the self-same reason, when I worship I go—

"Not to those domes where mouldering arch and column
Attest the feebleness of mortal hand,
But to that fane, most catholic and solemn,
That Nature planned.
To that cathedral—boundless as our wonder—
Whose quenchless lamps the sun and moon supply;
Its choir—the winds and waves; its organ—thunder;
Its dome—the sky!"

J. W. DE CAUX.

The Inquisition.—III.

(Continued from p. 140.)

TORTURE was a regular part of the trials of the Holy Office. Its technical name was *the Question*, and its object was to wring from prisoners who were suspected of heresy, but refused to acknowledge their guilt, a confession of their own crime and a revelation of their accomplices. Without any chronological order, we shall give an account of these tortures, as we have been able to collect them.

According to Gonsalvius, the Spanish historian—

"The place of torture in the Spanish Inquisition is generally an underground and very dark room, to which one enters through several doors. There is a tribunal erected in it, in which the Inquisitor, Inspector, and Secretary sit. When the candles are lighted, and the person to be tortured brought in, the executioner, who was waiting for him, makes a very astonishing and dreadful appearance. He is covered all over with a black linen garment down to his feet, and tied close to his body. His head and face are all hid with a long black cowl, only two little holes being left in it for him to see through. All this is intended to strike the miserable wretch with greater terror in mind and body, when he sees himself going to be tortured by the hands of one who thus looks like the very devil" (Chandler, p. 241).

Prisoners were stripped stark naked for the torture, and then clothed in a pair of linen drawers. Female modesty enjoyed no privilege in this respect (*Authentic Memoirs Concerning the Portuguese Inquisition*, London, 1761, p. 62; Chandler, p. 242). Davie says that "where females were brought before the Inquisition (and they were by no means unfrequently so), they were treated in a most immodest and brutal manner, and were subjected by the functionaries of the Holy Office to insults and injuries of the most revolting character" (p. 85). Lachatre even alleges that "for women were reserved particular tortures with refinements of lubricity. Nature was outraged in every form" (p. 13). From the hints conveyed by many historians we infer that females were systematically ravished in the torture-chambers of the Inquisition, their very modesty being made an agency of excruciation.

The first general torture was that of the pulley. The prisoner's hands were fastened behind him, a rope was attached to them, and a heavy iron weight to his feet. At a given signal, the executioners suddenly hoisted him up to the ceiling, by means of the rope which ran through a pulley. His arms were painfully wrenched back, and the combined weight of the iron and his body was usually sufficient to tear them from their sockets. While thus suspended, he was sometimes whipped, or a red-hot iron was thrust into various parts of his body. If he still refused to confess, and his arms were not already dislocated, the rope was suddenly loosened, and he fell within a few inches of the ground, his whole frame being stretched and disjointed by the terrible jerk (Davie, p. 80; Chandler, p. 242).

The torture by fire was inflicted in several ways. One was as follows. The prisoner's feet were bared, and he was placed in the stocks. A chafing dish full of burning charcoal was then applied to the soles of his feet. To render the pain keener, the feet were frequently greased, so that if the question was continued long they were literally *fried* (Davie, p. 81). Another form was this. The victim's feet were

enclosed in a parchment case, full of grease and tar, which gradually boiled with the heat, until the flesh was cooked to the bone (Lachatre, p. 11).

Mr. R. C. Christie, in his monumental *Life of Dolet (Etienne Dolet, the Martyr of the Renaissance: a Biography, by R. C. Christie)*, gives a few more delicacies from the hellish *menu* of the Inquisition. According to its official code, the fifth edition of which appeared in 1730, it was for the spiritual health of the prisoner that his feet should not only be burnt, but first well steeped in lard. Another volume by the Inquisitor at Pavia and Piacenza, published in Venice in 1588, adds a new torture to the old tickling of the heretic's feet, which drove him nearly mad. Salt is to be first rubbed in, and then the feet are to be *licked by a goat*, to render the torment more exquisite!

While these inhuman tortures were being inflicted, the inquisitors, who were hardened by familiarity with pain, turned a deaf ear to the groans and entreaties of the victims, and diverted themselves with the talk of the town (*Memoirs of the Inquisition*, p. 45; Davie, p. 82).

The torture of water was exceedingly ingenious. The prisoner was laid in the *chevalet*, a kind of torture-trough, which is thus described by Llorente:—

"It is formed like a groove, large enough to hold the body of a man, without a bottom, but a stick crosses it, over which the body falls in such a position that the feet are much higher than the head; consequently, a violent and painful respiration ensues, with intolerable pains in the sides, the arms, and legs, where the pressure of the cords is so great, even before the *garot* has been used, that they penetrate to the bone. If we observe the manner in which the people who carry merchandise on mules or in carts tighten the cords by means of sticks, we can easily imagine the torments" (p. 122).

While the prisoner lay in this torture-trough, with the cords cutting through the flesh, and blood oozing under them, his nose was stopped so that he could not breathe through it, and a piece of fine wet linen was introduced into the throat, on which water was poured so slowly that it required an hour to consume a pint. The victim found it almost impossible to breathe, and often ruptured a blood-vessel in the lungs (Llorente, p. 123). "As much as seven English pints of water," says Davie, "have sometimes been poured down the throat in this manner" (p. 88). Llorente prints the verbal process of the torture of Juan de Salas, at Valladolid, on June 21, 1527, signed by Henry Paz, the notary; and as it is an official document, some passages of it are worth quoting. Salas was accused of having said that some of the evangelists had lied. He denied the charge, but the inquisitors resolved to make him confess, and ordered him to be tortured; adding, that "in case of injury, death, or fractured limbs, the fault can only be imputed to the said licentiate Salas." Accordingly, runs the process,

"Being stripped to his shirt, Salas was put up by the shoulders into the *chevalet*, where the executioner, Pedro Porras, fastened him by the arms and legs with cords of hemp, of which he made *eleven turns* round each limb; Salas, during the time that the said Pedro was tying him thus, was warned to speak the truth several times, to which he always replied, that he had never said what he was accused of..... A fine, wet cloth was put over his face, and about a pint of water was poured into his mouth and nostrils, from an earthen vessel with a hole in the bottom, and containing about two quarts; nevertheless, Salas still persisted in denying the accusation. Then Pedro Porras *tightened the cords* on the right leg, and poured a second measure of water on the face; the cords *were tightened a second time* on the same leg, but Juan de Salas still persisted in denying that he had ever said anything of the kind" (Llorente, pp. 121, 122).

The charge against this unfortunate man could not be established, yet, "on account of the suspicion arising from the trial," he was sentenced to pay a fine and undergo an ignominious penance.

Another water-torture was *La Pendola*. The prisoner was placed in a chair embedded in the earth, and water was allowed to fall in single drops

on the crown of his head. Although apparently a mild torture, it is said to have been "the most painful operation practised by the defenders of the faith" (Davie, p. 393).

The cord, water, and fire, were the three principal tortures. Among the minor tortures there were some that displayed a devilish ingenuity. Several machines bore the name of *the rack*. The one chiefly in use is described by Davie. It was

"A simple partition, with a windlass behind it, from the barrel of which two ropes passed through two pulleys to the front of the partition. The prisoner was partially stripped, and, having a sort of handcuff placed on each wrist, he was placed with his back to the partition. The two ropes, one on each side, being fastened to the cuffs on the wrists, were drawn tight, and the prisoner's arms were thus extended on each side of him, and the pressure was increased till his arms were dragged from their sockets" (Davie, p. 82).

The *wheel* was a simple piece of machinery. Nearly naked, and sometimes entirely so, the prisoner was bent backwards on the rim and whirled round; the cords with which he was fastened being tightened at each pause till they cut into the flesh.

Iron *dice* were fastened by a machine to the heel of the feet, and by means of screws they were forced through the flesh till they reached the bone. *Canes* were placed crosswise between the fingers, and by pressure a most intolerable pain was produced. Small cords were tied round the thumb, and tightened till the blood squirted, while the thumb-screw crushed the very bone. Red-hot irons were applied to the breasts and side, and held there while the seething flesh gradually disappeared, until the bone was bare. Hot needles were run up under the nails; and a red-hot slipper was placed on the foot of one woman till the flesh was all consumed (Davie, p. 85).

Jews sometimes had one hand nailed to a wooden cross, while the sentence of perpetual imprisonment was passed on them for insulting Jesus. Sharp ladders were struck against the shins. An anvil was fixed in the floor with a projecting spike on which prisoners were impaled (Davie, p. 318). Tow and pitch were wrapped round the hands and set on fire. According to Davie, who relies on the authority of Bower, this punishment was reserved for women (p. 318).

Besides the public executions at *autos-da-fé*, there seem to have been many private executions in prison. The Inquisition at Rome was reported to be less sanguinary than other tribunals, but it was noticed that more prisoners entered its doors than ever came out again. When the Lisbon Inquisition was thrown open in 1821,—

"The doors of certain dungeons, which had not been used for some years, still remained shut, but the people forced them open. In nearly all of them human bones were found; and among these melancholy remains were, in one dungeon, fragments of the garments of a monk, and his girdle. In some of these dungeons the chimney-shaped airhole was walled up, which is a certain sign of the murder of the prisoner. In such cases the unfortunate victim was compelled to go into the air hole, the lower extremity of which was immediately closed by masonry.* Quick-lime was afterwards thrown on him, which extinguished life and destroyed the body" (*The Courier Francais*, October 9, 1821. Cited by Davie, p. 383).

As the palace of the Lisbon Inquisition was only built in 1775, before which time the site was covered with private houses, those victims must have all been sacrificed during sixty years.

According to the English translator of Llorente, when the Inquisition of Madrid was thrown open by the Cortes in 1820, twenty-one prisoners were found in it, not one of whom knew the name of the city he

* This terrible doom was not uncommon under the *ancien régime*—the good old times, as fools call them. Many a monk and nun was condemned to the *in pace*, from which Rabelais himself narrowly escaped; and the grim Bastille furnished many a victim of kings and priests with a stone coffin. Carlyle tells us how the Paris crowd, after the famous fourteenth of July, roamed through its caverns, and gazed "on the skeletons found walled-up."

was in. Some had been confined three years, some a longer period, and not one knew the nature of the crime of which he was accused. One of the prisoners was condemned to suffer death by the *pendulum* on the following day.

"The method of thus destroying the victim is as follows. The condemned is fastened in a groove upon a table on his back. Suspended above him is a pendulum, the edge of which is sharp, and it is so constructed as to become longer with every movement. The wretch sees this implement of destruction swinging to and from above him, and every moment the keen edge approaching nearer and nearer. At length it cuts the skin of his nose, and gradually cuts on, until life is extinct" (Llorente. Translator's note to the author's preface, p. 20).

Such were the tender mercies of the Holy Tribunal in 1820! It was this *pendulum* that furnished Poe with the theme of one of his thrilling stories.

Beneath the town hall of Nuremburg, in Bavaria, in a vaulted chamber dug out of the solid rock, stands an image of the Virgin Mary. When a spring is touched it flings open its arms, which resemble the doors of a cupboard, the insides being planted with poniards about a foot long. Into this horrid machine an obstinate heretic was sometimes thrust, and the Virgin closed upon her victim, the poniards goring him through the head and breast. The murder being completed, the floor of the image slid aside, and the mangled corpse dropped through a perpendicular shaft into a canal that communicated with the Pegnitz.

(To be concluded.)

James Thomson.

A CAREFUL perusal of a late issue of the *Review of Reviews* must give any logical, fair-minded reader a firm impression that the cult called Christianity is pretty well played out. The *Review* simply bristles with references to religion, missionary effort, and evangelism of all sorts; and yet, all the time, it seems sickled over with a grim, grey thought of a rapidly approaching wash-out.

As if to make confusion doubly sure, there is in the notice of the Dutch Reviews a note which will certainly rejoice all Freethinkers:—

"*De Gids* contains no fewer than three contributions on literary subjects.....the second is a sketch of the life and appreciation of the poems of James Thomson, not the author of 'The Seasons' [as the writer immediately reminds us] but the author of 'The City of Dreadful Night.'"

Several editions of the works of the better known James Thomson are to be found in the Dutch institutions, but one looks in vain for any trace of the second. Yet the writer of the article thinks that he is one of the really interesting poets of his time. "There is a sweet sadness about the lines written by this man which will attract attention to a greater extent as time goes on."

All which is grateful to hear, and is one more proof of the constantly diminishing value of the dot on the Deists' *i**; for if there is one thing certain in literature, it is that "B. V." will stand for all time as one of the great poets of Atheism—Atheism admitted and declared.

T. SHORE.

A FIGHTING CHANCE.

"So you think the author of this play will live, do you?" remarked the tourist.

"Yes," replied the manager of the Frozen Dog Opera House. "He's got a five-mile start and I don't think the boys kin ketch him."

* By the way, touching that "I" in issue January 14, will any kind reader that loves me and files his *Freethinker*—the others, well they're hopeless—take his pen and absolutely score out the "ital" in the third line of the verse. The compositor who left it in in spite of a trobly marked correction has already been executed and his skin salted.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON FEB. 29.

The President, Mr. G. W. Foote, occupied the chair. There were also present: Messrs. Baker, Barry, Cohen, Cowell, Davies, Heaford, Lloyd, Dr. Nichols, Quinton, Roger, Samuels, Silverstein, Thurlow, Wood, Lazarnick, Rosetti, Schindel, Bradford, and Miss Kough.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed. The monthly cash statement was presented and adopted.

New members were received from the Liverpool Branch and Parent Society.

A letter was read from the Secretary of the South Place Institute inviting the National Secular Society to send two delegates to take part in a Conference convened to consider the best means of securing the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. The President and Mr. J. T. Lloyd were elected to represent the Society.

The release of Mr. J. W. Gott from prison under the sad circumstances of his wife's death was formally reported, and the following resolution was carried unanimously:—

"That this Executive learns with the deepest regret of the death of Mrs. J. W. Gott during her husband's imprisonment for Blasphemy, and desires to express its sincere sympathy with him in his great bereavement."

The attention of the Executive was called to the recent prosecution of a Mr. Boyd, a free-lance speaker on Streatham Common, who, according to Mr. Muskett, the prosecuting solicitor, was charged with uttering remarks of a "disgraceful and insulting character." A long discussion arose as to whether a solicitor should be employed to watch the case, or a shorthand report should be taken for future use in the Society's crusade against the Blasphemy Laws. A resolution for the employment of a solicitor, and an amendment in favor of a shorthand report, were both submitted to the meeting and both lost.

The Secretary was instructed to send out the usual circular to Branches *re* the Annual Conference on Whit-Sunday, and to arrange for another Social evening before the close of the winter season.

The Sub-Committee appointed to deal with the resolution of the Birmingham Branch on Courses of Study in Free-thought presented a list of books, which was left in the hands of the President to deal with.

The meeting then adjourned. E. M. VANCE, Secretary.

Correspondence.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The correspondence in your issue for 3rd inst., headed "Cornering a Preacher" is interesting; but I think Mr. North's conclusion that such correspondence is useful is erroneous. What good can it do? The authors of these loose statements invariably know them to be such, so that it is useless pointing it out to them. Unless it can be pointed out to the people to whom they are addressed, it is only a waste of time. Quite lately I carried on a correspondence with a parson on the subject of foreign missions. He dealt with my letter in church, and gave answers that were no answers. Amongst other things, he told his congregation that Agnostic (as he called them) critics seldom read the Bible or knew anything about it, and that he knew "many Agnostic critics who did not even possess a Bible." In my next letter I contradicted the first statement, and expressed doubt as to the truth of the second, asking for the names of these Agnostic critics. Of course, I got no answer; but his congregation were sure to believe him. No doubt these Agnostic critics are identical with last week's *Daily Mirror's* Atheist, and like a lot more Christian Mrs. Harris'. They do not exist in the flesh, but are pure "spirit"—which, being interpreted, meaneth (in this case) "invention."

R. D. MORRIS.

KEPT ONE, ANYHOW.

The man who sometimes spoke his thoughts aloud had been more concerned with the things of the world than with things spiritual. One day by chance his hand fell upon a book containing the catechism of a certain Protestant Church, and he was soon earnestly engaged in reading the Ten Commandments. For some time he pondered over the "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt nots," which had been forgotten almost since childhood. Then, laying down the book with a sigh, he muttered, "Well, I've never killed anybody, anyway."

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON

INDOOR.

QUEEN'S (MINOR) HALL (Langham-place, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Robert Blatchford and William Shakespeare."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford, E.): 7.30, A. Hyatt, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ are all made alive."

OUTDOOR.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (The Green): 7.45, E. Boyce, "The Collapse of Christianity."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, Class; 6.30, Zosimus, "The Bicentenary of David Hume."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Councillor F. F. Riley, "Engravings: With special reference to the Dudgeon Collection." Lantern illustrations.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, F. G. Jones, "Christian Faith and Common Facts."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): J. T. Lloyd, 3, "Has Science Turned Religious?" 6.30, "All Things Die; There is No Death." Tea at 5.

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Hall Buildings, second floor): 7, Music; 7.45, Elijah Copeland, "Dickens' Hypocrites."

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