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PRICE TWOPENCE

Our opponents think they refute us if they reiterate their own opinions and pay no heed to ours.—GOETHE.

Frederic Harrison on Atheism.

MORE than twenty-three years ago—to be strictly accurate, it was on January 18, 1889—there was an article of ours in the *Freethinker* under this very heading. Mr. Harrison had attacked Herbert Spencer's "Agnosticism" with his usual vigor in the *Fortnightly Review*. Severe as he was upon Agnosticism, he was still more severe upon Atheism, which we twitted him with misunderstanding and certainly misrepresenting. We thought of returning to the subject in 1907 when Mr. Harrison published his *Creed of a Layman*, but various circumstances interfered. As the book naturally became more and more out of date with the lapse of time, we let the matter drop. It must suffice to state, for the moment, that Atheism was still Mr. Harrison's "black beast," as the French say. We see by the current number of the *Positivist Review* that it continues to hold this position. In the course of an able and interesting article on Theism we find Mr. Harrison indulging—quite gratuitously, by the way—in the following discharge of missiles at his old Aunt Sally:—

"Most certainly I have no intention of presenting any attempted refutation of Theism as a dogmatic belief. Anything of the kind is the height of absurdity as well as a piece of pedantic cynicism. Positivism is not as Atheism. It holds the denial of the Creation of the Universe by Omnipotence to be an idle and even mischievous sophism. 'Atheists' (said Comte) 'are the most irrational of all Theologians.' They affect to solve the mystery of Creation by the most improbable and least edifying of all the solutions of a hopeless dilemma. If we must choose a solution, that of Omnipotence is a less unintelligible hypothesis than that of Self-creation or Chance. As the hypothesis of Omnipotence has led to great moral and social effects in the world, whilst bare Materialism and Atheism, have led to egoism, conceit, and hardness, Atheism presents itself to us as positively repulsive as well as rank sophistry."

We propose to criticise this extraordinary outburst, and neither Mr. Harrison nor his friends need be astonished if we imitate his plainness of speech.

Perhaps we had better pause for a moment to explain that Mr. Harrison's remarkable plainness of speech with regard to Atheism is not a thing of yesterday. Nearly a quarter of a century ago he declared that in "militant Atheism all who have substantive beliefs of their own find nothing but mischief." Five years ago, in the *Creed of a Layman*, he went a great deal further. His detestation of Atheism had grown with the progress of time. "We loathe and pity," he said, "the mind which can plume itself on its denials and can air its idiotic Atheism." This is strong enough to please a Christian Evidence lecturer.

We hesitate to use the word "vulgarity" in connection with such a superfine personage as Mr. Harrison, but is there not a certain flavor of vulgarity in that same "idiotic," and indeed in the whole sentence in which it occurs? The word "airs" is decidedly supercilious. Mr. Harrison, as

a Positivist, states his views and argues his conclusions; the Atheist, being naturally and necessarily an inferior being, without a trace of Positivist modesty, and having no moral right to open his mouth at all, simply "airs his opinions." We take it that this amusing partisanship is a relic of Mr. Harrison's early Christian training. If one goes for years to a bad school one doesn't lose altogether what one has learnt there. It crops up in moments of excitement and ill temper.

One is tempted to say that Mr. Harrison gets worse in this respect as he grows older. Maybe this is natural. Coleridge remarked that extremes meet. Old age, it has been said, yearns back to the cradle. Early impressions are the deepest and stand out clearly in far later life when intervening impressions are faint or even obliterated. Thus it is, perhaps, that Mr. Harrison leans more and more to the practice of saying malicious things about his intellectual opponents. Atheism is not only "sophistry" but "rank" sophistry; it is not only "repulsive" but "positively" repulsive; Atheists are not only Materialists but "bare" Materialists,—they are also egotistic, conceited, and hard. In short, they are just fit for the mental and moral dust destructor. And judging from his adjectives Mr. Harrison would feel very little compunction in sending them there.

An Atheist who is anything of a humorist can afford to smile at these vehement objurgations of Atheism. In his old *Fortnightly* article Agnosticism was the object of Mr. Harrison's attack. He defined it—perhaps we should rather say he described it—in a manner that showed it was only Atheism in disguise. "As a matter of logic" Mr. Harrison "entirely accepted the Agnostic position." But what was logic to spirituality? What man really wanted was not the sawdust of logic but the bread of religion, and Mr. Harrison was for seeing he had it. To that end Agnosticism was to be confined to the cellar and Atheism buried in the back yard, while Religion fed itself in the kitchen and spread itself in the parlor. Now, however, Mr. Harrison appears to have dropped his objection to Agnosticism. He concentrates it all upon Atheism. The real thing bears the brunt of the odium; the simulacrum is quite respectable. Why is this? The explanation is that this is England, the classic land of mental timidity and compromise, where to have a decided opinion, except in party politics, is to be too audacious for good society. Agnosticism, in fact, is almost fashionable, while Atheism is treated with obloquy and persecution. It is different elsewhere, especially in France. A French sceptic no more hesitates to call himself an Atheist than he hesitates to call himself a Republican. But the Englishman, who has a reputation for physical courage, is the greatest moral coward in the world. If the radii of a circle have a tendency to be equal (to borrow George Eliot's illustration) the spirit of geometry may be carried a great deal too far. Let us honor the "safe" man. We must put up with brains nowadays even in religion, but let the man of brains give his ideas an inoffensive label. On this principle the difference between Atheism and Agnosticism is one of temperament. John Bull is infuriated by the red cloak of Atheism, so the Agnostic wears a brown cloak with a red lining, which he keeps rather carefully buttoned up. Now and then a sudden breeze exposes a bit of

the fatal red, but the garment is promptly adjusted, and Bull forgets the irritating phenomenon.

Mr. Harrison generally quotes Comte in connection with Atheism. But Comte never concealed the fact that he was logically an Atheist himself. He called "God" the figurehead of a hypocritical conspiracy against mankind. He proposed to "reorganise Society, without God or King, by the systematic cultus of Humanity."

Comte's quarrel with the Atheists was not logical but practical. They did not extend the welcome he expected to his Catholicised Atheism which he called the Church of Humanity. Comte was a very great man, but it is not given to the greatest of men to anticipate in detail the way in which a vital new idea is going to affect the human mind and character, and the frame of human society, in the course of centuries, and perhaps millenniums. Comte was for building up a Church, and leaving other things alone. The bulk of French Atheists preferred fighting for their ideas in the religious, political, and social conditions with which the course of evolution had surrounded them. It was not wise to turn this difference into a quarrel. It is conceivable that both sides were right—and both wrong in their opposition to each other. The Positivists are the greater sinners in this respect. They keep calling themselves "positive" and "constructive" and calling other non-Christians "negative" and "destructive." Mr. Harrison himself seems to imagine that Atheists have no ideal beyond that of attacking theology, but a moment's reflection might show the absurdity of this fancy. He might as well suppose that the pioneers of civilisation who hew down virgin forests have no conception of the happy homesteads they are making room for. Nay, is not all this talk of negative and positive work a kind of *cant*? To call the destroyer of superstition a negationist is as senseless as to call a doctor a negationist. Both strive to expel disease—the one bodily and the other mental. Both, therefore, are working for health, and no more positive work is conceivable.

(To be concluded.) G. W. FOOTE.

God and Science.

EVERYBODY knows the story of the Scotchman who wouldn't agree to arbitration until he knew what the decision was going to be. This is about the temper in which most clergymen make inquiries concerning the growth of Atheism or the decline of religion. Anyone who knows anything, for instance, of the fantastic performances of Sir Oliver Lodge in the field of religious apologetics, would be pretty certain as to what his replies would be to both questions. And it may be safely assumed that the Rev. B. O. F. Heywood realised this when he asked Sir Oliver Lodge whether there was any considerable percentage of scientific men who took up the position of strict Atheism as distinct from Agnosticism—whether any percentage would be prepared to argue that there was no God.

The nature of the inquiry is best expressed by the American epithet "slim." There is in it every chance of evasion and little indication of any genuine desire for the truth. In the first place, what is the distinction between Agnosticism and Atheism? The representatives of Atheism, in this country, who must at least be permitted to be the final authorities upon what they mean when they talk about Atheism, have always professed inability to distinguish between a genuine Agnosticism and their own Atheism. It is stupid for religious people, or even Agnostics, to say that there is a distinction between the two. If the Atheist means by Atheism what the genuine Agnostic means by Agnosticism, it is absurd for anyone to say that the Atheist cannot mean anything of the kind. It may be argued that the Atheist ought to call himself an Agnostic, just as the Atheist says that the Agnostic ought to call himself an Atheist. But this is a discussion about the choice

of a title. The thing itself—the frame of mind—remains. And the real inquiry, therefore, should be, "Is the attitude of mind in relation to belief in a God—called by some Atheism and by others Agnosticism—on the increase, or is it less common than it was?" But, it may be admitted, it would be highly inconvenient to some if the inquiry were put in this form. In the next place, as things are at present, the query as to what percentage of scientific men are Atheists or Agnostics is one that not only misleads, but is, I believe, intended to mislead. A very large percentage of doctors, lawyers, writers, merchants, mechanics, laborers, etc., would all profess to a belief in some sort of God. There would be endless variety about the gods believed in, and peace could be effected in the Theistic Kilkenny only by the same process that quieted the brace of cats hailing from that quarter. But there would be a large majority of the people professing belief in a God. And so, of course, would there be in the scientific world. Why should we expect otherwise? The bulk of scientific men are as the bulk of the population. Every man who is technically a scientist is not a scientific thinker. On the other hand, a man may be a scientific thinker with but little acquaintance with the accumulation of facts that are ranged under the name of science. Many a naturalist may have had a much greater knowledge of the facts of botany or biology than Darwin. It was not the quantity of knowledge, but the quality of brain, that made Darwin what he was. And it is not the quantity of knowledge that a scientific man possesses, but whether he applies it logically to religious beliefs, that makes his opinion on the subject of any value.

It is obvious that very few scientific men do this. Their religious opinions are little more than the echo of current religious beliefs, modified, usually, by their larger acquaintance with facts. And, in this country, a number of those who rise superior to current religious beliefs are extremely timid of scandal, and spend their time in devising vague formulæ which may pass muster as religious, and which a religious world, hard pressed and ready to snap at any support, can twist into a profession of belief in God. Sir Oliver Lodge himself has produced some remarkable essays in this direction; and those who most admire his scientific work are those who most deplore these productions. Those who are loudest in praise of his defence of religion are mostly indifferent to his scientific work. Anyway, a genuinely useful inquiry would be, not what scientific men believe about God, but what support does *science* give to the belief in God?

In reply to Mr. Heywood's question, Sir Oliver Lodge said he did not know any important people who dogmatised in the direction of strict Atheism, but the Agnostic attitude was common enough. And, in answer to a further inquiry, he said that the attitude of scientific men towards belief in God as a personal force behind and within the universe was more favorable to-day than it was fifty years ago.

By "strict Atheism" I presume Sir Oliver means the direct denial of the existence of God. And it would be surprising if he were not right in this particular. For how, as Bradlaugh and others have repeatedly asked, can anyone deny the existence of that of which they have no knowledge—not even an understanding as to what is meant by the term? The denial can only extend to the presence of a belief in God. Thus, if I am asked, "Do you believe in God," I can only reply, "I do not." And my reply only refers to the absence of such a belief. And if I proceed by inquiring as to what is meant by God, I may then be in a position to either affirm or deny existence. If the reply takes the form of depicting a God, such as some of the old pictures show—a venerable old gentleman of refined Jewish appearance—I should deny that any such personage controls nature. If the reply is that by God is meant an intelligence creating and controlling things—in Sir Oliver's phrase, "behind and within the universe"—I should again say I have no such belief. And in this case I should go further and say that so

long as our terms carry an intelligible meaning I do not believe that any such personal force exists. Personality, as we know it, is a quality of intelligence. Intelligence, as we know it, is a characteristic of organisation. And both, as we know them and think them, are products of the universe. They are not behind it; they are parts of it.

But may not intelligence and personality exist other than as we know it? I don't know what *may* exist to which you may be pleased to give the names personality and intelligence. What I do know is that when we talk about personality and intelligence we either mean the things we know, or we mean something different. And different things are not the same things. To say that the personality and intelligence "behind the universe" is not what we know as such is only another way of saying they are not personality and intelligence at all. They are different, and therefore cannot be the same. The apologist is really doing what he falls foul of the Atheist for doing. The Atheist says, I do not believe in intelligence creating and ruling the universe, because the only intelligence I can think about is that associated with animal organisation, and the force disclosed by the universe does not exhibit the same characteristics. You are wrong, says the Theist, the universe does disclose the presence of intelligence, but it is a different intelligence to that exhibited in animal organisation. Will somebody please show me the substantial difference in the two statements? Will someone explain how an intelligence that is not like the only intelligence we know can be intelligence at all? How, in the name of all that is reasonable, can different things be the same?

But whatever this juggle with such words as "intelligence" and "personality" may mean, Sir Oliver thinks the attitude of scientific men towards the belief in God more favorable than it was fifty years ago. I cannot, of course, pretend to the personal knowledge of scientific men possessed by Sir Oliver Lodge; but all the same I doubt the accuracy of this judgment. I suspect that all it means is that scientific men hold their tongues. For a few years following the publication of the *Origin of Species* some scientific men were induced, by the display of religious bigotry, to express their opinions about religion. Then the storm died down, and with it the open speech of many scientists. The dull, heavy pressure of conventionalism began to tell, and its outcome has been on the one side the growth of a veiled Atheism in the form of Agnosticism, which Sir Oliver admits is common enough, and on the other hand a number of really fatuous apologies for religion which surrender the substance while retaining the name.

But the main thing is not what scientific men think now as compared with what they thought fifty years ago. The important question is as to the bearing of scientific discoveries during the past fifty years on the belief in God. When the Atheist pointed to the facts of science as affording no proof of a God, the Theist retorted with the sneer that no one expected to find God in a retort. Yet if the appeal to scientific men—as scientific men—means anything sensible, it must be assumed that the last half century of scientific research has produced some proof of a God. And one would really like to know what are the scientific discoveries that have cast a favorable light on this belief? In what branch of science do the facts point to the probability of a personal intelligence "behind the universe"? Why, the whole trend of science is to reduce all phenomena, from atom to planet, from a speck of protoplasm to man, as the outcome of strictly calculable and determinable forces. Science leaves less and less to the play of a "directive intelligence," because it is all the time filling up gaps in our sequential knowledge of phenomena. Whether the attitude of scientific men be favorable to the belief in God or not really matters little. The important thing is that, as scientific men, in all their experiments and reasonings, none of them take God into account at all. And what is the scientific value

of a force that anyone is at liberty to ignore without one's calculations being affected thereby?

It is significant that Sir Oliver finds the Agnostic (Atheistic) attitude common enough. And this is exactly what one would expect. It is commoner now than it was; it will be commoner than it is. It is the customary ending of religious systems. First there is the strong belief under which the religion is elaborated. Then comes the steady, sapping operation of developing social and intellectual forces. Then a period of apologising and an attempt to fit the old belief to the new life. Everything is explained, and explained, until finally there is nothing left but the bare name, and there is nothing that awaits explanation. The frame of mind that was once a rarity becomes common. The fog of superstition melts insensibly before the sun of science.

C. COHEN.

"The Biblical Doctrine of the World."

THE Rev. G. Campbell Morgan, D.D., of Westminster Chapel, London, is beyond doubt one of the greatest preachers of the age. His success is simply phenomenal; and it must be frankly admitted that he richly deserves it. He naturally possesses all the gifts which constitute a commanding and convincing public speaker; and he has cultivated them to the farthest possible limits. He is a perfect master of the art of presenting truisms and commonplaces as if they were original discoveries of his own, and of speaking of the absolutely unknown in terms of the most positive and intimate knowledge. A man thus endowed by nature and thus disciplined for his profession, if he means business, cannot help being an ever growingly popular preacher. One does not wonder that Westminster Chapel is crowded to its utmost capacity under his ministry. But while all this is wholly undeniable, one cannot evade the inference that Dr. Morgan's ministerial efficiency is due, not to any supernatural aid graciously vouchsafed to him, not to any "bright effluence of bright essence increate," but solely to superior human aptitude and sagacity. Many a man fully as good and pious as he has to confess himself a lamentable failure, merely because he lacks the natural qualities which always ensure success. In other words, the Lord cannot look down upon the work done at Westminster Chapel and sincerely say of it, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit" is it all being accomplished. That is to say, Dr. Morgan's marvellous achievements as a preacher furnish a powerful argument against the truth of the Gospel he preaches.

Let us look at this Gospel as presented to us in a sermon on "The Biblical Doctrine of the World," which appears in the *Christian World Pulpit* for April 10. The text of this discourse is a most suitable one: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm xxiv. 1). The discourse is nothing but a repetition and application of those words which, even in their Biblical fewness, express a palpable absurdity, but which, with the preacher's copious addition of particulars and illustrations, appear to be completely irrational, absurd, and preposterous. Let us note a few of these particulars and illustrations in order to emphasise the obvious fallacies that underlie them. After declaring that the smallest atom of the material structure, all the forces that are operative, whether as discovered and harnessed by man, or whether as yet undiscovered and out of man's control, and all the laws that govern the operation of these forces, are Jehovah's, the preacher becomes more practical thus:—

"Your estate is the Lord's. Your garden is God's. Your house, in all the essentials of its material structure, is His; not the mood of your home,—that may not be His; not all those spiritual values that differentiate between house and home; but the house. When you get home, look about you quietly when no one is

looking, and the first thing you arrive at, put your hand down upon it; that belongs to God. What! that door? Yes; His trees provided it for you. This book? Yes; there is not a single atom or particle of it that did not come out of the mystery of His being, and was not formed by the mystery and might of His power."

To a believer there is a certain effective plausibility about all that; but there is also to every sensible person an insufferable puerility.

Dr. Morgan's contention is that up to this point he has only been dealing with a plain fact, but a fact which he knew would be questioned by some of his hearers. Instead of endeavoring to prove the fact, he contents himself with saying that he is simply "interpreting the Biblical view of the world, the Christian conception of the earth. Is there such a fact, and can it be definitely established? I am only an interpreter of the Word, says the preacher, and the Book posits this fact, and I accept it." Now, from this hypothetical fact, Dr. Morgan makes a definite deduction thus:—

"When we climb to such a height as this, when we thus look out upon the world as it ought to be looked at in its entirety, when we think of it not with some geographical limitation, not bound by the narrow horizon of our social position, no longer confined within the paltry conception which results from social life, when we see it as a whole, then we realise at once that there is but one Landlord, and that all human possession is leasehold."

At last, we know exactly where we stand. They whom we are accustomed to call Landlords and whom many vehemently denounce as unscrupulous thieves and robbers, are in reality eminently worthy personages; and whenever we speak disrespectfully of them we are guilty of wicked impiety towards God. Bradlaugh advocated the nationalisation of the land; but he did it simply because he was an Atheist. If Dr. Morgan's teaching is true, the land is a question in which Parliament has not the ghost of a right to interfere, for the land is the Lord's, and they who now hold it do so on a lease from him, and it is to him alone that they are responsible for their treatment of it.

Dr. Morgan's principle carries him further still. The first fact is God's ownership of the land, and the second, God's ownership of the wealth which the land makes possible. This second fact also the preacher accepts on the testimony of the Book; and having thus accepted it he makes this deduction therefrom: "There is but one Capitalist, and all human wealth is on trust." Again, if Dr. Morgan's Gospel is true, any attempt to bring about economic reforms is an act of disloyalty to God. The misguided miners who went out on strike in order to secure a minimum wage were guilty of rebellion against the ordinances of Divine Providence. The so-called mine-owners are but stewards managing God's business; and had they been mismanaging it by sweating the workers he would have duly censured them and, possibly, appointed a new board of directors. All human capital is held on trust on behalf of the "one Capitalist." The so-called struggle between Labor and Capital is but a disguise for the warfare between the poor and God. Is it not on record that the Divine Capitalist said long ago, "Blessed are ye poor"? Miners, railway servants, and all others who earn the shadow of a living by the sweat of their brow, instead of complaining, ought to consider it a privilege to endure hardship to the glory of the "one Capitalist" and his trustees.

We are now in possession of two great deductions, the first, that there is but one Landowner and all human property is leasehold, and the second, that there is but one Capitalist, and all human possession is on trust. But Dr. Morgan's principle takes him one step further still. If "the world and they that dwell therein" are the Lord's it necessarily follows that "there is but one King, and all human government is deputed." The preacher talks glibly about this "one King and his supreme government of human affairs"; but on this point he is discreet enough not to enlarge. The only observation we wish to make here is that any discontent or unrest displayed

by the lower classes is a heinous sin to be speedily repented of, because they are living under the supreme government of the one King who alone knows what is best for them.

From this point to the close of the discourse Dr. Morgan seems to be sub-conscious of the utter unreality of the Biblical doctrine of the world, because the world as it is and always has been flatly contradicts it. He must know that Landlordism in its present form is a fertile source of crying evils, in spite of his belief in the one Landowner and the leasehold nature of all land tenure. He must know that economic justice does not at present exist except in idea, though he proclaims God to be the one Capitalist and all rich people his stewards. He must know that all human governments are extremely imperfect and corrupt, despite his profession of faith in the supreme government of human affairs by a God of justice and of love. After three or four thousand years of Jehovah and the Christian Heavenly Father, he cannot but admit that the present is still a time of "clash and strain and difficulty and perplexity." How does the reverend gentleman explain this melancholy state of things, or how does he reconcile it with the existence of a loving Father of unlimited power? He openly evades the whole problem, and flies for sentimental solace to the time-worn platitudes of orthodox theology. He says, "I find the assurance of righteousness, because God is righteous"; but how on earth does he know that God is righteous, when he is aware that in all the ages righteousness has been conspicuous in human affairs mostly by its absence? The idea of a righteous God constantly winking at unrighteousness is ineffably revolting. Dr. Morgan says, "My heart is hot and burdened and crushed with the problem of evil"; but let us put this sentence in its context:—

"The God to Whom the earth belongs, to Whom the fulness belongs, to Whom the people belong, where do I find him? My heart is hot and burdened and crushed with the problem of evil! I find Him in the heart of the evil; I discover Him in the cross. *If that be all [the italics are our own], then have I seen God defeated, His throne is empty, the world is rushing on to a final cataclysm.*"

Here is a minister of Christ who sadly acknowledges that, so far as this life is concerned, the God of righteousness and of love has been defeated, his supreme government of human affairs has been a screaming farce, and the Cross of Calvary a standing joke. Such is Dr. Morgan's confession, *if that be all*; and his only comfort lies in the hope that "that is not all." "What else is there?" he asks, and answers, "The resurrection." The belief in the resurrection may minister strong consolation to Dr. Morgan's crushed heart; but how is it that there is still a problem of evil to afflict him, *if the resurrection be a reality*? A risen Lord of omnipotent love would have banished evil ages ago.

Our conclusion is that the Biblical doctrine of the world is fundamentally false. Dr. Morgan labors hard to defend it; but the world lying about his feet gives his defence the direct lie. The earth is not the Lord's, but man's, in so far as through patient and painful struggle he can win it. It becomes ours only by costly conquest. Dr. Morgan confidently hopes that, sooner or later, "all false owners will be ejected, all robbers will be made to disgorge, and every tyrant be made to bite the dust"; but that happy issue shall be effected by education, not God; by the gradual development and training of the social instinct, not profession of faith in a God-man that is becoming more and more of a myth. Selfishness is the supreme obstacle, and the very doctrine of immortality so eloquently preached by Dr. Morgan has always tended hitherto to intensify and perpetuate selfishness. This fountain from which flow the majority of our social woes can be dried up only in the fire of social love, kindled on the hearthstone, judiciously fanned at the schools, and fed by the fuel of ever-improving social practice.

J. T. LLOYD.

Old Testament History.—VI.

(Continued from p. 236.)

AMONG the proofs that may be adduced of the fictitious character of the early Jewish "history" the most conclusive, perhaps, is that of the complete silence observed by the Hebrew books respecting the Egyptian domination of Canaan. That the majority of the Israelitish tribes were among the inhabitants of the land during a portion, if not the whole, of this long period of Egyptian rule, there can be no reasonable doubt. That this domination was known among the tribes of a later date is also beyond doubt. How, then, can we account for the omission? Well, in the first place, it must have been some considerable time after the Egyptian rule had ceased before Hebrew writing came into use. If we put this use as early as the first mention of "recorder" and "scribe" (*i.e.*, "chronicler" and "secretary") in the Old Testament, we cannot be very far out. This we find to be the following:—

2 Sam. viii. 16, 17.—"and Jehosaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder.....and Seraiah was scribe."

This would be in the reign of David, a little more than a century and a half after the Egyptian suzerainty had been withdrawn. Such suzerainty would, no doubt, be known to the tribes in Canaan at this period; but the Hebrew historian has distorted the events handed down to his time. Oral tradition spoke of an Egyptian servitude: the historical fact that all the peoples of Palestine had been subject to Egypt for about four hundred years was transformed into the servitude of the tribes of Israel only—and *in the land of Egypt* under taskmasters—for that period. Furthermore, the "Lord God" was represented as foreshowing these four centuries of bondage to his "friend" the mythical Abraham.

Gen. xv. 13, 14.—"Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years: and also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge: and afterwards shall they come out with great substance."

The foregoing is a luminous sample of how Hebrew prophecies were made, and also of how the name of the "Lord God" was used to lend authority to fraudulent statements. This misstatement having been made, say, in the "History of Samuel the seer," or in that of "Gad the seer," was afterwards repeated by later Hebrew writers, and in time came to be regarded as an undoubted historical fact. And the saddest fact in connection with these misrepresentations is that the poor maligned "Lord God" had no means of preventing it. Hebrew writers could say anything they pleased about him, and never be called to account for it. This was taking a mean advantage of their deity.

But the most reprehensible proceeding on the part of the Hebrew writers in the time of Ezra was the fabrication of a number of narratives, now placed in the Pentateuch, in which the imaginary bondage of the Israelites in Egypt was related in all its fictitious details, including the ten plagues, the passage of the Red Sea, and the destruction of the Egyptian army. It is significant in this connection that Moses, the reputed writer of the narratives, though said in those narratives to have had many interviews with the king of Egypt, did not know that king's name. He calls him "Pharaoh," a word which was neither the name nor the title of any Egyptian king known to history. In later historical times, commencing with the reign of Rehoboam, the names of kings of Egypt are mentioned, as we hear of Shishak, So, Tirhakah, Necho, and Hophra; though the first of these names should be "Sheshonk," the second "Sabuko," and the others something else; still, the names are given. I shall not here waste time in pointing out all the absurdities and impossibilities connected with the Bible narratives of the bondage in Egypt; that has been done years ago by Bishop Colenso, whose argu-

ments and statements of facts have never been refuted.

Before leaving this period, however, one other matter calls for notice. In the book of Exodus we find no less than nine chapters in which the "Lord God" is represented as giving detailed instructions for the making of a grand Tabernacle and its furniture, and in Exod. xl. the building is said to be constructed and set up. In the book of Leviticus twelve chapters are devoted to all the different kinds of sacrifices and offerings to be made, and in the book of Numbers five more chapters are added on the same subject. Again, in the book of Leviticus three chapters, and in Numbers three chapters, are found instructions relating to the various feasts that were to be kept, with regulations respecting vows and tithes. All these commands and instructions are introduced by the words "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying"; but not one of them ever emanated from "the Lord." All the chapters here referred to were written for the first time in the days of Ezra, after the Exile. There was no elaborate Tabernacle in Israel, served by a large body of priests and Levites—8,580 of the latter are mentioned as officiating in Num. iv. 48—before the Exile. The account in the Pentateuch is all pure fiction. Neither, again, were all the different kinds of sacrifices mentioned in those books offered in Israel, or the various feasts therein named observed, before the Exile. Nearly all the rites and ceremonies named in the "books of Moses" were invented by the post-exilic writers, and were unknown in Israel or Judah before the Captivity.

The Israelites had, it is true, a sacred ark, like all the nations of Canaan; but this ark was kept in a private house, and had but one priest, or a priest and his sons, as custodians. The only "house of God" known in Israel before the building of Solomon's temple was a room set apart for the ark in, or connected with, the house in which the priest resided. We first hear of the ark as being at Shiloh, where "a feast of the Lord" was held once a year, at which feast "the daughters of Shiloh came out to dance," and to which pious, god-fearing men went with their wives and children to offer their yearly sacrifice, and to feast upon the goodly portion given to the offerer, as was customary (Judg. xxi. 19—21; 1 Sam. i. 3—5, 21). We next hear of a child Samuel who, "girded with a linen ephod, ministered unto the Lord before Eli the priest" (1 Sam. ii. 11, 18). This priest, his two sons, and the child Samuel attended to everything pertaining to the "house of God" at Shiloh: there was no Tabernacle, no high priest, no Levites.

Some years later, we hear that the ark was taken to battle by the Israelites, and that it was captured by the Philistines, who, after retaining it seven months, sent it back to the Israelites; that the men of Beth-shemesh placed the ark upon a great stone, and sent to the men of Kirjath-jearim asking them to take it away. This having been done, the men of the last-named city placed the sacred box in "the house of Abinadab.....and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord" (1 Sam. iv. 4—11; vi. 12; vii. 1). Here the ark remained for over thirty years, after which, in the reign of David, that king, accompanied by 80,000 men of Israel, took it away, the procession moving on towards Jerusalem. On the way, however, "the Lord" struck Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, dead, for laying his hand upon the box when the oxen shook the cart in which it was carried. This stopped the procession, and the ark was taken into the house of "Obed-edom, the Gittite," where it remained three months. At the expiration of this period, David tried again, and carrying the ark safely to Jerusalem, placed it in "the tabernacle that he had pitched for it" in that city (2 Sam. vi. 1—17).

Later on, when David fled from Jerusalem on account of his son Absalom, Zadok and Abiathar, David's two priests, carried the ark after him; but the king sent it back (2 Sam. xv. 24). When the temple was completed by Solomon, that king's two

priests removed the ark, and placed it in its proper place within the new buildings (1 Kings viii. 1—6).

We have now to ask where, during all this period, was the grand Tabernacle, with its lordly and dignified high priest, its hundreds of other priests, and its thousands of Levites? Why was the ark allowed to remain in a private house, and in the care of a doddering old priest and his two profligate sons? Why, when the ark was sent back by the Philistines, did not the Levites take charge of it and place it, as "the Lord" had directed, in the Most holy place of his great Tabernacle? Why was it sent to the house of Abinadab and allowed to remain there for over thirty years? And why, above all, was it placed in the house of "Obed-edom, the Gittite"—that is to say, in the care of a Philistine, a native of Gath, one of the bitterest foes of Israel? The answer to these questions is that there was no such Tabernacle as that described in Exodus in existence, and there never had been; neither was there an army of priests and Levites for its service, as recorded in that book. Again, it was the Levites only that were allowed to remove the ark from one place to another, and this was done by means of two staves passed through rings fixed on two sides of that box, to avoid touching it with the hand (Exod. xxv. 10—15). The ark was never put in a cart.

But, it may be replied, "Levites" are several times mentioned in the Bible accounts. True; but in every case the name is a gloss or interpolation. Thus, in Sam. vi. 15 we read:—

"And the Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the coffer that was with it.....and put them on the great stone: and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings," etc.

It was the men of Beth-shemesh who took down the ark from the cart; for in the previous verse it is stated that "they clave the wood of the cart and offered up the kine for a burnt offering unto the Lord." The ark was certainly taken out of the cart before that vehicle was chopped up. Moreover, the mysterious "Levites," after the ark was placed on the stone, appear to have vanished into thin air; for the men of Beth-shemesh, not knowing what to do with the sacred box, sent to Kirjath-jearim asking the men of that city to come and take it away. Had there been any Levites about, the men of Kirjath-jearim would not have had to go and fetch the box, nor to consecrate Abinadab's son to be custodian of it. Again in 2 Sam. xv. 24 we read:—

"And, lo, Zadok also came, and *all the Levites* with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up," etc.

Here the words italicised have been substituted for "Abiathar." The passage should read: "And, lo, Zadok also came, and Abiathar with him, bearing the ark of God," etc. The words "of the covenant" are a gloss. As in the last case, "the Levites" vanish and are seen no more. The same two priests that bore the ark from Jerusalem carried it back; there were no Levites.

2 Sam. xv. 29.—"Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem."

In 1 Kings ii. 26, king Solomon tells the priest Abiathar that his disloyalty merited death; but he would not inflict that penalty, because he had borne the ark before his father David.

The account of the dedication of the temple by Solomon (1 Kings viii.) contains an interpolation (verse 4) copied from 2 Chron. v. 5, which was probably inserted by some early copyist. The writer of the Chronicles wished to make it appear that the Tabernacle, priests, and Levites, as described in the Pentateuch, were in existence all the time the Israelites dwelt in Canaan; but he had no power to alter the books of Samuel and Kings, for they had been accounted sacred and canonical more than a century before his time. All he could do was to make a copy of a portion of those books, and insert in that copy his own falsifications—which he has done. The following are examples of these fraudulent additions: 1 Chron. vi. 31—48; xv. 2—27; xvi. 4—

42; xxiii., xxiv., xxv., xxvi.; 2 Chron. v. 5 and 11—13; etc. According to these mendacious statements, the priests and Levites had become so numerous that David divided them into twenty-four courses, and each served in the Tabernacle in rotation, the Levites alone numbering 38,000 (1 Chron. xxxiii. 3); also it was the priests and Levites who brought up the ark to Jerusalem. Furthermore, David knew that the Levites were appointed by God to carry the ark, and it was the non-observance of this command that caused the death of Uzzah, etc., etc. (1 Chron. xv. 2, 13, 15).

ABRACADABRA.

(To be continued.)

Acid Drops.

General Booth is eighty-three and still going fairly strong. His eyes, however, give him a lot of trouble, and he will undergo another operation on the right eye in a month or so. In spite of everything Anno Domini finds us all at last.

Jesus Christ was an eye-doctor. He cured blindness; but he forgot to leave the recipe, so General Booth has to go to the doctors.

Mr. George Lansbury, M.P., carrying a cross must have been an interesting spectacle. It was witnessed on Friday, April 12. Mr. Lansbury was a member of a procession, under the auspices of the Church Socialist League, that marched from the Church House to Lambeth Palace.

Rev. Dr. Clifford welcomes the Home Rule Bill. He says that Nonconformists now see that "nothing will so effectively extend and increase the Protestant influence and decrease that of the Catholic Church as the advent of the liberty in Ireland that will be gained by Home Rule..... Roman Catholicism cannot continue to thrive and grow powerful in an atmosphere of freedom." The last sentence is all right. The first sentence is all wrong. Catholicism will break up in Ireland, as elsewhere, but Protestantism will not gain. It has not so gained in France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, or any other Catholic country. Protestantism is only a religious makeshift. The death of Catholicism means the death of Religion; that is, the triumph of Freethought. The successor of Catholicism is not Protestantism but Atheism.

Freethinkers are constantly told that they must "respect the feelings" of Christians. Nobody, however, suggests that Christians should respect the feelings of Freethinkers. The very idea is ridiculous. Not that we want them to respect our feelings. We don't fight Christians—we fight Christianity. And in the war of ideas, without personalities, there should be no quarter given or taken. To slay a falsehood is to injure no one—to insult no one. It is to make room for the truth. And the truth is to everyone's advantage. That is, to every honest man's advantage. It may not be to the advantage of those who lie for a living.

The good Christians who send Freethinkers to prison for not respecting *their* feelings don't show very much respect for each other's feelings. Both Protestants and Catholics at Belfast, for instance, would go to prison by hundreds if the law about "feelings" were administered to Christians as it is to Freethinkers. But we need no go so far as Belfast. Look at something that happened in the House of Commons on Thursday evening, April 11, when Mr. Asquith introduced his Home Rule Bill. We take the following from the next morning's *Daily Mirror*:—

"Later the Premier cited passages from Mr. Bonar Law's speech containing mention of 'conspiracy and treachery.'

"'This, Mr. Speaker,' the Prime Minister commented, 'is the new style!' (Prolonged cheers and uproar.)

"Proceeding, Mr. Asquith said such language was all very well in Ulster.

"Mr. Bonar Law: I have said it here.

"Mr. Asquith: Is the right hon. gentleman prepared to repeat here that I and my colleagues are selling our convictions?

"Mr. Bonar Law: You haven't got any?

"Mr. Asquith: You are getting on with the new style! (Cheers.)"

It would be difficult to beat the vulgar insolence of that "You haven't got any." A bus driver would shrink from talking like that in a public assembly. To speak in that way is to put an end to civilised intercourse. Mr. Asquith would be perfectly justified in declining to hold any sort of

communication with such an ill-conditioned person. Mr. Balfour never committed these offences. Whether he was right or wrong in his politics, he bore himself like a gentleman.

Mr. Bonar Law is a Christian—a rather ostentatious Christian. He talked religion in his very first public speech after being appointed leader of the Unionist party. No doubt he is quite prepared when necessary to indulge in the sort of speech we hear from Mr. McKenna about "blasphemy" and "blasphemers." Yet he has as much respect for the feelings of a fellow-Christian as to put a coarse and uncalled for insult upon him in a public place; the public place being the national legislature, and the object of the insult being the Prime Minister, whose position is entitled to some respect, altogether apart from his personality. What an ignoble farce it is, then, to send two men to prison (as at Leeds) for being infinitely less offensive than Mr. Bonar Law! and that without a spark of personal malice. If those two men had not been Freethinkers their "vulgarity" would have been no offence.

We have a word now for Mr. McKenna on this subject. When he was asked the other day why he did not let the so-called blasphemers alone, the right honorable gentleman replied that it was all very well to talk like that; he wished to let them alone, but they would not let other people alone. Whereat all the Christian bigots in the House cheered lustily. Yet it was the greatest nonsense in the world. It was mere verbiage. There was no analogy whatever between the "let alone" in the two cases. Mr. McKenna endorsed the indictment, the trial, and the imprisonment of "those men." That was a pretty active attack upon them. What, on the other hand, was *their* not letting people alone? It simply consisted in talking, at a public place used for such purposes, to men and women who need not have listened a moment longer than they chose; and in selling a pamphlet to persons who were under no constraint to buy it, and who might easily have judged of its character beforehand, considering where and of whom they purchased it. Surely it is absurd to speak of "those men" in those circumstances as refusing to "let people alone." They were "attacking" the public just in the same way that all publicists and propagandists do. Just in the way that Mr. McKenna does when he goes on the stump or opposes woman suffrage.

One gets really tired of Christian silliness on this subject. The Blasphemy Laws are a greater curse to Christians than they are to Freethinkers. Martyrdom may be painful,—it is not ignominious; but those who enforce and defend a law rooted in ancient bigotry, and argue that it is a splendid safeguard of free discussion (if you only administer it with sufficient discrimination) are allowing the law to reduce them to the most imbecile hypocrisy. They should get the Blasphemy Laws abolished for their own sakes. It would enable them to recover their self-respect, at least in this direction.

The President of the National Union of Teachers, in his address before the Annual Conference, dealt with the question of religious instruction in elementary schools. We quite agree with him that the theologian blocks the way of educational progress, but the new President has a most remarkable method of clearing him out. He laughs at the idea of parents being anxious for denominational religious instruction; and, again, we are with him. But, says Mr. Bentliff, the parents are strongly desirous for "the retention of the Bible in the schools, and he was voicing the opinion of that great Union of Teachers in saying the Bible must be kept in the schools." Now, we think most teachers will agree that the parents, if let alone, are no more concerned for Biblical instruction than for denominational instruction (you cannot really have one without the other), and Mr. Bentliff must be well aware of the truth of this. Teachers in London elementary schools have told us, over and over again, that parents don't trouble at all what kind of religious instruction goes on. Of course, when the Nonconformist parson goes round, he can induce the parents to profess anxiety about the Bible. But so can the Episcopalian and the Catholic work up a concern for denominational instruction. And the agitation of all these varieties of the parsonic species is not unconnected with the President's declaration. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of parents are not interested in the matter at all. We wish they were. And with the Trades Union vote in favor of Secular Education, Mr. Bentliff's deliverance is simply ridiculous. Such statements rule the N. U. T.—one of the largest trade unions in the country—as being of little consequence in the formation of public opinion on the subject of education.

The *Christian World* says Mr. Bentliff would not dare to make such a statement unless he knew it could be substan-

tiated, and fairly represented the views of the teachers. Mr. Bentliff knows, and the *Christian World* knows, that he is perfectly safe in making such a statement. Teachers know that to speak out their real opinions on Bible instruction, and to stand up for Secular Education, is to damn their prospects of promotion. And it is not the Episcopalians, but the Nonconformists, who are responsible for this state of terrorism. We know councils on which Episcopalians are in a hopeless minority. But we also know that on these councils an objection to the Bible in the schools, coming from teachers, would be met in the same spirit as would an attack on the Pope in a Roman Catholic school. It is part of the Nonconformist humbug that it maintains a system of oppression against an expression of opinion in favor of Secular Education; and having muzzled the teachers, points to their silence as evidence of conscientious support.

There is much indignation in Nonconformist circles, we learn, over the teaching of Church of England religion in the Peterborough Secondary School for Girls. For our own part, we view the position with comparative unconcern, and with even a spice of malicious pleasure. Nothing seems able to rouse the bulk of Nonconformists to the iniquity of the State teaching a form of religion with which they happen to agree, so perhaps it may be brought home to them better by having a religion taught with which they do not agree. If local authorities have ample justification for teaching any religion, they have ample justification for teaching any religion they decide ought to be taught. If the vast majority of Nonconformists in this country stood for any principle worth bothering about they would plump wholeheartedly for Secular Education. They will not do this, and we experience some pleasure in seeing them compelled to swallow a dose of the medicine they are so ready to serve out to others.

It is highly amusing to find the Nonconformists and Churchmen, during the discussion on the committee stages of Sir George Mark's Bill, bogging each other to respect the principle of religious equality and freedom. Here are two parties, both engaged in the attempt to saddle their own peculiar religious opinions on the general taxpayer, posing as the champions of equality and freedom. The only equality involved is that of a piratical association. Each is really asking the other to agree to a fair division of their mutual plunder of the public purse. The only genuine equality and freedom is that which keeps religious instruction altogether outside the sphere of State action. And this neither party is likely to support. And over all the discussion is the usual impertinent assumption that Churchmen and Nonconformists are the only parties in the State that need be considered. All others must submit to what these agree on, and be thankful. We admit that in a parliamentary sense—which is the only sense that troubles the muddled political mind—there may be some justification for this view. But public opinion is the ultimate arbiter of Parliament, and the growing opinion in favor of real freedom and equality will one day bring the sordid and self-interested compromises of Church and Chapel to an abrupt conclusion.

A copy of our issue containing Mr. Hilaire Belloc's letter on the Ferrer case was duly forwarded to him. We have heard nothing further from him on the subject. We have to suppose, therefore, that he subsequently repented of his offer to prove that Ferrer's innocence was not vindicated by the recent judgment of the higher court at Madrid. After this, it seems to us, Mr. Belloc should hold his tongue with regard to Ferrer.

Superstitious people in the country around Brionde expected a gigantic bird, that was to render sterile all the fields it flew over, during Holy Week. One day an old farmer thought he saw it, so he took his gun and fired upon it. Fortunately he was a bad shot, for the ill-omened bird was an aeroplane controlled by Corporal Gilbert.

"Take the religious people out of a community—the Christian leaven—and you make Sodom and Gomorrah." So says the Rev. A. F. Forest, of Glasgow, who must be, in his way, a very pretty kind of preacher. No doubt as Mr. Forest looks round his church and reflects upon his own goodness and upon that of his congregation, he wonders if the world is as bad as it is with such good people in it, what would it be like in their absence? For, asks Mr. Forest, "What is there that makes our civilisation superior to others, and life in the British Empire desirable, that is not due to Christianity?" And the smug congregation doubtless turn round and admire each other, with a certain amount of suspicion, as indispensable pillars of modern civilisation. It is a soothing gospel. And it is so consonant with the fatuous and impudent conceit of the Christian preacher.

There have been quite a large number of paragraphs lately in the religious press concerning the dangerous condition of Japan. The general trend is that Japan is doomed unless it takes up with Christianity. These gloomy prognostications are confined to religious papers, the writers of which can usually find in a non-Christian people all they wish to discover. An article in the *Christian World* for April 4, for example, refers, as a matter beyond dispute, to Japan's "swift moral decline," and to the "orgy of vice and sensualism" that has set in. The younger generation, we are told, has become "frankly and aggressively materialistic," and reads Herbert Spencer and Nietzsche. These last things might be true without their having any connection with the orgy of vice and moral decline depicted. Probably this vice is discovered because Japanese students read Spencer instead of Spurgeon and prefer Nietzsche to the Bishop of London. Doubtless sanguine Christians thought that if Western ideas could be planted in Japan acceptance of the professed religion of the West would follow. This has not happened. The Japanese have taken the one and declined the other. And the convenient Christian explanation is propounded that in its absence the nation cannot escape the abyss of moral corruption.

We are quite prepared to believe that many evils may have grown up in Japan during recent years. And if this is so, it is not flattering to "Christian" civilisation. For many of these evils have been forced upon the country by the conduct of Christian nations. The Japanese found that no amount of artistic development, of settled family life, or of steady social progress, could command the respect of the Christian nations of the world. The two things only that were admired by them were money and brute force. Given these, and Christian nations would meet them in equality and friendship. Without them, they would be ruthlessly sacrificed. So, in self-defence, Japan had to become commercialised and militarised. It took from the West its knowledge of mechanical inventions as applied to manufactures, and of scientific discoveries as applied to the art of international murder. It entered into a cash-and-cruelty competition with the Western world, and soon showed it could hold its own. Naturally, the faults of such developments show themselves among the Japanese, as they show themselves with us. Our pious journalists could overlook this if they would only profess our religion. But the Japanese have not come to that point, and are not likely to do so. Hence the cry of moral degradation, and the sanctimonious air of superiority assumed by ill-informed Christian writers.

How the point of view changes the prospect! Mr. Upton Sinclair and Rev. Dr. Len Broughton figured in contiguous columns on the front page of the *Daily News* on April 13. Both are Americans. Mr. Sinclair prophesied a "fearful revolution" in America. Dr. Broughton said "the future is glorious." Each might tell the other that prophesy is risky work, and we might tell them both so. We might specially remind the reverend prophet that his idea that Christianity is "only demanding to-day an opportunity of expressing itself," is one of the funniest we ever encountered. No old "lag" in the dock equals Christianity for claiming "another chance." It has had millions.

Mr. Arthur Henderson, M.P., says that the Brotherhood movement has come just at the right moment to prevent the Socialist movement developing the anti-religious element of continental Socialism. Quite so; that we believe was one of its objects. And it may succeed. It is not the first time in the history of reform that Christianity in this country has captured a movement and drained it of all vitality. On the Continent socialistic leaders happened to be of a different stamp, and they had a different public to deal with. The leaders did at least grasp the important truth that if any social reform worth having was to be secured, the power of Christianity would have to be broken. In this country the people, and apparently the leaders, have yet to learn the lesson.

The *Pretoria News* of March 4 points out "what a beautiful world this would be if the Mayor of Muizenberg, Mr. John Delbridge, had his way." This gentleman would not even allow people to visit Muizenberg itself on Sunday. It is a sea-bathing resort, and the bathers look clean and happy—which are two offences that Sabbatarians never could tolerate. Mr. Delbridge would not allow Sunday concerts, Sunday picture shows, or Sunday libraries and museums. The duty of a good Christian is to make himself as miserable as possible on the Lord's Day. Perhaps a walk is allowable for health's sake. Nothing must be done for pleasure. This is Biblical teaching, according to the Mayor

of Muizenberg. Whereupon the *Pretoria News* suggests that the next Commission should inquire into the popular theory that the world is round, and broadly hints that Mr. Delbridge might oblige with some up-to-date views on that subject.

Anthony William Thomas, a collier, aged forty, of Glanmor-terrace, Llanelly, caught a bad attack of religious mania during the Welsh revival of 1906, and had to be removed to Carmarthen Asylum. He was released twelve months ago. The coal strike of 1912 finished him completely. His poor wife found him hanging in the back parlor on April 10. There is no moral. He was a Christian. The moral only arises in the case of Freethinkers.

Father Belford, of Brooklyn, says that the Socialist is "the mad dog of society, and should be silenced if need be by a bullet." We don't see what the reverend gentleman would have to complain of if the Socialists anticipated him in the bullet business.

We have seen a good reason—from the religious side—to account for the Churches losing their hold on the people; but the Rev. A. H. Sine, of Huddersfield, has brought forward a new one. This is that the Church "is being crowded out of modern life largely as the result of her unselfishness. She has voluntarily given over many of her earlier functions—charity, education, statecraft—to specialised organisations, and lost her influence in these." For a cock-eyed reading of history this is hard to beat. Of course, it is true that in many departments of life in which the Church was once supreme it now has little or no influence, just as it is true that social functions that were once thought inseparable from religion are now seen to be quite independent of it. But this is not a case of the Church unselfishly handing over certain functions to the secular State; it is the secularising of life that is detaching social functions from religion. As a matter of fact, the Church fought for the control of all these things as long as it was able to fight. It is even fighting still to maintain some influence, however slight. The fight for the schools is a case in point. Religion gives up nothing, but it has much taken from it. The whole course of social development is to free life from the influence of religion. Religion may retard the development, but it cannot reverse the course of events.

Canon Willink, vicar of Yarmouth, regrets that he cannot abolish the silly practice of throwing confetti at weddings. Reference was made at the Easter vestry meeting to the former practice of throwing rice as preferable. No doubt. The rice was not only cleaner, but it meant something. It was an emblem of fertility.

Rev. Mabel L. Witham is pastor of the Church of Im-mortalism in a fashionable part of Boston. She declares that clergymen should refuse to marry couples unless they have four certificates; (1) that they have passed a medical examination, (2) that the husband is able to keep a wife, (3) that the bride has received training in domestic duties, and (4) that they are really in love with one another. Why not a fifth certificate, that they owe no arrears of payment?

The following is from a letter of the New York correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle* (April 11):—

"The energetic way in which the great religious revival in this country is being managed under the new advertising regime is shown by the unusual methods adopted to attract and hold worshippers. A preacher in Baltimore has broken new ground by providing free meals during his all-day evangelistic services in that city.

"The preacher, the Rev. E. T. Liddell, has been conducting a successful series of revival meetings in Virginia, and paid a flying visit to Baltimore. As he could only be in the city for a single day, it was decided to occupy every moment of his time. Accordingly, continual services were held at the Methodist Church of the Redeemer, and a hot luncheon, consisting of boiled ham, roast beef, rolls and coffee, and a supper were provided for the worshippers.

"The congregation was enormous all day, though whether the meals had anything to do with it is difficult to say."

Who says the Church is behind the age? All it wants now is smoking pews and spittoons.

"When God Laughs" is the title of Mr. Jack London's new book. The reviewers raise no objection. Twenty-five years ago it would have been horrible, even in the *Freethinker*. Evidently our real offence was being a bit in front of the time. Pioneers generally have to pay penalties.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday, April 21, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, London, W.: at 7.30, "Christianity and the Coal Strike."

April 28, Queen's Hall, London.

May 5 & 12, South-place Institute.

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—April 28, Wood Green; 30, and May 1, Belfast; 5, Victoria Park; 12, m., Finsbury Park, n., Parliament Hill.
- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—April 21, West Ham.
- PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1912.—Previously acknowledged, £119 7s. 11d. Received since:—Henry Jessop, £5; R. Stirton and Friends—Dundee (quarterly), £1 10s.; John Deacon, 5s. 3d.
- J. F. A.—Pleased to hear Mr. Bates had good meetings at Hanley; but sorry, though not surprised, at the violent bigotry of "Christian ladies and gentlemen" in the audience.
- L. KOTHE (S. Africa).—Always glad to receive cuttings affording raw material for a paragraph.
- E. HARVEY.—Sending as desired. Glad to hear of the "happiness" you have "experienced from a perusal of the *Freethinker*" during many years. With regard to an item now and then that you don't care for, you must remember that this is inevitable. No paper is perfect, and no reader is perfect either.
- E. B.—Thanks for letter. We are glad to hear that your news-agent, who is trying to sell the *Freethinker* at your request, began with one copy and now sells four, with a prospect of further progress. We wish all our readers would do something to promote our circulation in this way.
- A. MILLAR.—Absolute rhymes are not so plentiful. And even that rhyme would be absolute to many people's ears. It depends, of course, on pronunciation.
- J. G. BRIGGS.—Solemn argument is inappropriate to a *jeu d'esprit*.
- VERA ZASSULITCH.—Your denial of our statement takes the form of an economic argument, with which we can have no concern in this journal.
- E. RICHMOND.—You will see by the advertisement on our back page that Mr. Foote is to lecture at Queen's Hall on Thomas Hardy's "God's Funeral."
- C. W. CHRISTIE.—Will see if it is worth notice. Thanks.
- W. MANN.—Lee's work on the Inquisition did not exist then. We shall have to consult it in a new edition. Glad to have your appreciation of the chapter as it stands. You are not "wearying" our readers. Quite the contrary. No articles are more acceptable than yours.
- J. W. H. DAVIS.—Pleased you "always find the *Freethinker* a great treat." We don't expect a big circulation, but our readers are readers, and influence others.
- HENRY JESSOP, subscribing to the President's Honorarium Fund, says: "I hope you will receive a greater response to the appeal for this Fund, which to say the least you richly deserve."
- R. STATION.—Accept our thanks for your continued zeal in the matter.
- A. POTTS.—He was connected with the N. S. S. in the Manchester district for a short time in the early 'eighties. The rest is romance; especially the passage about Mrs. Besant and Dr. Aveling.
- THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- WHEN the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Shop Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- PERMITS 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 delivers this evening (April 21) the first of the two final lectures of the 1911-12 course at the Queen's (Minor) Hall. His subject will be "Christianity and the Coal Strike." His object will be to show what an ignominious failure Christianity is now, and also to show that social chaos is likely to continue until Humanism had completely taken its place. We hope Freethinkers will try to bring some of their more orthodox friends along to hear this lecture, which should be important as well as interesting.

After the close of the Sunday evening lectures at Queen's Hall a special effort will be made farther east. South Place Institute has been engaged for the first two Sunday evenings in May. Admission to all parts of the hall will be free. Every service rendered in connection with these lectures will be gratuitous, including the lectures themselves; and an attempt will be made to raise a little money for the Society at the end of an unusually expensive winter season. Mr. Foote is preparing two fresh lectures for the occasion, of which fuller notice will be given in our next issue. It is to be hoped, therefore, that there will be a crowded audience on each occasion, and that the "saints" will come prepared to contribute with extra liberality to the collection.

The Rationalist Peace Society has engaged the Queen's (Minor) Hall for Sunday evening, May 19, when a public meeting (with free admission) will be addressed by Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, Miss Kough, Mr. F. J. Gould, Mr. George Greenwood, M.P., Mr. G. W. Foote, and others whose names will be announced later. Freethinkers should regard this as the Peace meeting of the special season, and the hall ought to be crowded.

Tuesday evening (April 30) is the date of the next "social" at Anderton's Hotel under the auspices of the National Secular Society's Executive. No charge for admission is made at these pleasant functions. Members of the N. S. S. have the privilege of introducing a friend. Non-members who have no one to introduce them can obtain a ticket of admission gratis by applying to Miss E. M. Vance, 2 Newcastle-street, London, E.C.

Mr. A. B. Moss has an excellent reply in the *Camberwell Borough Advertiser* to two reverend gentlemen. It is a cheerful sign of the times that such letters should be printed in newspapers.

Mr. J. W. Gott publishes on April 20 the story of his "Trial and Imprisonment for Blasphemy." He claims to have had some special prison experiences. Mr. Gott's address is 28 Church Bank, Bradford.

Miss Vance, the N. S. S. Secretary, wishes to remind Branch Secretaries and others that all notices of motion for the Conference Agenda should reach the office by April 26, and that the books of the Society close for the year on that date. Branches in arrears with their subscriptions are not entitled to vote at the Conference.

We do not as a rule sell outside publications at our publishing office, but we make an exception occasionally. We did so in connection with Mr. Manson's exposure of the Salvation Army. We are doing so again in connection with Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner's little book on the Blasphemy Laws, entitled *Penalties Upon Opinion*, which we strongly advise all who are interested in the subject—and what Freethinker has not some interest in it?—to obtain and keep constantly by them. An advance copy of the volume, containing rather more than a hundred pages, enables us to commend it unreservedly to our readers' attention. We intend to notice it at some length in next week's *Freethinker*. Our review will thus appear on the day of publication,—for the volume will not be on sale until April 25. Meanwhile we are in a position to say that Mrs. Bonner's history of the Blasphemy Laws, and their applications, with a view to their indictment, is surprisingly well done in such a moderate compass. We want to push the circulation of the book for its own sake, as well as for the sake of our old General's daughter, who has very fittingly undertaken, and very ably executed, this important task. The price of the paper-bound copies is sixpence net, and that of the cloth-bound copies one shilling net. Orders, as per advertisement, can be placed with the Pioneer Press.

Restoration of Ferrer's Books.

IN *El Progreso* of March 29, Senor Cristobal Litran (late secretary and intimate personal friend of Ferrer) who was appointed, jointly with myself, as one of the testamentary executors under Ferrer's will, has made an authoritative and reassuring statement in reference to the proximate reopening of the publishing house in connection with the Escuela Moderna. He tells us that the famous books and pamphlets issued by Ferrer during the momentous years of his scholastic activities will soon be on sale to the general public.

When the Decree restituting Ferrer's property to his heirs was promulgated, the bigots took instant alarm at the prospect of these books, which embody the soul of Ferrer, being resurrected from the tomb of confiscation. They had slain the man they hated, and they had obtained a sentence placing an embargo upon the whole of his property for the expressed and legally defined purpose, as set forth in the sentence of death, of levying upon that property the indemnities considered to be due to the churches and conventual houses in respect of the damages arising to their establishments out of the insurrection of which Ferrer was declared to be the chief and author. The new Decree has frustrated their hopes and disappointed their cupidity. They have rent the air with their cries of protestation, and have grown rabid with religious fury. I have before me a copy of *Accion*, the reactionary organ of conservatism and clericalism in Barcelona, which, in its issue of February 20, groans its complaint that the Government "is placing Spain under the fantastic yoke of the execrable International League for the Rights of Man," and then utters its pathetic moan as follows: "They are handing over his property to Ferrer's family, they are passing on to the hands of his heirs those numerous volumes which are poison and venom to Spain, while the victims of the savage doings of 1909 will not get the very slightest indemnity." And Mr. Belloc will perhaps note with grief that the doleful article winds up by declaring that the aforesaid League "has triumphed once again, and the sentence which fell on Ferrer remains, in part, unexecuted, either from fear or knavery." More misdoings of the Grand Orient!

The religious congregations moved in arrest of the devolution of the books to Ferrer's executors. After the issue of the Decree of December 29 last, they felt that they were powerless to intercept the handing over of the other effects, but they drew the line at the books, the terrible books, full of irreligion and modern science, and full of baleful influence upon the faith once delivered to the saints and kept alive by fire and rack in Spain. Every difficulty known to the law was placed in the way of the restitution of the books, and for some time the execution of that part of the new Decree was held in abeyance. And now Senor Litran informs us that the Supreme Tribunal of War and Marine has ordered the devolution to Ferrer's heirs of the entire property lately held under embargo by the Government. But even at the eleventh hour the bigots continued their terrified protestations. *El Radical*, of March 28, published a telegram from Barcelona stating that the Ladies' League of Catholic Action had addressed a memorial to the Governor of Barcelona imploring him, as President of the Provincial Junta of Public Instruction, to prohibit the circulation of the books of the Escuela Moderna then lately handed over to Ferrer's heirs. Failing the Governor of Barcelona, they pray that the Governor of Heaven will intervene and make a bonfire of the books. But, apparently, nothing in heaven above nor on the earth beneath could shake the resolution of the Tribunal to make its Decree absolute. And so, in their desperation the bigots sought to obtain an expurgation of the accursed books, and would have been meanly satisfied with a humiliating compromise which would have made a funeral pyre—a sort of twentieth century *auto-da-fé*—of the more pronouncedly irreligious books on the list. But

not even that poor satisfaction will be left to the unco guid, whose religion can tolerate the bull-fight but stands horrified before the Rationalism of the Escuela Moderna.

Before long, the books of this much maligned institution will once more be on sale in Barcelona; and I am the more glad to make this announcement as I know that Ferrer's own main thought and his most anxious solicitude during the terrible weeks in which he was waiting in his cold and vermin-haunted cell for the supreme sacrifice of his life, was that his school and his books and the continuance after his death of their beneficent influence, might be made secure. And I am glad that the people in different parts of the world, who so often send me their inquiries as to the possibility of purchasing Ferrer's publications, will at last be able to possess themselves of these works. They will rejoice with me that the publishing stock which we feared might never again see the light, except the sinister light of vandalism and destruction, remains intact; and that the educational work of the Escuela Moderna will be perpetuated within the ever widening limits of law and right. On the tomb of the heroic Martyr of Montjuich the edifice of his educational and pedagogic conceptions will remain as an imperishable monument to his enlightened love of humanity.

A definitive announcement, made in *El Progreso* of April 4, subsequent to the writing of the foregoing lines, puts at rest all doubt as to the final devolution of Ferrer's goods and allays all our fears as to the continuance of the educational work of the Escuela Moderna. It now appears that by the direction of the Supreme Tribunal of War and Marine, the landed property of Francisco Ferrer, consisting of a wood in Alella, and the farm house and property known as Mas Germinal, at Mongat, has been formally handed over to the legal ownership of José Ferrer. Such disposition of the property in question is entirely in conformity with the provisions of the Martyr's will. In addition to this, Ferrer's money and valuables, deposited at the Bank of Spain in Barcelona, have been legally restored to Ferrer's heirs.

Simultaneously with this act, the same Military Court handed over to Senor Lorenzo Portet, late of Liverpool, the entire publishing stock of the Escuela Moderna, together with all Ferrer's papers and manuscripts. Lorenzo Portet, as all the world knows, was named and appointed in Ferrer's will as the man honored with the duty of continuing the publishing and pedagogic work of the Escuela Moderna. The books have accordingly been removed from the judicial *depôt* where they have long been retained under the embargo placed upon them by the Court, and are now in stock at the new publishing premises of the Escuela Moderna, viz., Cortes, 478, Barcelona.

I am in a position to say that the personnel of the Escuela Moderna will continue the same as before the assassination of Ferrer, and that the philosophic and educational principles which my friend Portet, who now succeeds Ferrer in the direction of the Escuela Moderna, will impart to the new undertaking, will remain Rationalistic.

Among the works which will shortly be published by the Escuela Moderna will be the following: *La Gran Revolucion*, a translation into Spanish of the colossal work of historical and scientific criticism by Prince Kropotkine; and amongst other notable books there will be included the fifteen volumes, constituting the *Popular Encyclopædia of Higher Education*, which, in point of fact, had been planned by Ferrer only a few months prior to his arrest.

I may add that the new publishing house will continue to be known by its old title, "Publicaciones de la Escuela Moderna," and that the business will have a branch establishment abroad, either in Paris or at Brussels.

At the moment of my penning these lines, Senor Portet is actively engaged in superintending the operations of removing and stocking the invaluable books bequeathed to his charge by Francisco Ferrer.

Together with Senor Litran's article an interesting booklet, entitled *Les Biens de Ferrer*, etc.,* has just come to hand. It contains M. Lorand's articles explanatory of the recent Ferrer Decree; a full translation in French of the Decree itself; the verbatim report of Senor Alvarez's speech in the Cortes in favor of revision; and, amongst other things, an account of the proceedings at the inauguration of the Ferrer Monument, with the text of Haeckel's letter. This booklet gathers, in its 125 pages, a great deal of interesting matter of permanent historic value in connection with the later stages of the Ferrer movement, and its modest price, apart from its intrinsic value, should command for it a wide circulation.

The restoration of Ferrer's property to his heirs practically completes the splendid labors of my friend Lorand. His devotion is beyond all praise. Seven journeys to Madrid and Barcelona, and forty visits to Paris, during the last eighteen months, constitute only a part of his work in achieving this conspicuous victory for justice and truth. I am almost overwhelmed by my sense of personal gratitude to him for so efficiently carrying out the onerous task of Testamentary Executor under Ferrer's will. But duty and gratitude alike compel me to add what Lorand would be foremost in admitting, viz., that the Spanish Liberal Government, and especially Don José Canelejas, the Spanish Prime Minister, as well as the administrative and judicial authorities in Spain, have, in this matter, acted nobly in facilitating the reparation of a great wrong. My friend Lorand is anxious that due acknowledgment should be made, far and wide, of this fact, so honorable to the fair name of Spain, and he expressly asks me to invite all English and American Freethinkers to join with him in raising three hearty cheers for Canelejas.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

Modern Materialism.—V.

(Continued from p. 230.)

"Agnosticism—a religio-philosophical Cave of Adullam wherein are gathered the discontented from various regions of thought. Agnosticism is especially the euphemistic retreat of scientific thinkers unwilling to be thought Nature-worshipers, and of cultured freethinkers escaping the vulgar connotations of 'Atheism,' while maintaining their criticisms on all Theistic theories."—MONCURE D. CONWAY, *Free Review*, No. 1, vol. i.

"But, in reality, if we look at things in open daylight, we find that the 'Unknowable' of modern Agnostics is nothing more than the good old God of the theologian, who has already made his appearance in so many deceptive disguises in the history of philosophy. It makes no essential difference whether he answers to the name of 'Will,' or 'Unknown,' or 'Thing *per se*,' or 'Universal Soul,' or 'Unknowable.' At the bottom of it we always find the same anthropomorphic disfigurement, the same *asylum ignorantie*, and the same vague being which, being begotten of the fear of the unknown, ruled of yore over the crude primeval man, and will continue to rule over the civilised man, until the sun of knowledge and the recognition of a natural and self-contained order of the world shall have made a reality of the *Fiat lux!*"—LUDWIG BUCHNER, *Force and Matter*, 1884, p. 499.

"It is the misfortune of all truly great minds to be wedded to errors as well as to truths."—LESTER WARD, *Dynamic Sociology*, vol. i., p. 83.

It is plain enough that Spencer wrote *First Principles*, in which he propounded the gospel of Agnosticism, and the reconciliation of religion and science, to escape the charge of Atheism and Materialism which he foresaw would be levelled against the Synthetic Philosophy—and justly so—by the orthodox. It was a sop to Cerberus, a concession to the vindictive religious spirit.

But—as we shall see further on—it was only by forcing a wrong interpretation upon Atheism, an interpretation that Atheists repudiate, that Spencer was able to make a show of opposing it.

We have seen how Agnosticism was received by the ordinary Nonconformist, as represented by Mr.

Spurgeon; its reception by the orthodox among the upper class was not more cordial. "The first feeling of religious believers on the appearance of this shadowy enemy was made up of bewilderment and dismay," says Mr. Benn, the historian of English Rationalism; Mr. Gladstone "denouncing Agnosticism as more dangerous to religion than Atheism." But "since then," says the same historian, "a more conciliatory attitude has been adopted; and the acknowledged chief of the Agnostic school seems in a fair way to be accepted as a great religious teacher."* Such is the fate of the Atheist who truckles to the religious spirit.

Mr. J. M. Robertson notes the case of a clergyman who "professed to find himself, as a religionist, in substantial harmony with Spencer, and so opened up a new vista of the possibilities of dishonest clerical maintenance of meaningless dogma and ceremonial."†

In the *Nineteenth Century* for February, 1884, will be found an article entitled *Christian Agnosticism*, by Canon Curteis, in which he sought to prove that the early Church fathers and "the great Catholic theologians.....are all 'agnostics' to a man." Doubtless, the time is not far distant when we shall find Church dignitaries professing themselves "Christian Atheists," and citing Charles Bradlaugh as the founder of their faith.

But, leaving aside these unscrupulous special pleaders, who capitulate to a victorious enemy to avoid annihilation, who endeavor to identify force and energy with the Christian God, and so make out a plausible case for retaining their ecclesiastical salaries, we quite agree with Sir Crichton Browne in tracing modern Materialism to its fountain head in the philosophy of Herbert Spencer. His *Principles of Psychology*—the intense labor of composing which completely shattered his health—in which mind is treated as the necessary outcome of matter in motion, is nothing more nor less than a manual of Materialism, in spite of his repudiation there of the title "Materialist." We ourselves freely acknowledge our indebtedness to Spencer, as, indeed, must every materialist and evolutionist, whether he is aware of it or not. If we put aside the futile *First Principles*, we are face to face with a purely Atheistic system which stands four-square to all the winds of criticism. He is our greatest philosopher. Mr. Lester Ward, the American scientist, the author of *Dynamic Sociology*, one of the finest works ever issued from America, observes:—

"Mr. Herbert Spencer has received, and probably deserves, the title of England's greatest philosopher; and when we reach England's greatest in any achievement of mind, we have usually reached the world's greatest."‡

And further:—

"No man probably ever wrote as much as he has written without saying more than the average judgment of mankind could not indorse as soon as presented. This is due to the firm manner in which his reason is enthroned, and the all-sided practical wisdom with which his extensive information enables him to survey every problem."§

But he takes exception to the so-called reconciliation of religion and science. He observes:—

"Within the historic period, the territory once belonging to the gods, which has been contested and reclaimed by science, embraces the entire fields of astronomy, physics, chemistry, and geology. That of biology has now fairly passed out of theological supremacy, while those of moral and social phenomena are at the present time the battle-ground between science and religion. And now Mr. Spencer comes forward and proclaims that the latter must continue to retreat and surrender its empire, until the line is reached which sets absolute bounds to all possible human comprehension. This he is pleased to call a reconciliation! It certainly affords the only indication that the work of scientific invasion will ever find a

* A. W. Benn, *History of English Rationalism*, vol. ii., p. 204.

† Robertson, *Modern Humanists*, 1891, p. 226.

‡ Lester Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, 1897, vol. i., p. 139.

§ *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 218.

limit; and any terms with a victorious enemy are better than annihilation."*

Mr. J. M. Robertson, our finest critic, affirms that the mind of Spencer, in spite of certain flaws, "was one of the most massive and comprehensive that ever looked on men's problems;"+ and observes:—

"Here is an eye that devours in turn, with patient hunger, whole provinces of knowledge, whole kingdoms of nature, not merely cataloguing their contents, but working out their laws and relating them with passionless care to the whole scheme of things." †

He compares his gigantic task to the work of Magellan, who first circumnavigated the world; and remarks that, if you only master a single one of his minor works,—

"you will find yourself faced by a range of practical observation and a degree of generalising power which, had there been no other manifestation of them, would have sufficed to reveal an original and commanding intellect." §

Mr. Robertson also disagrees with Spencer's scheme of reconciliation. He says:—

"Religion and Science are to be finally reconciled observe, when Religion has abandoned every dogma and every positive belief, and takes the shape of a final negative proposition that Science never rejected, and has long affirmed."

He says Spencer makes the assumption that Atheism professes "to 'explain' the Universe in a sense in which Agnosticism does not." But, as he points out,—

"Atheism is just the negation of all Theisms, and is thus fundamentally on all fours with Agnosticism. Spencer's own final position is the assertion of an Infinite and Incomprehensible energy, which, all the while, he admits to be as unthinkable as the self-existence of the Universe";

and concludes that Spencer argued "down a doctrine whose name he did not like, though it was scientifically identical with his own." ||

Even Professor Hudson, who so strenuously defends Spencer's Agnosticism, is obliged to admit that it is unfortunate that Spencer made such prominent use of the word "Unknowable":—

"Because [says the Professor] he has thus left a loophole for what has been described as some of the dreariest twaddle which has been given to the world under the name of philosophical discussion since the days of mediæval scholasticism." ¶

But the Professor's perception of other people's folly does not prevent him from contributing his share of "twaddle" to the controversy, and we soon find him floundering in the same morass in company with all those who accept the Spencerian compromise, for, he observes:—

"To speak of the Divine Will, or a Personal Creator, or an intelligent Governor of the universe, is, from the standpoint of philosophical exactness, scarcely more admissible than to go back at once to the quaintly manlike images of the early Hebrew Scriptures."

Having thus deprived God of Will, Personality, Creative Powers, and Intelligence, one would have thought that the Professor would have taken the next logical step and declared himself an Atheist; instead of which, he picks up the fallen idol, gives it another name, and restores it to its old position, as follows:—

"We are not, therefore, to suppose that we are left without touch upon the Unseen and Eternal, or that there is no kinship and no communion between our spirits and the Source and Sustainer of all things." **

Thus can a professor of literature "keep the balls in the air."

As Mr. Benn has remarked, Spencer's "incoherent and vacillating treatment also served to confuse the

* Lester Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, vol. ii., p. 269.

† *The Reformer*, February, 1904, p. 83.

‡ *Modern Humanists*, 1891, p. 216.

§ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

|| *Ibid.*, pp. 223-232.

¶ W. H. Hudson, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Herbert Spencer*, 1904, pp. 115-6.

** *Ibid.*, p. 116.

logical issues of the whole controversy, and to embarrass the position of more consistent thinkers."* But, as he points out, Spencer's "formula of evolution is so constructed that the most determined Atheist might safely accept it, so far as fidelity to mechanical principles of explanation is concerned." To this—

"must be added the perfunctory character of Spencer's argument against Atheism. It amounts to no more than the inconceivability of self-existence. Now this difficulty—admitting it be a difficulty, which many will deny—applies also to the Infinite and Eternal Energy, or it does not. In the former case, what becomes of dogmatic Agnosticism? In the latter case, what prevents the Atheist from accepting the world and refusing to go a step beyond it? If twitted with not offering an explanation of what exists, he may fairly reply that none is needed, and that, according to his opponent, none can be conceived that would not equally require to be explained. If asked by what right he denies God's existence, he may reply with equal fairness that the burden of proof falls on the affirmative side. Divine activity is the necessary condition of belief in a divine being. Where no such activity makes itself felt, no such belief can be required. Appearances once quoted in evidence of it having been explained away by Spencer and others as the result of unconscious physical agencies." †

And what were Spencer's views as to a future life? Mr. Benn says:—

"In the latest, as in the earliest edition of *First Principles*, there is an ominous silence about this side of the question—a side which for many constitutes its sole importance. Here there is no comforting reservation of an ultimate mystery; not a chance of truth survives. Until a year before the philosopher's death, that silence remained unbroken." ‡

Then, in his book of *Facts and Comments*, says Mr. Benn, we learn that the idea of a future life "originated in nothing better than the baseless savage superstition of 'a wandering double suggested by dreams, which comes back on awaking, and goes away for an indefinite time at death.'" §

And as for consciousness, says Spencer,—

"We can only infer that it is a specialised and individualised form of that Infinite and Eternal Energy which transcends both our knowledge and our imagination; and that at death its elements lapse into the Infinite and Eternal Energy whence they were derived." §

So away goes the soul and future life, along with angel hosts and heavenly crowns, all helter-skelter into the limbo of exploded superstitions, and God might as well follow them, for what any believer would care, after this wholesale clearance. The only use people have for a God now is to guarantee them a future life; and if they became convinced that a future life was a myth, they would not care twopence whether there is a God or not. It would be a case of no future bliss, no present pew-rent; no heavenly crowns, no prayer and praise. People are not in the habit of giving something for nothing in religion, any more than in worldly transactions. They are not going—to use an Australian metaphor—to "hump the Cross" for nothing. W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

FINE OLD ENGLISH GENTLEMEN, ALL OF THE OLDEN TIME.

The *Brighton Herald* gives the following account of a novel amusement invented by some military gentlemen:— "A party of Officers belonging to a regiment of Dragoons, lately procured a young bear, which, after depriving of sight, they baited for their diversion with dogs in their riding schools. The most formidable opponent of Bruin was a particularly high bred bull-dog which, rushing upon him, would seize him by the throat, turn him on his back, and fix him to the ground, without the beast, though unmuzzled, being able to extricate himself. But this amusement has been put a stop to by authority."—*Observer*, April 5, 1812.

* *English Rationalism*, vol. ii., p. 235.

† Benn, *English Rationalism*, vol. ii., p. 234.

‡ *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 231.

§ Spencer, *Facts and Comments*, p. 203; cited by Benn, *English Rationalism*, vol. ii., p. 231.

God Dwells Amongst You.

God? I cannot see it in the baby's laughing eyes,
Nor in the morning's glory, nor in the star-strewn skies,
Nor in the hush of even, when the peewee's wailing song
Haunts the darkening meadows, ever brooding o'er a wrong.*

God? where is it? In the horrors heated in the city's flame?
Is it circling round my sister branded by a devil-name?
Is it strong to save and succor, give life pure, and sweet, and
clean
To a sweated toil-worn victim whose joy is the obscene?

God? I cannot hear it in the hard unsympathetic street,
Beaten by the thousand thousand weary, work-worn feet
Of men and women spectra who laboriously give
Their ugly tragedies of lives for the privilege to live.

God? Will you test its great beneficence by an orator's
appeal,
Or by a human phantom standing by a whirring wheel?
Will you prove its soothing solace o'er a murderer near death,
Or by a dust-drowned mother sacrificing every breath

For her hungry, lonely, little ones in a slum room on the
earth,
Weeping for the life-bought food of love from her who gave
them birth?

Will you say the truth is yonder, in respectable attire,
In church, or here, deep down, amongst the human mire?

God? Tell me if you can find it in the Christian's easy
mind,
Or in the stagnant cruel creeds by fanatics once defined,
Or in the thronging palaces of paltry prayer and praise,
Or in the heart-harrowing wailings hungry children raise.

In ministerial mansion, or in the sweating den,
Does it show its wondrous leaven, its love, and lovelinesses
then,
When the mind is tuned by comfort to a sickly senseless
hymn,
Or when life's leaden, gall-filled cup o'erruns its ragged
brim?

God? Is it in the grief-grey brows of those who wonder
why
God continues doing nothing while they must toil to die;
In the dark, the dirt, the trouble, in the fear oppression
feeds,
Why such a vast array of words and never any deeds?

God? The great crowds roar contempt that echoes to the
skies;
The city's grime and squalor growl in tongue that never lies;
But the heart of man is opening; his eyes on truth are set;
The love that vainly flowed to God will be turned man-ward
yet.

ROBERT MORELAND.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

I suppose Christianity pure and simple, the essence of
Christianity, is to be found, if anywhere, in the Sermon on
the Mount. These transcendental hyperboles of Jesus about
humility, patience, other-worldliness have a truly pathetic
power, when they are supposed to be uttered by an Almighty
God who descended from Heaven to teach them. But these
"counsels of perfection" are not so perfect when simply
uttered by a young moral enthusiast. And they have been
practically dropped by the wisdom of the Church and by
the noblest Christians.

Take them seriatim:—(1) "Blessed are the poor in spirit:
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Humility is a virtue,
but Comto's parody is far higher—"Blessed are the rich in
heart: for theirs is the Kingdom of Earth." Humility is
good and beautiful, but Charity is better. The first is vague
mysticism; the second is noble and practical morality.
(2) "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be com-
forted"—mystical extravagance. (3) "Blessed are the
meek: for they shall inherit the earth." That is sheer
nonsense. They may inherit Heaven (we do not know), but
not earth. The other beatitudes on the merciful, on the
pure in heart, on the peacemakers, are beautiful and true.
But Confucius, Buddha, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius said
much the same, though not in a way so pathetic, so mystical,
so passionate. Then comes that famous declaration as to

* The peewit, or peewee, as it is named in Scotland, is called the Judas-bird, because, by its weird cries, it betrayed the whereabouts of the Covenanters, and so led to their capture by their pursuers.

the fulfilment of every jot and tittle of the Mosaic law—a thing which Paul and the Pauline Church utterly repudiated and cast aside. "Then whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of Hell-Fire." Jesus' interpretation of the law against adultery marks a great and notable moral advance. But it is immediately followed up by the injunction to pluck out the right eye and cut off the right hand. The injunction against swearing has been formally broken by all Christian countries, for the injunction is against *all* swearing, and is not limited to profane swearing. "Turn the other cheek to the smiter" is extravagance. It is not healthy morality at all, and no Christian treats it seriously but a fanatic. The injunctions as to Charity are fine, but quite hysterical and unreal. "Love your enemies." No man can *love* his enemies, and it would be moral weakness to pretend to do so. We forgive our enemies; remain unmoved. Such language used by the Son of God, who had descended to soften men's fierce hearts, has a meaning and a justification. But in a young moralist, it is morbid and unreal. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect"—is impossible. How can the sinful and corrupt nature of man imitate divine goodness? If we come to look at the Lord's Prayer there is little in it that can be called moral elevation. And when we come to the hyperbolic injunctions to take no thought for the morrow or what we eat or drink, or what we shall put on, we have commands which no Christian follows, which it would be utterly immoral to follow, which are conceivable as the utterances of God, but which are ridiculous and inhuman in a man.—*Frederic Harrison, "Positivist Review."*

Correspondence.

FREETHOUGHT IN S. AFRICA.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In your issue of February 4 ("Sugar Plums"), Mr. E. P. Beere is referred to as secretary of the S. African Rationalist Association, thus ignoring Mr. J. D. Stevens, who does not deserve this at your hands. Mr. E. P. Beere is one of our vice-presidents, and our mainstay as a lecturer. He is also an enthusiastic worker, who only requires to know that any work is being neglected, from handing out bills to hunting up speakers, to do it himself, at no matter what personal inconvenience.

Mr. Beere's lectures are remarkable for the great care with which every word is chosen, for the order with which argument is marshalled, and the epigrammatic incisiveness of his expressions. He also keeps well up-to-date in all the best literature of his subject.

We have other members who can be relied on for emergencies, who have other qualities. Mr. Manson especially, who can decorate his addresses with purple patches recited from the leading poets and others. This gentleman has the unique peculiarity, for an anti-Christian lecturer, of boasting that he has not read the Bible for I don't know how many years, and says he doesn't intend ever to read it again; he says that to demonstrate the absurdity of the Bible you require no more than the superficial knowledge of its fairy tales possessed by your Christian audience, and further study is time wasted that had been better devoted to books that tell the truth, unless you are a philologist or an antiquary. I am not sure that he isn't right.

Last Sunday night we had a lecture from Mrs. Wybergh, a Theosophist, who is considered the best lady speaker in S. Africa, and it was altogether a red-letter day. We have also had many prominent Labor leaders, including one M.L.A.; but, taking them all round, I think that the lectures of visitors either run to platitudes, from want of sympathy in detail, or to politics, which are most undesirable.

East Rand, Transvaal, March 6.

JOHN LATHAM.

[Mr. Latham might have written that first sentence otherwise. We meant no sort of offence to Mr. J. D. Stevens. Not being able to gain knowledge by intuition, we have to depend on experience and information. When we received what seemed an official communication from the S. African Rationalist Association, signed by Mr. Beere, we concluded that he was the new secretary. Of course we are glad to hear that Mr. Stevens is still at the old post, for we hold him in much respect.—EDITOR.]

To complain that life has no joys, while there is a single creature whom we can relieve by our bounty, assist by our counsels, or enliven by our presence, is to lament the loss of that which we possess, and it is just as rational as to die of thirst with the cup in our hands.

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, "Christianity and the Coal Strike."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford, E.): 7.30, J. T. Lloyd, "A Scientific Study of Death."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 3.15, E. Saphin, a Lecture.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (The Green): 7.45, E. Burke, "Buddhism and Christian Pretences."

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Finsbury Park): 11.30, W. Bradford, a Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields): 3, F. A. Davies, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, J. M. Gimson, "The Letters of Horace Walpole."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, E. Egerton Stafford, "Miracles."

OUTDOOR.

DERBY (Market Square): Joseph A. E. Bates—Sunday, April 21, at 7.30, "God or Matter?" Monday, 22, at 8, "Science and Immortality"; Tuesday, 23, at 8, "The Uselessness of Monarchy"; Wednesday, 24, at 8, "History and Character of Christian Symbolism"; Thursday, 25, at 8, "Philosophy of Materialism"; Friday, 26, at 8, "The Paradox of Christian Socialism."

PROPAGANDIST LEAFLETS. New Issue. 1. *Hunting Skunks*, G. W. Foote; 2. *Bible and Tectotalism*, J. M. Wheeler; 3. *Principles of Secularism*, C. Watts; 4. *Where Are Your Hospitals?* R. Ingersoll. 5. *Because the Bible Tells Me So*, W. P. Ball; 6. *The Parson's Creed*. Often the means of arresting attention and making new members. Price 6d. per hundred, post free 7d. Special rates for larger quantities. Samples on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—N. S. S. SECRETARY, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

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