

THE

# Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XXXII.—No. 30

SUNDAY, JULY 28, 1912

PRICE TWOPENCE

*Whoever attacks the popular falsehoods of his time will find that a lie defends itself by telling other lies. Nothing is so prolific, nothing can so multiply itself, nothing can lay and hatch so many eggs, as a good, healthy religious lie.—INGERSOLL.*

### More Fighting.

THE attack upon freedom goes on apace. It is in obedience to a deliberate policy of the reactionaries in England. There will be no occasion for surprise if advanced movements are presently fighting all along the line for their very existence.

Police prosecutions for "blasphemy," for instance, are evidently not ended. There have been five within the last twelve months, and a sixth is pending at this moment in Leeds. We shall have to write about it later on in this article. For the present we wish to deal with the action of the London County Council, which has already been referred to in our columns.

It has been obvious for some time that the London County Council is seeking to suppress all except specially permitted public meetings in its parks and other open spaces. Public meetings are all right while the London County Council can choose the speakers and their principles. Otherwise they are all wrong. That is the view—not the avowed view, but the actual view—of the "Moderate" majority of the London County Council, as it is the view of all reactionaries at all places and at all times.

The Council started its attack on free speech at Streatham Common. It was a well-devised attack, and it was a great pity that the defence was not in better hands. The police, of course, cheerfully lent their assistance. Under the pretence of preserving order, they skilfully encouraged the most abominable disorder. At last it was announced that a small army of medical students and Billingsgate fish-porters were going to march to Streatham Common and demonstrate their fidelity to the Christian religion by breaking up the Freethought lecturer's platform and throwing him into the pond,—a brilliant idea which extremely tickled the pious fancy of a local newspaper. Checking the rowdies who proclaimed their violent intentions did not commend itself to the guardians of the peace at Streatham Common. They adopted the novel and easy policy of arresting and prosecuting the intended victim of this concerted outrage. It was as if a constable found a man calling loudly for help against several ruffians who were badly assaulting him, and ran him in for causing disorder in the public streets.

When a question was asked by two or three members of the House of Commons on this matter, the Home Secretary explained that the authorities were perfectly justified in suppressing, by fine or imprisonment, a man who persisted in uttering opinions that displeased the majority of his fellow citizens. The House of Commons, with rare exceptions, cordially acquiesced in this new "Liberal" doctrine. Even out of doors, the only prominent journalist who protested against this new reading of the old law of liberty, this reversal of all that Englishmen had understood as the rule of freedom,

was the late W. T. Stead in the *Review of Reviews*. We thanked him for it then, and we mention it to his honor now.

The County Council made the disorder of its own encouragement an excuse for closing Freethought meetings at Streatham Common altogether. Religious topics may be discussed again when the local atmosphere is cooler! Which it is likely to be, according to those who discovered its high temperature, in the next ice age.

The next move of the London County Council's attack on liberty was what we may call "the law of permits." Adventurers went talking in the parks and collecting money for themselves. On this ground it was arranged that collections should only be taken up for *bona fide* societies. This arrangement could hardly be objected to. The N. S. S. Executive took permits for all the Branches collectively, and the collections were all acknowledged, with the expenses of the various meetings, in the annual balance-sheet. But there was no pleasing the Council, even when complying with its requests. When the collective permit was applied for in regard to the present summer it was refused on the ground that "the Council is not satisfied that the money collected would be entirely devoted to the furtherance of some public object." The N. S. S. asked, in reply, what was a "public object" if it did not cover a collection in which the collectors had no personal interest whatever. But the County Council orders and does not explain. It threatens proceedings if collections are taken up without its "permit." We have advised that the collections should be continued. They *have* been continued. If the Council keeps its word the matter will go into the Courts—even to the Court of Appeal. It will have to be seen whether a County Council bye-law is the law of England. In this case we do not think it is. And the question shall be tested. It is no part of a Secularist's duty to lie down whenever the "authorities" order him to do so. He has moral, and we trust legal, rights of his own.

With regard to the "blasphemy" prosecution of Stephen Edward Bullock (who lectured for family reasons as E. B. Stephens at Rotherham), the case was committed to the Leeds Assizes, and the N. S. S. is providing solicitor and counsel for the defence. Resistance must be offered to every revival of the Blasphemy Laws. That is a matter of principle with the N. S. S. Moreover, we have read the Police Court depositions; and we say deliberately, though the matter is *sub judice* as we write, that if a man can be sent to prison on what we may call the substantive testimony of the two first (police) witnesses, there is no security left for free speech on religion in England. Let it be remembered, too, that the Sheffield police, instead of proceeding by summons—for "blasphemy" is only a "misdemeanor"—actually arrested this young man at his lodgings, and took him through the public streets to the station.

Later witnesses alleged that Mr. Bullock frequently used the word "damned." We are not bound to believe them; neither are we able to contradict them. The word is out of place at public meetings, but to prosecute it as "blasphemy" is an abuse of the English law as well as the English language.

G. W. FOOTE

## The Bible as a School Book.

THE clergy insist that the Bible is the beginning and end of wisdom, and say, or rather shout, that national degeneration must inevitably follow its removal from the schools. Let us test this sacred volume as a school book. Much of it is totally unfit for any child's reading. Plain, unvarnished accounts of rape, incest, adultery, sodomy, and unnatural crime may be suitable reading for the adult Christian; but the line must be drawn at young children.

Biblical chronology is utter nonsense. Only grossly ignorant persons or lunatics believe the universe was created six thousand years ago. Others similarly afflicted probably believe that Adam lived to the age of 930 years, Methuselah 969, Lamech 777, and Noah 950. Philology gets no countenance from the blunders of the building of Babel or the pious perverseness of Pentecost. Biblical zoology is too funny for any words. Noah's ark is the last word in absurdity with its wondrous zoological collection in a floating pantechicon. Elsewhere in the Holy Bible the hare is confounded with the ruminants. Christ himself, who is supposed to be "God," thought that the whale was a "fish." The Biblical stories are funnier than those of the *Arabian Nights*. A snake talks, a whale has a boarding house in his interior, a pigeon acts as co-respondent, and an ass converses in the inspired volume. Fiery serpents, unicorns, dragons, flaming horses, giants, and cockatrice glare at us from the sacred pages.

Astronomers must be enchanted to learn that the sun stands still on occasion. In Biblical medicine we find the long-exploded notion of demoniacal possession being the cause of disease. Fevers are "rebuked," leprosy cured by a fig poultice, and blindness removed by spittle. Some happy persons die twice and others never die at all. Witchcraft is still insisted upon as being true long after it has been discarded by every civilised nation. Ghosts still squeak and gibber in the Holy Book. As for ethics, the lives and actions of the patriarchs and the kings of Israel and Judah, are only paralleled in the Newgate Calendar. Psalm cix. is a proof that God's ways are, fortunately, not our ways. In short, the Bible from the time that Adam and Eve start life as fully grown persons without parents until the murdered "God" ascends into the ether like a flying machine, is a salmagundi of unrestrained and riotous Oriental imagination.

"Miracles," said Matthew Arnold, "do not happen." Yet the Bible is crammed from cover to cover with miracles, and it is upon the truth or falsehood of miracles that the book must stand or fall. The book is claimed as a divine revelation, and the proofs are that Christ multiplied loaves and fishes, turned water into wine, healed the sick, and brought back the dead to life. The whole question is reduced to one of facts. These miracles are inconsistent with ascertained knowledge, and, sooner or later, to the scholars in our schools, in spite of all the priests of Christendom, "hell" will have vanished and "heaven" will have become a mere name. The "true cross" will survive no more than the "real ark." The Garden of Eden will have gone and the Garden of Gethsemane will have vanished with it. If the Biblical characters survive at all, it will be as fiction. Jacob with his ladder will be no more credible than Jack and his beanstalk. Jonah will swagger arm in arm with Sinbad the Sailor, Daniel will exchange yarns with Captain Gulliver, and little Moses in the bulrushes will gurgle a welcome to the Babes in the Wood. The menagerie of the Apocalypse will be classed with the geni of the *Arabian Nights*. Bald-headed Elisha will romp with Red Riding Hood and her wolf, and the New Jerusalem with its jewelled streets and its many mansions will be as phantasmal as the House that Jack Built.

MIMNERMUS.

## Mr. Runciman and Methodism.

SEVERAL members of the Government, avowedly ardent supporters of Evangelical Christianity, are at times quite ostentatious in the display of their attachment. Although one may regret this, we can hardly blame them for giving it practical form. If men are really and sincerely religious there is no reason whatever why they should hide the fact; all that we can legitimately desire is that they would keep their positions as Ministers of the Crown and as members of a chapel distinct. The misfortune is that they are too inclined to regard themselves as representatives of a religious opinion. And that, of course, they are not. As members of the Government, they represent all classes of the community. Theoretically, they represent the whole of the community, and in that representation the minor differences of religious belief should be swallowed by the larger unity of a common social life and interest.

This parade of religion is not made inside the House of Commons. But it does occur outside Parliament, and certain Ministers of the Crown are often invited to speak before religious gatherings, and their opinions sought by religious papers merely because they are what they are. Religious leaders fully recognise the advertising value of being able to publish the opinions of a cabinet minister on a question of theology. Thoughtful people may smile at their deliverance, but the vulgar mind rejoices, and this type flourishes in all classes of society from the highest to the lowest. With some people an opinion gains weight from the eminence of the one who expresses it. Whether it is a subject on which the eminent person is entitled to express an opinion is a question never asked or considered. To them it appears that if a man is Chancellor of the Exchequer his opinion on the resurrection of Jesus ought to be of more than ordinary value. If he is of the Board of Agriculture, this, in some unexplained way, qualifies him for deciding on the historical value of the Christian faith. And as Home Secretary he ought to be particularly well acquainted with the philosophic connection between faith and morals. It is all supremely silly, but it is good business. And, after all, as we seem to take it for granted that a man may be qualified for administering the affairs of the Navy by serving an apprenticeship under the Board of Agriculture, or *vice versa*, it is all part of the current philosophy of things.

Mr. Runciman is at present engaged "in a desperate struggle with an insidious foe," namely, the widespread outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. Consequently, his opinion on the present position of Wesleyan Methodism is one of peculiar importance, and the *Methodist Times* detailed one of its staff to interview the President of the Board of Agriculture. The interviewer appears to have been mainly concerned with the decline of membership in the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion, and the best means of remedying the constant leakage. On the first point Mr. Runciman was clear enough. He told the interviewer:—

"Despite all your efforts to explain it away, you can't get over this fact. Here is a total decrease in six years of over 15,000 members. There is no sort of a definition that will turn that into an increase. The fact remains that, instead of having an increase, which ought to be the normal tendency of the Methodist Church, we are confronted with these alarming figures. They cannot be explained away. It is a remarkable fact that all the Methodist Churches have suffered from the same decline, a decline not only in Church membership, but also in the number of Sunday-school children."

If Mr. Runciman had stopped here, he would have done well, but he went on to point out methods of getting over the trouble, and here he made it pretty plain that a study of the foot-and-mouth disease is

not the best of preparations for understanding the religious situation. He suggests that "we can only make progress by the old methods of revival and conversions. If Methodists are going to give up the belief in the miracle of conversion, they may as well put up their shutters." From one point of view, this advice sounds like "the way to increase membership is to get more members." From another point of view, it shows a most amazing ignorance of the modern spirit, and of the real nature of "the miracle of conversion." It is to be noted, moreover, that the immediate problem before the Methodist Church is not the conversion of outsiders, but the retention of its own members. There is not merely an absence of growth, there is a positive shrinkage. Methodism not alone fails to convert outsiders, it cannot keep its own. Population is growing, and Methodism is declining; and the position of Methodism is that of every Christian Church. In falling back upon revivals, Mr. Runciman—unless he was talking pure cant—shows himself in a much more primitive frame of mind than many of the preachers themselves.

What is the "miracle of conversion"? The original idea of conversion was that the "Holy Spirit" seized hold of the individual in a moment of self-surrender, and completely transformed his nature. From being a "scoffing," careless, unbelieving person, he became a steady, faithful believer. From being a drunken, brutal, worthless person, he became a worthy member of decent society. Consequently, as all men were brought to God because God brought all men to him, every conversion meant the working of a special miracle, and served to influence outsiders to surrender themselves in the same manner. Now, given a general atmosphere of the miraculous, this idea of conversion presented nothing that was strikingly incongruous. Moreover, a certain number of people did undergo conversion. They became imbued with an active faith in religion, and their lives were more or less changed, and more or less permanently.

But, like all miracles, the miracle of conversion has been gradually decaying. First of all, as men ceased to look for miracles in other directions, so they showed a greater disinclination to look for miracles here. The modern revivalist has almost to create an environment for his material, as well as experiencing greater difficulty in getting suitable material to his hand. A more critical generation began to inquire into the nature of these conversions, and their machinery became apparent. So far as the changed moral life was concerned, this, wherever genuine, admitted of every explanation. In professing conversion, the convert set up a new set of associations, both objective and subjective. He made new friends and acquaintances, and they were interested in keeping the convert up to the mark. The same result is to be seen in ordinary life, where new acquaintances may serve as either helpful or baneful influences on the life of a young man or a young woman. And these social conversions are really more enduring than the religious ones. For they avowedly rest upon the solid basis of the moral superiority of one form of conduct over another, and on the good opinion of one's neighbor. Whereas, with religious conversions, these forces only operate in a disguised form, and when the convert's religious convictions become weakened the moral improvement is likely to go by the board.

From another point of view religious conversions were seen to be so many studies in pathology or degeneration. Hysterical young people, potential subjects for all kinds of auditory and visual hallucination, saw visions and heard voices, and professed themselves converted. Young men and women, with their sexual and social nature in course of development, conscious of feelings that were ill-defined and ill-understood, and subjected to the emotional strain of a revival meeting, readily professed themselves as seized by the "Holy Ghost." If Mr.

Runciman will read, with the smallest possible understanding, the records of Methodism, he will find ample illustrations of both classes. The medical man and the psychologist on one side, and the sociologist on the other side, have helped to destroy all faith in the "miracle of conversion." As the interviewer reminded Mr. Runciman, revival services no longer attract the outsider. Mr. Runciman seems unaware of this—perhaps he has been too busy studying diseased cattle. Yet everyone knows that revivals to-day appeal almost wholly to a special and a degenerate class. There are thousands of people who attend revival after revival, experiencing the same emotional debauch at each, making the same profession at each, and looking forward to the next visit in the same spirit that the confirmed alcoholic looks forward to his next drinking bout. It is a pity that Mr. Runciman, who is so fervent a supporter of religion, retains such crude and primitive notions of the nature of religious phenomena. The miracle of conversion!

Mr. Runciman also wants the Methodist Church to train men for outdoor work who have "sufficiently virile minds to be able to stand up against the open-air Atheists." This is a confession that those they have are not "virile" enough for the work, and is an unconscious testimony to the ability of the "open-air Atheist." And no one would welcome a body of well-trained fighting preachers more than these same open-air Atheists. In sober truth those opponents they have to meet are sorry enough. They do not understand the position they are arguing against, and very often the Freethinker could put their position with greater ability than they display. But someone ought to warn Mr. Runciman that it is dangerous training able and virile men to fight Freethought. Their Christianity is apt to evaporate in the process, and even though it remains their attack is apt to suggest more doubts to the audience than it removes. Moreover, the Methodist Church has already tried the experiment with Mr. Ballard. True, Mr. Ballard never did meet any qualified Atheist in equal discussion. He found it more profitable to run away when the crucial moment arrived. Still, within limits, the experiment has been tried, and the Methodist Church lost 15,000 members during the time covered by his labors. He may not have been responsible for the loss, but he certainly did not prevent its occurrence.

Mr. Runciman, being a Methodist, is chiefly concerned with the outlook before the Methodist Church. But in this matter all Churches suffer alike. They are all powerless, because they are all fighting an ultimately indestructible power. Let Mr. Runciman, instead of falling back upon idle talk of conversion, and more attractive preachers, and the like, ask himself how it happens that the Churches, with their lengthy start and enormous outward advantages, are yet losing ground before an enemy that can boast of no resources such as they possess? If he studies that question he may discover that the strength of the "open-air Atheist," and the indoor Atheist also, is ultimately due to the fact that he more accurately represents the spirit of the age, and is putting into words truths that large numbers of people are prepared to hear and sympathize with. And how can a specially trained body of evangelists fight this state of things? Can they make people unlearn all they have learned or forget all they know? Can they ever make Christianity, to the man who knows, any more than one of a world-wide group of superstitions, or the idea of God more than an ignorant blunder of primitive man? Can they put back the clock of European progress at least three hundred years? If they can do these things there is hope for them. If they cannot, they are doomed. And it is plain that Mr. Runciman, in his counsel, is offering advice how to fight without the remotest idea of where the enemy is, what he is like, or what is the strength of his resources.

## King David.

WE read in the Book of Proverbs that "love covereth all transgressions"; but the apostle Peter furnishes a revised edition of that saying, so that in 1 Peter iv. 8 we read that "love covereth a multitude of sins." In James v. 20 also we find the new version. The proverb is perfectly true, for love *does* cover "a multitude of sins," and occasionally it is strong enough to cover "all sins." Now piety—that is, piety towards God—performs the same feat quite as effectually; and nowhere is the truth of this so fully illustrated as in the case of King David. In every age since the famous monarch flourished it has been the custom to whitewash him on every available occasion. The performance has to be repeated continually, because no sooner is a fresh coat put on than it wears off. What necessitates the whitewashing is the text (1 Sam. xiii. 14) in which David is described by the prophet Samuel as "a man after his [God's] own heart." To-day members of Christian Endeavor Societies in all the world are straining their ingenuity to the utmost in the attempt to force David's life to tally with that oft-quoted text. What exactly Samuel meant when he said that the Lord had "sought a man after his own heart and appointed him to be a prince over his people," is no concern of ours. It suffices to say that the statement, as generally understood, signifies that, taking it all in all, David's life was well-pleasing to the Divine Being. As one divine says, by way of guiding the meditations of Endeavorers this day: The vital point is "that the whole of his life in its earlier humilities as well as in its later grandeur is lived under the sense of Divine direction." That is to say, David's piety covered the multitude of his dark crimes, which he committed "under the sense of Divine direction."

The Rev. Dr. Newton Marshall tells us, in the *British Weekly* for July 18, that David "was the national hero of the Jews, and that they looked back to him much as we do to Alfred the Great, as the founder of their national civilisation." Then the reverend gentleman alludes to a most distinctive characteristic of his personality, namely, courage. He also mentions his industry, and delivers himself of a sermonette on the crime of laziness. At last, coming to the real point, Dr. Marshall says:—

"The hero must be nourished by roots that go deep into the unseen world—he needs God. Now David was conspicuously the godly man. That he was a sinner, swept often violently by gusts of black passion, is true enough. But he was no hypocrite. He did not hide his sins. Nor was he impious—he did not glory in them. He was a man of utter and simple faith in God."

The only statement in that extract with which we are in agreement is the one which labels David as "conspicuously the godly man." On that point there can be no doubt, if we take the records as they stand. But after admitting that "he was a sinner, swept often violently by gusts of black passion," Dr. Marshall adds that "he was no hypocrite." Now, if David was not a hypocrite, who tried hard to hide his sins, what on earth was he? On the occasion of the siege of Rabbath Ammon the army was under the command of Joab, the king having remained behind resting at Jerusalem. One afternoon, while walking to and fro on the roof of his palace, he saw an exceedingly beautiful woman in the act of bathing in the court of a house not far off. Smitten with her charms, he sent and inquired who she was. Learning that she was the wife of Uriah, who was away with the army, he "sent messengers and took her." He robbed her of her honor; possibly she sacrificed it quite willingly. In due time she informed him that she was with child; and he became terribly alarmed. He instructed Joab to send Uriah to him at once, ostensibly with a message from headquarters. After the message was delivered the king ordered him to go down to his own house, in the hope that he would spend the night

with his wife. But Uriah respected the taboo on sexual intercourse applied to warriors in ancient Israel, and never went near his home. When David was informed of this he asked him to stay another day. He obeyed, and in the evening of the second day he dined at the king's table, when he was urged to drink copiously of the best wine. Indeed, the record goes the length of stating definitely that David actually "made him drunk" (2 Sam. xi. 13), fervently hoping that in that condition he would forget the vow and go home. But Uriah had still his senses sufficiently awake to prevent his falling into the cunningly laid trap. In desperation at the failure of his hypocritical scheme David conceived the cruel and treacherous plan of sending Uriah back to the camp with a letter instructing Joab to arrange for his destruction. Joab was a willing tool, and the obstinate Uriah was removed. Bathsheba, as soon as her conventional mourning for her husband was over, became David's wife.

Now, assuming the historicity of 2 Sam. xi.-xii. 1-25, David stands out as an arch-hypocrite. To hide his sin with Bathsheba he descends to the lowest depths of depravity; he even commits murder by proxy to prevent his adultery from becoming publicly known. And yet, in the face of the despicable conduct ascribed to him in these two chapters, Dr. Marshall unblushingly asserts that "he was no hypocrite; that he did not hide his sins." For a whole year he hid from the public gaze two of the most hideous sins in the criminal calendar. And even when Nathan narrated an imaginary crime analogous to the one he had committed, we read that "David's anger was greatly kindled against the man," and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this is worthy to die." It was only when the prophet turned upon him and said, "Thou art the man," that the blush of guilt came to his cheek. During the whole of that year, blackened with adultery, deceit, and murder, he doubtless played the part of the "conspicuously godly man." Will Dr. Marshall tell us, since godly men can commit the darkest crimes, and do their utmost to conceal them, what is the use of godliness? If Napoleon was "perverse and criminal," and did much harm in the world, of what benefit was it, either to himself or to the world he so deeply injured, that he "stood in awe before the thought of God"?

But let us follow King David a little further. After the adultery, the hypocrisy, and the murder so scathingly denounced by Nathan, we find the King taking his place at the head of the army, and storming the royal city of Rabbath; and this is how the sequel is told in 2 Sam. xii. 30, 31:—

"And he brought forth the spoil of the city, exceeding much. And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws and under harrows of iron, and made them labor at the brick mould; and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon."

This was cruelty of the most shameful nature. That David was naturally cruel is proved by many events in his life. As a young man he spent some time at the court of Saul. Suddenly Saul's ardent love for him turned to violent hatred, and he had to seek safety in flight. He became an outlaw and a captain of some four hundred freebooters, and he went about levying blackmail on all who could afford to pay it. It was a predatory life in which might was right. The refusal of blackmail was punished by wholesale slaughter. Nabal was one of the chiefs who did refuse; and David instantly resolved upon the total destruction of Nabal and all his people, saying, "God do so unto the enemies of David, and more also, if I leave of all that pertain to him by the morning light so much as one man's child." Hearing of this intention, Nabal's wife, Abigail, and her young men went to meet him, laden with all sorts of valuable presents. Abigail fell on her knees before him, heaped flattery upon him, called her husband a base fellow, and thoroughly

ingratiated herself with the notorious pillager. Some ten days later Nabal met a mysterious death, "the Lord smote him that he died," and David took his widow to wife, and became the owner of all his wealth.

King David is now on his deathbed. The life of him who has been "conspicuously the godly man" is rapidly ebbing away. He is leaving his last instructions with Solomon, his successor, and here they are:—

"Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did unto me, even what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner, the son of Ner, and unto Amasa, the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet. Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace. But shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table; for so they came to me when I fled from Absolom thy brother. And, behold, there is with thee Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjamite, of Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim; but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I swore to him by the Lord, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword. Now, therefore, hold him not guiltless, for thou art a wise man; and thou wilt know what thou oughtest to do unto him, and thou shalt bring his hoar head down to the grave with blood. And David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David" (1 Kings ii. 5-10).

"These are horrible words to be the last of such a life," says Principal George Adam Smith; "horrible words clothing a horrible spirit," and he tries his hardest to find linguistic and other grounds on which to reject them as unhistorical. But there is nothing in them inconsistent with David's character as sketched in the two Samuels.

Dr. Marshall throws a cloak over the worst crimes if the criminal is a godly person. Then he exclaims: "Scepticism paralyses action. Great deeds are wrought by faith.....It is the shallow pate, the weakling, the supercilious cultivator of *ennui* who is your typical sneerer at religion." It is only natural that a whitewasher of King David because of his piety should try his hand at blackwashing all opponents of godliness; but the people will judge the latter process in the light of the former.

J. T. LLOYD.

### Positive Gains from Negative Teaching.

To the Rationalist of the present day there can be no more hopeful angury as to the issue of his controversy with orthodoxy than the growing tendency, among the partisans of that "slowly dying cause," to stake the existence of their faith on its alleged utility rather than on its truth. With this tendency there is linked another by natural necessity, which speaks of the teaching of Rationalism as purely negative; as though that were in itself a reproach, and as though a true denial were not in any case better than a false affirmation. Yet, as I shall hope to show, not only are the gains from negative teaching very real and definite, but the supposed gains from even the cardinal doctrines of orthodox theology are seen, when fairly examined, to be quite illusory and negligible when not altogether pernicious.

This will be made plain by a glance at the consequences of rejection and acceptance in the case of the two doctrines most universally held among our opponents, and most generally acclaimed by them as the pearls of rarest price which revealed religion has to offer—the belief in a personal God and in a personal immortality.

When we have discarded Theism, we have not only rid ourselves of an insoluble perplexity to the mind and a servile superstition of the heart, which is in itself a great gain, but we learn that knowledge is power, the great and kindly dissolvent of a legion

of unspeakable spiritual terrors, and the healing balm to a multitude of bodily ills. We learn that calamity and pestilence are not the inflictions of an omnipotent chastiser, in which case it would be hopeless to struggle against them, but the result of agencies which man can and must bend to his will. His strife, it may be, has often to be waged against colossal forces; but we know that it grows daily and hourly more equal as the barriers they oppose to his advance yield, one after another, to the "Open sesame" of knowledge. We learn that the key to all conquest, whether over the world within or the world without, lies in patient human effort; and this dictates and makes habitual a bracing self-reliant attitude of mind, so that we have simply no use for God. We substitute, always, foresight for propitiation, and resolute action for prayer. This frees us, on the one hand, from the paralysis engendered by uncertainty as to the divine will; and, on the other, from the worse danger of juggling ourselves into the belief that our interest is God's, thus gradually obscuring our moral vision in a fog of insincerity.

The doubt as to the respective shares of God and man in bettering the lot of the race or the individual is banished for the rejector of Theism by the certainty that human strength and human skill must do all. The believer in general gives practical recognition to this truth in his conduct. Does he not strain every nerve (and all honor to him for it) on behalf of his sick friend, well knowing that heaven will take that friend to himself if the least loophole be left? His is a cruel dilemma indeed! If he exerts himself too strenuously, he may be blamed by himself or others for his want of faith. If he leaves too much to heaven, he may be reproached with "tempting the Lord his God." This dilemma, however, will hardly trouble him much while his friend lives. He will heed it only when he has done all in vain, and the murky mist of his conventional superstition once more gathers about him. Then, indeed, he may dutifully deface a tombstone to his friend with some vile conceit about God having touched him, though he would have given his own life willingly to have kept the fingers of the divinity off him!

The tragedies of life, whether few or many be involved in them, must sometimes oppress the gayest spirit which is not utterly selfish. But what help has Theism in such distress which cannot be found in human aid and sympathy, or, if need be, in sheer uncomplaining fortitude of heart? She stands dumb before such catastrophes as the earthquakes of Lisbon and Massena, the tidal waves of Japan, the famines of India and Russia, and the world-wide ravages of disease. Or, if she speaks, it is but in sophisms, distinguishing between what God *permits* and what he *does*. As though an Omnipotent Father, who permits a hundred thousand of his children to be killed, and many more to be plunged in misery, were really less blameable than if he had stricken the blow with his own hand; and as though, in a world where all is foreordained by God, there could be anything for which he is not directly responsible! We who reject Theism are spared the demoralising necessity of excusing or extolling in God what we should execrate in our fellows.

This brings us naturally to what is doubtless the most important gain from the shelving of God. We place ethics at once and necessarily on a human basis. Morality is given the best possible reason of being, its object becoming avowedly the promotion of human happiness. We are no longer concerned to please the God, the Alpha and Omega of whose oracles is a threat and a curse; the opening pages of whose revelation tell of the Deluge and the closing pages of the "lake that burneth with fire"; nor are we put to the trouble of distorting our minds and corrupting our hearts in the futile endeavor to justify his ways to men. We know him to be an immoral interloper, whose shabby benevolence and bogus charity have no claim on our regard, and whose jealousy and bad temper we need not fear. We cease to plough the sand in a vain effort to

ground our ethics on obedience to a God unworthy of reverence. We put morality to school, with human reflection, human experience, and the unwarped human emotions for her instructors; and her powers, perpetually unfolding and enlarging, bringing more and more of reason and order into human conduct, lifting it from the crooked ruts of prejudice to the broad road of principle, giving more and more of harmony and consistency to action and thought, will be devoted to the sole end of preserving and increasing the joy of human existence, recognising no other as relevant or worthy.

The gains from the dissipation of the dream of personal immortality are perhaps less obvious till we come to reckon up exactly what we are losing. Assuming the belief to be true, neither reflection nor Christian revelation gives us the least warrant for supposing that we shall have greater liberty of choice as to the conditions under which our future existence is to be passed, than has been granted us in our present life. There is no reason, a priori, why our liberty of choice should not be more, and not less, restricted in the future world than in the present; and on this point our revelation is far less reassuring than our unaided reflection, which, at least, does not dogmatically exclude happier possibilities. Yet it may be fairly questioned whether perpetual conscious existence, under whatever variety of pleasurable circumstances, might not at length become an appalling weariness from which we should long to be released. Theologians and metaphysicians, indeed, may speak of the immortal spirit as transcending time; but a conscious personality who should be above the consciousness of time is unthinkable. It is possible to conceive the notion of something which should transcend both time and consciousness; but this necessarily involves the transcendence—that is, the extinction—of personality. The immortality of the Churches, indeed, is but one of the multitudinous contradictions which compose the fabric of orthodox faith. Personality is to persist for ever; but it is to transcend time, the consciousness of which is involved inevitably in the consciousness of self. Personal existence throughout eternity simply means personal existence throughout infinite time,—a doubtful boon in any case, and perhaps an intolerable misery. There are few, I imagine, who would share the sentiment which Milton puts into the mouth of the graceful Belial, preferring immortality, under even the hardest conditions, to extinction:—

"Who would lose,  
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,  
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,  
To perish rather, swallowed up and lost  
In the wide womb of uncreated Night,  
Devoid of sense and motion?"

Those who shrink from the idea of extinction do so because of the dim dread expressed in the lines just quoted—the dread, namely, that they will be somehow conscious that they are dead. But to be conscious of extinction is, again, a contradiction. We do not fear a dreamless sleep; and death, for us, is no worse than that. It is a sleep that brings no nightmares from which we would fain wake, but cannot; and no dreams of pleasure from which we shall have the disappointment of waking.

While our heritage of ideas is thus seen to be no poorer for the loss of the belief in personal immortality, the gains from its dissipation are tangible and sure. No longer enduring by proxy the imperfections of the present world as "our light affliction which is but for a moment," to be borne for the sake of a "far more exceeding weight of glory" in a "kingdom which is not of this world," we realise that here and now must the paradise of human society be built. We come to see that happiness is to be sought in self-culture, in the widest sense, and in the multiplication of human interests; that, in truth, the salvation for which we must strive is not, primarily, salvation from sin, but from the starved and stagnant poverty of existence of which religious illusion is, perhaps, as much an effect as a cause; an

existence gladdened, it may be, by an occasional ecstasy or two, but made continually miserable by deep disappointment. No longer hating, or pretending to hate, our "life in this world" that we may "keep it unto life eternal," we recognise the right of all men, as men, to present enjoyment of tangible things. We have but one world for the two in which our ancestors believed; but the value of that one, which to the religious among them was as nothing, is enhanced a hundredfold when viewed from the Rationalist standpoint. We see it, even now, to be the splendid demesne of Nature's aristocracy, a magnificent heritage with possibilities of indefinite enrichment and improvement by human hands for human ends; the future scene of peaceful victories and fruitful triumphs, of continuous emancipation from the tyranny of ignorance, and of ever-extending conquest over the empire of blind forces. Ascetic precepts, enjoining contempt for the world, have thus become for us, as they must at length become for all, simply irrelevant and meaningless. Wealth, with her splendid train of adornments and comforts, will render willing homage to wisdom and knowledge, and will minister, as they bid, to the multiplying needs of men. For the ideal of eternal rest for the individual in another world we substitute the ideal of ceaseless change and advance for the race in this—of change, which the teeming variety of Nature will compel; of advance, which the joint governance of reason and concert will ensure.

It has, finally, to be observed that, in so far as positive teaching, *per se*, is considered by our opponents to be superior to negative teaching, contemporary English orthodoxy is in sufficiently parlous plight. The early Christians had a God who gave them a heaven with gold-paved streets, and consigned to a place of endless torment their persecutors and the millionaires. But orthodoxy to-day grows ashamed of all this. She protests against crude literalism; but if asked what is the reality underlying the letter; in other words, if we ask what is her positive teaching on the points discussed above, she has little enough to say. Though God remains, heaven and hell are no longer places, but states of the soul, the natural consequences of its deeds in the body. This is relatively rational, and seems to rob God, albeit the foreordainer of sin and its consequences, of some of his uglier attributes. But the Christian immortalist, deprived of the "place" which his Master has gone to prepare for him, and no longer able to anticipate the "everlasting fire" as a doom for the "cursed," is still left asking where is the residence, and what the employment, of the soul after it leaves the body. If it leads a conscious existence, it must live somewhere and somehow. Where then, and how? "There is no voice, nor any that answers."

KONNINGTON HARWOOD.

#### PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES.

A new pastor for the Presbyterian church had arrived, and desiring a good, snug corner, sought out a resident named Dyer, by suggestion, as one having a very suitable place for him to put up. He found Mr. Dyer in his office and introduced himself to that gentleman. Mr. Dyer is no very ardent admirer of ministers, being a subscriber to the *Truthseeker*. On receiving the announcement of his prospective guest, he walked to his house telephone and sang out: "Hello! Lock the chicken house, close the doors, put down the blinds, turn the dog loose; there is a preacher in town."

#### A CHANCE TO HELP.

John had been very disobedient, and his mother, with a sad face, called to him to come and receive the punishment that followed an infringement of that particular rule. "Just one minute, mother," begged John. He knelt down beside his bed, and in a very earnest voice said: "Oh, Lord, you've often promised to help us when we needed it. Now's your chance."

## Acid Drops.

Better late than never. We were unable last week to deal with the Archbishop of York's sermon on the fatal Denaby mine explosion. The local service, which he conducted, was a histrionic performance altogether. All the time he was deliberately playing upon the excited emotions of the bereaved or terrified congregation. But we are most concerned with Dr. Lang's frightful and blasphemous theology; for "blasphemy," while impossible in an Atheist who does not believe in God, is possible to a Christian who does. Listen to this—taken from the report in the *Sheffield Independent* (July 14):—

"With this awful shadow over them there was not a man there who did not feel in his heart that there was a God. This was no time for argument. When things were going well and everything was smooth and easy they could spend time in chopping arguments about the existence of God, but when God sent such a visitation as this, it went straight to their simple common heart, and at such a time it was only the fool of light and empty head who said, 'There is no God.'"

"The Archbishop's sermon," the reporter says, "produced a profound impression upon the congregation." Very likely. It was skilfully adapted to that end. It was an appeal to their fears. Evil, suffering, and death were about; and the preacher cried, "Behold the hand of God!" Thus did Dr. Lang illustrate, without intending to, the truth of the Roman poet's epigram that "It was fear that first created gods in the world." God has always been seen in mischief and misery. Calamities that cannot be foreseen are legally called "the Act of God." The Denaby explosion was the Act of God. We have the Archbishop of York's word for it. No other investigation is needed. The fatal explosion was a "visitation," it was "sent" by "God." Let "God" have the credit of it. No one is likely to compete with him for any portion of it. The worst human being on earth would shun the responsibility for such malignant wickedness. It is the "awful shadow" that proves there is a God. The Archbishop of York says so. It is the "awful shadow" that knocks Atheism to smithereens. The Archbishop of York says so. And the poor bereaved and frightened congregation groan "Amen." But other people, who are in a cooler and more normal condition, are tempted to exclaim "What a priest!" and "What a God!"

The Bishop of Salisbury understands the death and the grave business just as well as the Archbishop of York does. In consecrating a portion of Westbury Cemetery, Wiltshire, he said "he wished the Church would utilise more than she did the graveside as well as the pulpit. He would hold it a happy thing if all his clergy took the advantage which the burial service afforded, for those who heard at such a time were impressionable and easily moved." That's it. Stamp the wax when it is hot. If you can't work upon people's reason work upon their feelings. Catch them when they're maudlin.

The Board of Trade issues a list of suggestions for the prevention of disaster to ocean-going steamers. One suggestion is that every steamship "should be launched in the presence of a Bishop." We now know why the *Titanic* sank. The White Star Line should note this. We understand that a Bishop's attendance would cost about £20, but it would be a wonderfully cheap insurance.

At the Guildhall banquet to the Royal Society, Mr. Asquith reminded his hearers that the Society had never had any direct financial assistance from the Government. He congratulated the Society on the fact, and said that it was not well for science to be a mendicant for State endowment. The words seem to us badly chosen. It is not well for scientific research to be a "mendicant" to anybody, and it is certainly ill when financial assistance, without which scientific research is seriously handicapped, is treated as a form of mendicancy. In these days scientific research is indispensable to a nation that would do all that might be done in the fight against disease, and in the general work of national development. With our short-sighted economy and petty views of life, we starve and handicap the scientific workers, and so strike at one of the conditions of advancement. The science that does not depend upon Government aid has to depend upon private charity or see its work crippled—and it is usually crippled even with private charity. It is the nation's misfortune to have had in our recent Liberal Prime Ministers, at least, men who seem almost oblivious to the value of scientific work, except so far as it serves the purpose of rhetorical adornments for their speeches.

The Royal Society was established for the pursuit of "Natural Knowledge." The expression was repeated by several speakers at the banquet, without comment, and most readers of the report would be likely to miss the full significance of the phrase. Originally, the expression was deliberate, and had a purpose. At the time of the formation of the Society, belief in the supernatural was general. Divination, magic, and witchcraft was common. It was the age of the "power of sympathy" and sympathetic confusion. There was no clear line of demarcation between the natural and the supernatural, and the charter of the Royal Society, which stated that its object was the pursuit of "natural knowledge," marked a new era in spirit and method. The clergy saw the danger, and vehemently opposed it. Even the great Dr. South denounced its work as irreligious. Indeed, one gathers from Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* that many of its earliest members were thoroughly disgusted at the extent to which the public mind occupied itself with theology. And it must certainly be placed to the credit of Charles II. that he favored and protected the Royal Society, and that, thanks to his aid, its earlier years were less troublesome than might otherwise have been the case.

The *Guardian* remarks that "happily for us" the celebrations were accompanied with religious services. It also adds that "In England science and religion are not the bitter foes that they seem to be in other countries..... Possibly the arrangement may be only in the nature of a truce, for signs are not wanting of aggressiveness towards religion in certain scientific quarters." We congratulate the *Guardian* on having its eyes—and mouth—open. In England scientific men are not so avowedly opposed to religion as is the case in other countries, but this is obviously not because in England scientific teachings are more favorable to religion than elsewhere. Science has no particular home, and for that reason is at home everywhere. But in England there is less plain speaking than elsewhere, and it cannot but happen that in time scientific teachers will grow restive under the silence imposed by English respectability. We are, as the *Guardian* says, in a period of truce. And it is in the nature of a truce to come to an end, and for the parties to resume the contest. When that occurs, those lesser lights who have been busy carrying on the skirmishing will reap their reward.

Mr. Edward Kingsland, the Brockley bootmaker, who has been figuring in the law courts lately, admitted having been a member of the Salvation Army, but not afterwards an Atheist. He said he had not been an Atheist, but an Agnostic. Yet in a bill issued on his behalf he had called upon people to hear him talk on "the divine love of the great Creator." Mr. Kingsland has his own idea of Agnosticism,—as he has of many other things.

We are glad to see clergymen doing wise and useful, instead of foolish and useless work. But why does the Rev. Henry C. Ricketts, in the *Anti-Vivisectionist Review*, talk of "God's dumb, defenceless creatures in licensed hells"? They are not dumb. They are certainly defenceless. And if they are God's creatures, how ashamed he ought to be not to defend them himself. The reverend gentleman should think of these things.

More "Providence"! We take the following from the *Daily Chronicle* (July 16); it occurs in its New York correspondent's letter:—

"Brief dispatches from the City of Mexico report that a great disaster was caused yesterday by a number of cloudbursts in the State of Guanajuato, about a hundred miles north of the capital. A considerable portion of the State was flooded, and several towns were practically destroyed.

"The loss of life is said to be over 1,000, while the damage to property runs to over £4,000,000. Communication has been seriously interrupted. Reports state that 20 places suffered, and that in some towns not a house remains standing.

"The cloudbursts were so sudden, and the mass of water so great and overpowering, that everything was swept before the floods. The messages state that the survivors are in a terrible plight, suffering from exposure and hunger."

"Providence" has allowed this world to be largely peopled with ruffians, and it turned a lot of them on these desolate sufferers in the extremity of their distress. "For his tender mercies are over all his works."

The Peruvian horrors beat the Congo horrors. But civilisation—Christian civilisation—is powerless to stop them. The only remedy proposed is—more Christianity! There is talk of sending out a new Mission. But it must be a Roman Catholic mission, as only Roman Catholics are

allowed to carry on religious work in the country. What a Church! And what a religion!

Cardinal Callegari, the Patriarch of Venice, has been preaching in St. Mark's Basilica against present-day female fashions. Words failed him to stigmatise the infamous customs of the modern society woman. "The Patriarch," a newspaper report says, "vividly contrasted the professing Christian women of to-day with those of the Primitive Church, whom he depicted as faultless models of modesty, coyness, and simplicity, whereas in this sad age they strut about, reeking in pestilential perfumes, and clad in such shameless fashion that even hardy, irreligious males stand aghast." The preacher must be referring to a very Primitive Church, for inveighing against female fashions was a pastime of many of the "early fathers," and has been a pastime of their successors in the pulpit ever since. "Hide, O hide, those hills of snow," has been the constant burden of their song. And what impression have they made in (say) eighteen hundred years? Not a bit. The one object of all women's fashions that ever were, or perhaps that ever will be, is to emphasise the sexual peculiarities of the female form. One must say this, however, for the Christian ladies whose charms figure in the great game of hide-and-seek, that their fashions are mostly designed by men.

The ancient Roman matron was more modestly dressed than her Christian successors in that part of the world. The early Christian women's dress was not originated by themselves; it was borrowed from Pagan society. Christianity, therefore, according to the Patriarch of Venice, has effected no improvement in this respect, but rather the contrary.

It is in Christian England, by the way, that "blasphemy" prosecutions are carried on by the police. It is in Christian England, too, that ladies dance on the public stage very nearly in the condition of "the altogether," what raiment they wear that *does* conceal being little enough to go into the daintiest handbag.

A religious paper publishes an account of how an Indian rajah sent a long distance to procure a doctor attached to a missionary hospital, and then sent £200 as a token of gratitude. This was well done on both sides; but if it is intended as a tribute to missionary work, we consider it a very poor one. The rajah did not send for a missionary—he sent for a doctor; and one attached to anything other than a missionary station would have done as well had he been forthcoming. We are not told that the rajah had any greater faith than before in the religious teaching of the missionaries, and we should be the last to deny that the natives of both India and China accept medical help when they require it. Indeed, this is one of the ways in which missionary agencies hoodwink the home subscribers. They hold out free medical attendance as an inducement to get people to attend the mission, and then use their attendance as proofs of their interest in the religious side of the work, and as a means of raising further subscriptions at home.

The late heat wave killed many adults. How many children it killed will never be known. London was like a furnace. And down in East London, all the time, thousands of adults and myriads of children were lacking bread—to say nothing of milk, simply because there wasn't sense and humanity enough in the people who pray to "Our Father which art in heaven" to settle a trade dispute that would never have occurred in any decent state of society. We are all living under the shadow of the cross.

Ten passengers on the *Canada*, from New York to Naples, became insane owing to the heat. "He doeth all things well."

Bad coin and buttons are no novelties in a church plate. In Graham's *Social History of Scotland* it is recorded that bad coppers in the plate were a constant trouble. When the managers had gathered a sufficient bag full they were sold for old metal to be smelted; but somehow the same identical coins invariably found their way back again, never having reached the melting pot. The Scotchman at that period, if not now, was notorious for keeping the Sabbath and saving his bawbees.

According to that voracious chronicle, the *Christian Herald*, Prebendary Webb-Peploe was responsible for the following story. It was told by him at the Keswick Convention. An infidel—name, of course, not given—went to hear Mr. Webb-Peploe preach. He came away declaring

that the preacher "was one too many for him, and vowing never to return." But in a few months he was seized by cancer, and then sent for Mr. Webb-Peploe, who "preached to him Christ and his great salvation." The infidel was, of course, overjoyed. Not only so, but he opened his house to all his brother infidels, and they came; and during the six months that he lingered "All his old companions in sin heard the Gospel, and not only heard, but accepted the Gospel. It was a marvellous story of the Grace of God." We agree; it is a marvellous story. But the marvellous aspect of it to us is that preachers should repeat such tales, and that people should be fools enough to believe them. We have not heard Mr. Webb-Peploe preach, but we have read some of his sermons, and we really cannot conceive them converting anybody who are not already well soaked in superstition, and who do not, therefore, need converting. To announce that the story was true would be an insult to any decent person's intelligence. We hope, for Prebendary Webb-Peploe's sake, that the story belongs to the *Christian Herald*, and not to him.

The following paragraph appeared in last week's *Reynolds*:—

#### "POETIC LICENCE."

"The Rev. William Morgan, Rector of Manafon, Montgomeryshire, known throughout Wales by his bardic name of Pentro, was charged at Berriew (Mont.) Petty Sessions with the non-payment of £14 16s. 1d. poor rate. The rate collector stated that trouble was always experienced in collecting defendant's rates, and added: 'He gave me awful bad tongue when I went to him. It was quite shameful for a rector.' (Laughter.) Mr. Marston: He is a celebrated bard. The Chairman (Captain Johns): If a man cannot bridle his tongue he should pay his rates. Mr. Humphreys Owen: I often feel like giving 'awful bad tongue' about the rates. The Magistrates decided to issue a distraint order."

The reverend bard might use less lurid language over the rates if he could find the wherewithal to pay them, as his Master did through Peter's agency, in the mouth of a fish.

The honorary secretary of the International Congress of Spiritualists at Liverpool expressed the view that the late Mr. W. T. Stead would do more for Spiritualists in the spirit than in the flesh. This may be true, for all we know, but we don't notice Spiritualists hurrying out of this life in order to be more useful.

At a recent Gateshead "desertion" case a Spiritualist witness—father of the defendant, who lost the day—said that he had a son who had been dead for years, and was so clever at his examinations that he was now a qualified chemist in heaven. Some day or other we may have a Directory of that establishment.

The Abbé Piton, the priest who mysteriously disappeared from Angers, and turned up again with the story that he had been kidnapped by motor bandits, was after all the only kidnapper in the case. He kidnapped the funds in his control. He is now doing eight months' imprisonment.

Even when they reckon up their faults the Christians flatter themselves. An Australian who deplored the degeneration of the age said he did not believe there were three men in Sydney now who could write *Hamlet*.

All suicides ought to be Atheists, according to the orthodox philosophy of Talmage and Torrey, but you very rarely hear of one that is. Letters they leave behind usually contain pious expressions. Here is another instance. Mr. John Derry, aged 54, for 29 years clerk to the Lichfield Guardians and the Rural District Council, who drowned himself in a local pool, used the word "God" several times in a pathetic letter he wrote before performing the fatal act—of course "during temporary insanity." "Now," he concluded, "let me fall into the hands of God, for very great are his mercies. May God have mercy upon my soul!" This trust in God is quite touching. The poor suicide had trusted in God to very little effect in this world, but he was willing to try the game again in the next world—no doubt with the same result, if any.

Miss Georgia Lichtenwalter, at one time prominent in Denver society circles, was found shot in a dying condition. She could just state that her assailant was Eugene Miller, well known in Denver business circles, and closely associated with the work of the Young Men's Christian Association. There was a Mrs. Miller in the case. It was the old story again—two women and one man; and he a Christian, as probably they were.



**Mr. Foote's Engagements**

(Lectures suspended until September.)

**To Correspondents.**

**PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1912.**—Previously acknowledged, £170 5s. 11d. Received since:—An Old Worker, £1; Harry Meredith and Edwin Calder (Calcutta), 10s. 6d.; Wm. Wood, 1s.; Widdowson, 3s. 6d.; Fred Gibson (S. Africa), £1; J. F. Flood (U. S. A.), £1.

**AUDREY COLLEGE.**—We can hardly undertake to explain Christian defences of the faith. That is rather a task for Christians themselves. Is it not? But we may make this remark. Suppose there were any real force in the far-fetched argument, in the pamphlet you send us, that there *might* be a whale that could swallow a man, waiting about for Jonah when he was thrown overboard, what sort of home would the intestines of such a "sea monster" afford him for three days and nights? Let the story be miraculous, and one part is as true as another; try to make it natural, and one part must be as natural as the rest. If the *swallowing* of Jonah is to be explained naturally, so must his breathing without air and his resisting the powerful digesting apparatus and dissolvent gastric juice of his entertainer.

Will the unknown sender of the local press cuttings about the little disturbance at Crane-street Baptist Church, Pontypool, over the pastor's sermon on King David, forgive us for saying that it is rather a poor little domestic squabble than an event of any significance to outsiders?

**W. P. BALL.**—Thanks for useful cuttings.

**H. B.**—Many thanks for cuttings.

**BEN EVANS.**—Glad to have your encouraging letter.

**CONVERT.**—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.

**A. MURRAY.**—Rather a poor search—wasn't it. See July 7, p. 429.

**GEORGE BERRISFORD,** secretary of the Sheffield N. S. S. Branch, has changed his address to 94 Brightmore-street.

**S. LIDGETT.**—We are obliged to you for your trouble in the matter, and we will keep your letter by us for a bit. Meanwhile please see our front article.

**WM. WOOD.**—Delighted to hear from one who was so much engaged in Christian work until the *Freethinker* started his liberation from supernatural faith. That you were "shocked" at first was natural, but you "reasoned it out" and found you were wrong. We are glad of our share in your "conversion."

**T. DOBSON.**—A paragraph was already in type. Thanks.

**J. HARGREAVES.**—Will bear the suggestion in mind.

**W. D. ANDERSON.**—Our shop manager will attend to your order. Pleased to hear you get mental satisfaction, at last, from reading this journal.

**F. WOOD.**—Useful. Thanks.

**A. FIRTH.**—Glad to read your appreciative account of Messrs. Gott and Jackson's visit to Heywood.

**J. F. FLOOD,** an American reader, subscribing to the President's Honorarium Fund, says: "I was an interested reader of your articles giving your experience with the *Freethinker*. I sincerely hope you will soon have the paper on a paying basis. You deserve mountains of credit for the fight you have made." This correspondent passes on the paper to others and is sure that "good for the Freethought cause is bound to result."

Some correspondence unavoidably stands over till next week.

**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.

Persons remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send *halfpenny stamps*.

The *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

**Sugar Plums.**

Several Branches have asked Mr. Foote to open their lecture season in October. He has had regretfully to refuse them all. It has been decided that he shall lecture exclusively at Queen's Hall, London, on Sunday evenings during October, November, and December. Until this experiment is worked out it will be impossible to say anything definite about Mr. Foote's lecture engagements in the New Year. One result of the experiment is obvious beforehand. It will leave Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd free to visit more provincial towns during the season—including some of those where Branches are formed by the new Gott-and-Jackson enterprise. This, indeed, is a part of the general policy of which Mr. Foote's location at Queen's Hall is also a portion. Our readers will see, therefore, that the propaganda of Freethought is being attacked on a larger and broader scale, as far as the N. S. S. and the Secular Society, Ltd., are concerned.

Branches of the N. S. S. that desire to secure Mr. Cohen, Mr. Lloyd, and other lecturers, during the winter lecturing season, should lose no time in communicating with them and with the N. S. S. secretary at headquarters. A great effort will be made this coming winter to let the largest possible number of towns hear the Gospel of Freethought preached by distinguished and effective representatives.

Mr. J. W. Gott reports a most encouraging experience at Bolton, in connection with the new Propaganda Scheme. Before the evening meeting every sort of pamphlet and every copy of the *Freethinker* were sold out, although the supply was thought to be more than sufficient. "We were just sick," Mr. Gott says, "to think we had nothing to offer at the big evening meeting, when we came across a local Secularist who had saved all his copies of the *Freethinker* for seven years. We made him an offer for the lot, which he accepted, and we took these back numbers to the meeting and very nearly sold the whole stock."

Mr. R. H. Rosetti, who started open-air Freethought propaganda in the village of Laindon, Essex, where he resides, reports continued success there. He and Miss Pankhurst jointly occupied the platform last Sunday and had a capital meeting, which was most orderly and attentive. Much Freethought literature was distributed and more was asked for. "Miss Pankhurst, my brother [he looks after the literature], and I," Mr. Rosetti writes, "send our kind regards, and desire to tell you how proud we feel to be of a little service to the cause of which you are such an esteemed leader."

Two Calcutta Freethinkers "beg to state that we consider the *Freethinker* a noble education. But, as you know," they add, "some grown-ups will not be taught."

"By his re-election at the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society held at Leeds on May 26, Mr. G. W. Foote is made President of the Society for the twenty-second (or is it twenty-third?) consecutive year. Mr. Foote, in his address of acceptance, told the Conference that he had never considered that the success of the Society consisted in a large number of members. 'Advanced movements were always conducted by a small body of people. It was like a stage army, always visible, apparently numerous—but only a few. The great thing was, was the work done? What was their function after all? Their main function was to make Freethinkers; and if they went on doing that, even if the members' lists did not increase, their activity was producing its fruit. The great body of the people was permeated with their ideas, and in that way they became, as it were, the preparatory school of all the other advanced institutions of the country. Take the Freethinkers out of them, and what was the residue worth?' These are truths that believers in the necessity of large organisations are inclined to overlook. The Freethought movement is a tree that keeps on multiplying fruit even though it may not add to its own size. President Foote's annual address, published in the *Freethinker* of June 2, is a valuable document which in recounting the Society's deeds since the last Conference shows to what an extent religious persecution is rife in England at the beginning of the twentieth century. The imprisonment of Messrs. Gott and Stewart on 'blasphemy' convictions took place in the present year, and there are other prosecutions of the same nature. We thank President Foote for the kind words regarding the *Truthseeker* which his address contains. We congratulate him on his retention in the responsible place he occupies, and we congratulate the Freethinkers of Great Britain in having so able and courageous a man to put there."—*Truthseeker* (New York).

### Within the Toils.

THE wind was growling amongst the trees, and the rain lent its swish to the wild music of the night. The very grass around his feet bent and bowed in an erratic motion, as the storm-gusts rushed between the tree-trunks, and dashed onwards to scatter and loose themselves, as it seemed, in the blackness of the forest deeps. Only a faint line marked the distinction of sky and foliage: the leaves appeared darker than the clouds. But when the wind-devils of the west came charging over the meadows, flinging themselves in frenzied might against the opposing forest, leaves and clouds became an indistinguishable mass of chaotic movement.

The air was full of furious rejoicings, of weepings, of moanings, of anger, of the terrible voices of suffering, inevitable and as cruel, of piteous cries against calamities, of wild mirth and music. Inanimate nature, intensified to extravagance by the conflict of its parts, poured into the night voices that seemed to possess every human emotion. Dominated by a power stronger than man's science, the branches lashed each other into a state of terror, their voices rising from a weak whimper of fear to a tornado of nervous excitement.

In the clash of the leaves, tossed to and fro like a human crowd under the influence of a morbid curiosity, there was the heated applause of a million clapping hands. Groaning heavily, like a strong man within the toils of an unendurable physical pain, a monarch of the forest, in the distance, offered a grudging allegiance to the gale; and the agony of his death turned the voice of his conqueror into a child's song of victory. The shrieks of a younger tree, as its trunk was torn raggedly in twain, close at hand, sounded like a woman's yell of mingled distress and fear and hopelessness when she is caught by a coward in the dark. And all the while the rain, borne on the breast of the wind, rattled merrily against the foliage, laughing at the powerless discomfiture of his friends. All the while there was singing, soft, melodious, soothing, stealing in and out, sometimes loud and full and sweet, sometimes low as a lullaby sung over a sleeping child. If there were anger and hate, there were also peace and love. If there were strife and dismay, there were also companionship and trust. Hardness and coldness gave place to beauty and warmth, and the cruelty of power dissolved into fellowship and service. Mockery lost itself in admiration, and cowardice surrendered to noble strength.

He stood, looking and listening, with his back pressed against a tree, a big beech, that swayed slightly to and fro as the wind impetuously searched its branches. Wild-fire shot through his eyes. His breath came short and sharp. He dilated with joy. His mind, influenced by every change in the conflict around him, and attuned to a susceptibility that seemed eager to reciprocate every nuance of shade or sound, seemed to forget its relationship to the body. It became an active part of the larger nature, rushing with the wind, swaying with the branches, yet, even when the body seemed to disappear and be forgotten, when the "humanity" of the individual dwindled away and was lost, the mind never deleted the larger humanity from its interminable thoughts. Still there rang in his ears the shriek of terror. Still he heard the moaning and weeping and wailing. Still he saw man-shaped phantoms arise from the gloomy leaf-caverns, ascend into the dim grey, and dissolve, like whiffs of wind-swept smoke, into the blackness of the clouds. Still he heard the merrymaking of the raindrops; and still his mind expanded to the crescendo of the storm, and soothed itself in the low music of motion that followed.

Forgetting himself, the ego utterly abolished, the humanity of his nature he could not forget. It pulsed in every vibration incited by his surroundings. The man in him throbbed and heaved, ineradicable and eternal. Set free from every petty thought, every restricting circumstance of the commonplace,

every little reflex of environmental unnaturalness, his mind remained human. Purified, ennobled, enriched, raised high above the accustomed level, its humanity was ever within it.

The imagination can soar high above the eagle's limit; and as the eagle's wings are an essential to its progress, so is the mind's humanness an omnipresent factor in its movement. Hidden in the light, the eagle's wings, we know, are still part of its vitality. Concealed, maybe, in the splendor of his imaginings, man's humanity is not so wonderfully colored that we cannot discover it. Beyond nature man cannot go. Nature encloses all his thoughts; and even on those ideas that would escape her commands she impinges her sovereignty. By making them weak and wavering, by inscribing them of natural and human origin, by restricting their attributes to human semblance, she turns their attempts to abject futility.

Heaven and Hell, God and the Devil, angels, black and white, have, all of them, the accusing semblance of the natural or the existing. To dispossess, or attempt to dispossess, God of his human resemblance, is to destroy the keystone of the arch. Even the spiritualistic endeavor to robe God in a column of a smoke-like something is a miserable failure because it cannot avoid clinging to the human form. When people feared God as they did a great big human tyrant, and for the same reasons, religion was strong. With the gradual disappearance of the definitely knowable human attributes goes the power of religion. God ceases to be comprehensible. Nature regains her full control, and the god-idea becomes an easily understood fallacy.

The beech moved behind him, yielding itself to the sway of its thickly foliated branches, as if enjoying, as thoroughly as he did, the delights of the storm. Its quiet, peaceful motion flooded him with an enduring strength that lent solidity to the emotion of his mind. And, when the wind went to rest, and the dispeace settled into sleep, and the voices were hushed into a gentle murmuring indescribably sweet and soothing, when the clouds floated apart, showing, through the filagree of leaves and twigs, the stage of the skies, and the beech became, once more, immovable as a truth, he smiled and stroked its soft silver-grey bark. Yet, he was no Pantheist, no worshiper of Nature: only a lover of hers. He bowed to no God, recognising none. He worshiped nothing, having nothing to worship. He was an Atheist, a raw blatant Materialist, within the toils of mental degradation, whose ignoble dry philosophy was cold and drear as the ashes of a tinker's fire left on the roadside of life.

ROBERT MORELAND.

### Religion in the Light of Science.—II.

(Concluded from p. 459.)

ANOTHER belief which is common to all religions, is that of a future state. Lord Avebury has emphasised the fact that dream experiences which point to another life at the same time suggest a limit to it. Dead companions or enemies who are recognised by savages in dreams are those who were personally known to them, and as a general consequence those long dead are forgotten. The Manganjas "expressly ground their belief in a future life on the fact that their friends visit them in their sleep." Du Chaillu states that if one were to ask the African Negro, "Where is the spirit of your great-father?" he would reply that he does not know; it is done. Ask him about the spirit of his father or brother who died yesterday, then he is full of fear and terror. And from this and similar notions have been evolved in the course of cultural development the religious dogmas of an eternal life of salvation or damnation which characterise some of the higher theologies. The savage Comanches think that the dead wander through the night, but depart to their rest with returning day. This superstition still flourishes

among the peasantry of civilised Europe. One of the most memorable instances of this once universal belief has been immortalised by the greatest of poets. The ghost of Hamlet's father revisits the glimpses of the moon, but it vanishes with the herald of the dawn.

Closely associated with the belief in a future life is that which assumes the existence of another world. With unrivalled brilliancy, Herbert Spencer has traced the genesis and development of this idea. Originally, savage man imagines his deceased relatives near at hand. In our own rural districts ghosts are still believed to haunt graveyards. In Oceania and throughout savage Africa the souls of the dead frequent the habitats of the living. The burial places are consistently shunned except at such times when offerings are presented to the spirits. At a higher stage of savage culture, although the dwelling places of the living are still visited by the dead, they are usually thought of as remaining at a respectable distance. Where the hills are utilised as burial-grounds, these eminences are regarded as the abodes of the dead. Where caves receive the corpse, there dwell the ghosts; and from this theory has been evolved the belief that the departed linger in subterranean homes. In much the same manner the idea of the hilltops as the residence of the dead has, with increasing knowledge, been enlarged into the theory of another world in the sky.

With primitive peoples every unusual occurrence is attributed to the beneficent, or more frequently to the baleful, activities of ghosts. The early Greeks, the Babylonians, the Jews, and the Roman Catholics at much higher grades of culture, have inherited this gross superstition. Extinct civilised peoples, in common with contemporary races, boasted their attendant spirits, guardian angels, or patron saints. With savages, barbarians, and even advanced races, supernatural agents have been, and are still sometimes, regarded as the causes of insanity, disease, and death. The violent bodily struggles of the victims of epileptic seizures were thus explained. What more natural than to suppose that the patient's other self was absent during the fit? This explanation is strengthened by the fact that when the epileptic is restored to consciousness he has not the remotest idea of what has taken place. Fainting sickness and epilepsy are both ascribed by the East Africans and the Congo natives to demonic possession. The records of the Jews abundantly illustrate the same belief, and the language of their neighbors, the Arabians, contains the same word for epilepsy and possession by devils. Lunacy and other neural diseases were traced to the machinations of demons throughout Christendom until the rise of medical science. In every quarter of the world diseases of all descriptions were traced to evil spirits. Death was at one time regarded universally from the same point of view. As our great philosopher has said:—

"We still occasionally read the coroner's verdict—'Died by the visitation of God'; and we still meet people who think certain deaths (say the drowning of those who go boating on Sundays) directly result from divine vengeance: a belief differing from savage beliefs only in a modified conception of the supernatural agent."

As it was imagined that the ravings of the delirious and the self-inflicted injuries of the insane were the results of demoniacal possession, so the power and ability which a few display were attributed to the influences of some beneficent indwelling spirit. Great mental superiority was ascribed to the inspiration of a ghost. Until quite recently, spiritual inspiration was claimed for our sacred Scriptures. Brinton speaks of savages whose medicine-men were accustomed to lay their hands upon the heads of the nearest kin of dead members of the tribe and to blow into them the souls of the deceased. These souls then reappeared in the next children. This superstitious practice bears a weird resemblance to the following

passage in the Church of England service for ordaining the clergy: "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands." The doctrine of apostolic succession conveys a similar interpretation, and even enlightened Quakers suppose themselves moved by the spirit of God.

As good spirits enter men, so also do evil. The most fantastic customs exist among men for the purpose of driving the demons away. One favorite device is to make the sufferer's body so uncomfortable that the devils are only too anxious to flee. Most medicine-men are exorcists, and this function is still fulfilled by Christian priests. The ancient Hebrews drove out the devils by creating a revolting stench with the burning heart and liver of a fish. Jesus expelled the unclean spirits from the insane and sent them into pigs. To this very hour the Roman Church provides specially ordained exorcists. Devil-driving was practised in the Church of England during the reign of Edward VI., when infants were exorcised before baptism. In 1665 the Bishop of Exeter licensed a clergyman as an exorcist, and this parson promptly laid a woman's ghost.

It was customary with many primitive peoples to enter the dead in the huts or caves of the living. The terror excited by the spirits of the dead caused the survivors to abandon the place of burial. Ages after caves were utilised as human habitations, they continued to serve as cemeteries. Numerous savage and barbarian temple caves have been discovered in modern times. It appears almost certain that the celebrated cave temples of ancient Egypt were evolved from prehistoric burial-places. Among peoples to whom the custom of hut burial is foreign, the structure erected over the grave indicates the beginning of a sacred edifice. Flowers, fruits, and other offerings are placed upon the grave, and in some instances a priest is appointed to minister to the corpse. In other instances, the departed repose on platforms which receive the refreshments provided by the living for the use of the dead. The earliest Christian altar was an empty chest on whose lid the Eucharist was celebrated. The relics of martyred saints were deposited beneath an altar; and the primitive tradition is still maintained by enclosing the remains of a saint within an altar. The original holy place, then, was the residence of the dead and their ghosts "The sheltering cave, or house, or other chamber for the dead, becomes the sacred chamber or temple; and that on which offerings for the dead are put becomes the sacred support for offerings—the altar."

Every uncivilised race possesses supernatural beliefs of some kind or other. All assertions have collapsed. Fear of the ghosts of the dead is a universal characteristic of savage and barbarous peoples. The ghost theory permeates all religious beliefs from the rudest up to the most advanced. With wandering savages who desert their dead this ghost fear is comparatively small. But in more settled communities with their defunct relatives lying in their midst, funeral rites and ceremonies evolve, and the propitiation of spirits becomes an established custom. In Fiji, dead parents are immediately elevated to the rank of gods. Rude temples are forthwith raised to commemorate their deeds. Marsden informs us that the Sumatrans acknowledge no god, devil, or idol. Nevertheless, they "venerate, almost to the point of worshiping, the tombs and manes of their deceased ancestors." From the Eskimo in the extreme north of America to the Patagonians of the uttermost south, ancestor-worship and propitiation have been, and are, the chief religion of the people. Throughout savage Africa, and barbarous and semi-civilised Asia, similar phenomena abound. The ancient civilisations of Egypt and India proclaim the same truth. Dead Europeans are worshiped as gods in British India to this very hour.

Nor is ancestor-worship restricted to the inferior races. It is almost universal in China. It underlay

the cults of ancient India, and it dominated the religions of classic Greek and Rome. Evidences of its former existence everywhere abound throughout modern Europe. That the ancient Hebrews—from whom the Christian peoples derived their divinities—were at one time ancestor worshipers, we possess ample proof. Nominal Mahomedans still worship the ghosts of the dead. Prayers to the departed for intercession are daily offered by Roman Catholics. The Feast of all Souls and other orthodox observances point plainly to an earlier worship of the dead. From this adoration and propitiation of the dead ancestor has been developed the belief in a personal God or gods. In Christian plastic and pictorial art, God the Father is depicted as an elderly man. The man Jesus has been developed into a deity. The woman Mary has become the leading divinity of millions of Roman Catholics. And the multitudinous Christian saints are still adorned as minor divinities of the Catholic Pantheon.

All its multifarious manifestations, notwithstanding, religion finds its most rational genesis in the terror inspired by the supposed spirits of the dead. The adoration of the hosts of heaven, the worship of plants and animals, likewise find their fundamental explanation in the propitiation of spirits. As Dr. Tylor so well says:—

"Man first attains to the idea of spirit by reflection on various physical, psychological, and psychical experiences, such as sleep, dreams, trances, shadows, hallucinations, breath, and death, and he gradually extends the conception of soul or ghost till all nature is peopled with spirits. Of these spirits one is finally promoted to supremacy when the conception of a supreme spirit occurs."

The history of religion is thus one of evolutionary growth. This may be traced without a break from the rudest beginnings to its highest and most elaborated forms. The line of its advance is stained with bitterness and blood. Civil barbarities are as nothing when compared with the revolting cruelties perpetrated in the name of the gods. Animal and human sacrifice and slaughter; persecution, torture; crusades, and other holy wars are a few only of the horrors and injuries with which religion has blotted the fair face of humanity. The accumulating knowledge of mankind, which constitutes its scientific achievements, must ever remain the inexorable enemy of the religious superstitions of the people. In our day more exalted religious conceptions have been reached than in any antecedent period of human culture save that of ancient Athens. And as advancing knowledge and higher ethical teaching served to ennoble the religions of classic antiquity, so in modern times, mental, moral, and physical science have led to the purification and humanisation of theology. Our civilisation is in no way indebted to religion; it was solely begotten by science in her many varying modes of creation. "Religions," said Schopenhauer, "are like glow-worms, they require darkness to shine in"; and again, "Religions are the children of ignorance, and do not long survive their mother." Theologies promote blind, unreasoning faith; they exercise influences which are fatal to progress. The first cousin to religion is metaphysics, masquerading in the plumes of philosophy. The theologians are sufficiently dangerous when standing alone, but in times like ours, when sincere religion is so largely at a discount, the cobweb-weaving metaphysicians lend material aid to the priestly caste. We cannot afford to neglect the fact that countless thousands of people have as yet insufficient mental stability to enable them to view nature and life from the standpoint of calm reason. The transient notoriety of Bergson serves to illustrate this unfortunate fact. Even when so enlightened and able an inquirer as Dr. F. B. Jevons was compelled to acknowledge that science has doomed the idea of a personal God to ultimate extinction, he at once attempted to escape from his own logic by dwelling on the unreliability of human reason. Many have settled into the comfortable conclusion that, whatever happens, the

sentence of death pronounced by science upon theology will be inevitably carried out. This opinion is unquestionably sound. But an enormous amount of educational work lies before us if this happy consummation is to be quickly reached. The economic interests are so vast; the issues at stake are so numerous; the superstitious cravings of humanity are so deeply embedded that the sacerdotal parties are quite unlikely to relinquish their ill-gotten powers and privileges without a protracted struggle. But, of the ultimate result of the impending conflict, one opinion only is admissible. The diffusion of knowledge—above all, a knowledge of science—is the most potent antidote to superstition. And when the people possess an understanding of the verities which science is hourly disclosing to us, the sombre clouds of theology will vanish from view, and the light-shedding sun of Rationalism will steadily illumine the minds and lives of men.

T. F. PALMER.

### Literary Gossip.

MR. S. R. LITTLEWOOD'S article in the *Daily Chronicle* of July 20 on the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy contained some good points, one of which is in itself decisive; though it is far from being novel, as we shall show presently. Mr. Littlewood takes the general position that the plays and poems of Shakespeare are like all we know of the man, while they are nothing like all we know of Bacon. In the course of the argument in defence of this position reference is made to the "love test." To show what Shakespeare "knew and thought of the passion of love," Mr. Littlewood quotes four lines from the noble hundred and sixteen Sonnet:—

"Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom."

Beautiful! But there is a greater truth and a greater subtlety in the immediately preceding lines:—

"Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark, [taken.]  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be

A thousand passages, celebrating the power and glory of love, might be quoted from the dramas. But this is in itself sufficient. "Look on that picture," Mr. Littlewood says, "and then on this"—whereupon he quotes a most arid and cynical passage on love from Bacon's essay on that subject. It is as certain as anything can be without ocular demonstration that Shakespeare could never have written Bacon's withering essay on love; and just as certain, on the other side, that Bacon could never have written, or conceived, or appreciated Shakespeare's glowing praise of that passion. They were two totally different minds and temperaments.

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Mr. Littlewood is right, but we repeat that he is not original. We do not say that we are, but we do say that we employed this very "love test" of his some quarter of a century ago in a *Freethinker* article on "Lord Bacon on Atheism." After referring to Pope's lashing couplet on Bacon as "The wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind," we remarked that Pope himself did one or two meaner things than Bacon did. Nor, we added, was Bacon the wisest and brightest of mankind:—

"A wiser and brighter spirit was contemporary with him in the person of 'a poor player.' The dullards who fancy that Lord Bacon wrote the plays of Shakespeare have no discrimination. His lordship's mind might have been cut out of the poet's without leaving an incurable wound. Some will dissent from this, but be it as it may, the styles of the two men are vastly different, like their ways of thinking. Bacon's essay on Love is cynical. The man of the world, the well-bred statesman, looked on love as 'the child of folly,' a necessary nuisance, a tragic-comical perturbation. Shakespeare saw in Love the mainspring of life. 'Love speaks in a perpetual hyperbole,' said Bacon. Shakespeare also said that the lover 'sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.' The poet knew all the philosopher knew, and more. What Bacon laughed or sneered at, Shakespeare recognised as the magic of the great enchanter, who touches our imaginations and kindles in us the power of the ideal. Exaggeration there must be in passion and imagination; it is the defect of their quality. But what are we without

them? Dead driftwood on the tide; dismantled hulls rotting in harbor; anything that awaits destruction, to give its imprisoned forces a chance of asserting themselves in new forms of being."

Ingersoll said something similar (and no doubt finer, but we haven't the book before us at the moment) in his splendid lecture on Shakespeare. But we did not borrow from him, any more than he borrowed from us; for his lecture on Shakespeare was first published some ten years after the date of our own article in which the above passage occurs.

\* \* \*

Mr. Littlewood remarks that logic is lost upon the Baconians. We will say something even stronger than that. It is a curious fact—though not so curious if you look below the surface—that Spiritualists are nearly always prosaic-minded. There are many Spiritualist versifiers, but where is the Spiritualist poet? Atheism, on the other hand, can show Lucretius, Shakespeare, Leopardi, Shelley, Swinburne, Meredith, Hardy, and James Thomson ("B. V."). This is by no means a complete list. No French name is included, because of the difficulty of selection; Atheism being so prevalent among French men of letters. The "gross and grovelling materialists" have somehow a great array of poets on their side, while the (supply your own adjectives, reader) Spiritualists are singularly barren in that respect. Now, in the same way, the Baconians are nearly all prosaic-minded people. We never heard of a poet amongst them. Persons of literary sense and judgment know by a subjective test, which is better than all objective tests in such cases, that Bacon did not write "Shakespeare" any more than Shakespeare wrote "Bacon." Persons without literary sense and judgment may believe anything about the production of great literature. They are at the mercy of any nonsensical theory that has the least objective plausibility about it. Tennyson or Browning or Swinburne or Meredith—not to go back further nor to come down later—would naturally laugh at the Baconian theory as the most addled egg of conjecture that ever was laid. What does it matter that Lord Palmerston was a Baconian? What does it matter if a judge or two, and a few lawyers, are in the same camp? What does it matter that one American lunatic, and a few American nobodies, are also in the same camp? The matter-of-fact people, the foot-rule people, are simply out of court in a question of pure literature. Shake a box of "evidences" before them and you may make them believe almost any absurdity; that the man (say) who wrote *Pickwick* also wrote *Esmond*, or vice versa—that Herbert Spencer wrote *Songs Before Sunrise*, or that the late Lord Chief Justice Russell wrote the *Ring and the Book*. Perhaps these theories are a bit too near in point of time—but only give them a couple of hundred years' antiquity! For we are dealing with people who don't judge by face and figure, and voice and gesture; all they want is the print of the nails.

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The death of Mr. Andrew Lang removes a graceful and versatile writer, of no particular importance to literature, except so far as his prose translation of Homer—in conjunction with Messrs. Leaf, Myers, and Butcher—is concerned. Monday's *Evening News* reproduced a sample of Mr. Andrew Lang's caligraphy. No wonder printers detested it—for it is almost indecipherable even to practised eyes. It might easily be mistaken for the writing of an illiterate man, but it is really the writing of a man who has written too much. The same thing is true of Shakespeare's writing, as we pointed out to the curator of the Shakespeare Memorial at Stratford-on-Avon.

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It was Mr. Andrew Lang, we understand, who was alluded to in a later Preface to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as the "critic who turned Christian for half-an-hour" in order to reprove Mr. Thomas Hardy for referring to the Deity, in Eschylean phrase, as the President of the Immortals, who had at last ended his sport with poor Tess. Mr. Lang did ill to draw upon him a sword like Mr. Hardy's. It is always bad business to provoke one's Master. G. W. F.

Everyone has sometime to ask: What am I going through life for? What shall I do on the way? Shall I do only what will bring pleasure to myself, or shall I think of others, also? If one lives right, one will end right. It is the living that is the important thing. While we are going through life, we need to think only of the present. We are not going through for the sake of getting somewhere at the end of it, but for what we can get out of the journey. It is being something that counts, not becoming something. Life should never think of death. There is only life to the living. No one knows when he is dead. Live to your last breath.—L. K. Washburn, "Truthseeker" (New York).

Correspondence.

RE G. L. MACKENZIE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—“His family saw fit to give the funeral a religious character.” One hesitates to criticise the actions of private individuals, but it almost seems a piece of unpardonable impudence to treat the author of *Brimstone Ballads* so. May I offer a hint to Atheists who are likely to suffer the characteristic impertinence of relatives in these last services. Extract from my will:—

“I direct that my funeral shall be secular and that no religious ceremony of any kind shall take place in connection with my obsequies. Should this condition be infringed I give devise and bequeath all my estate absolutely and without reservation to the National Secular Society to be devoted to the spread of Freethought and all further clauses of this will shall become null and invalid.”

I have inserted this clause in the strong belief that between the devil and the deep sea—or, rather, between God and Mammon, there would be only one choice for the average sorrowing, religious-minded relative.

F. L. BILLINGTON GREIG.

[Unless there is some peculiarity in Scottish law, we are afraid that Mr. Billington Greig's will does not give him the security he imagines. There is no property in a dead body, unless it is willed to a hospital or other institute for medical purposes. In the ordinary way, the living and not the dead have the responsibility—and the power that goes with it—of disposing of a corpse, and they may do it in any legal way that pleases them. It is not possible to order one's funeral by will; it can only be desired. Nor would courts be likely to make beneficiaries under a will suffer for a blunder or misjudgment of the executor on such a matter. Finally, it is a very dangerous thing to leave money to the N. S. S., which could not be found at law, especially if there was no disposition to find it. The Secular Society, Ltd., was established, in part, to do away with that difficulty. We wish all Freethinkers who are making a will in which the movement is concerned would consult us before the signing and witnessing—no matter if they have the best solicitors—for this is a speciality.—EDITOR.]

The Northern Tour.

THERE are quite a number of towns in Yorkshire and Lancashire which would appear to be anxiously in need of attention. This week we have sampled Blackburn, Failsworth, Rochdale, Bury, and Heywood—all with encouraging results. In Blackburn the Branch (which had become non-existent) stands a fair chance of being revived. Failsworth was only fairly satisfactory; more advertising is needed to get a crowd here. The Failsworth Secular Society, it appears, put little faith in outdoor meetings, although several of their members were present. In Rochdale, on Saturday, the inevitable "drunks" arrived, and were assisted by the equally inevitable fanatics. Patience and good lungs wore them down, and we escaped without disorder. On Sunday, also in Rochdale, we had to face strong opposition in the form of widely advertised Socialist meetings, which, however, did not entirely spoil the day. We have every reason to promise a new Branch at Rochdale. On Monday night we made an abortive visit to Whitworth, returning, without attempting a meeting, to Rochdale in time to hold a short and moderately successful meeting. Tuesday found us in Bury, when we were very well received. A new Branch is certain in Bury. Wednesday we attacked Heywood. Councillor Firth, a member of the Parent Society in Heywood, was there to greet us, and a highly appreciative audience gathered. There are several in Heywood who can be attached to a Branch in either Rochdale or Bury, even if a local branch is impossible.

THOS. A. JACKSON.

Obituary.

Two of the oldest and most loyal friends of the English Freethought movement, Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Fincken, of Highbury, have suffered a great bereavement in the loss of their son, Charles Frederick Fincken, at the early age of twenty-seven years. He had been ill for some time, and both the doctor's reports and his own appearance encouraged the hope that rest and the sea air would restore him to his usual health. A sudden relapse took place, however, and he passed away at Ramsgate in the presence of his parents. He was a consistent and lifelong Freethinker, and a young man whose fine simple character formed a worthy tribute to the principles and ideals upon which he had been reared. To his parents, his brothers, and to his young widow we offer our sincerest sympathy. The funeral took place at the Marylebone Cemetery on July 18, when Mr. H. Snell, who had known both the deceased and his wife since they were children, read an appropriate Funeral Service at the graveside. In addition to the members of Mr. Fincken's family and their friends, many well-known Freethinkers attended, and Mr. and Mrs. Foote, who are close friends of the family, encouraged the mourners by their presence.—S.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

### LONDON.

#### OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 3.15, Miss Kough, a Lecture; 6.15, Mr. Burke, a Lecture.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15 and 6, L. Gallager, Lectures.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (The Green): 7.45, Miss Pankhurst, "Woman's Sphere of Activity."

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Finsbury Park): 11.15, F. A. Davies, a Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road, High-street): 11.30, F. Schaller, "Atheism."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields): 3.15, F. A. Davies, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, E.): 7, Miss Kough, a Lecture.

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Jolly Butchers Hill, opposite Public Library): 7.30, F. A. Davies, a Lecture.

### COUNTRY.

#### OUTDOOR.

LANCASHIRE AND YORKSHIRE: Thos. A. Jackson—*Burnley* (Market Place): Sunday, July 28, at 11, "When I Was in Prison"; at 3, "Philosophy of Secularism"; at 7, "The Dead Masters of the Living." *Ashton-under-Lyne* (Market Place): July 29, at 7.30, "The Devil and All His Works." *Dukinfield* (Town Centre): July 30, at 7.30, "The Cause and Cure of Christianity." *Stockport* (Town Square): July 31, at 7.30, "What Would Jesus Do?" *Huddersfield* (Market Cross): August 1, at 7.30, "What must we do to be saved?" *Leeds* (Town Hall Square): 2, at 7.30, "Christianity and Secularism"; 3, at 7.30, "Christian Socialism Impossible."

PROPAGANDIST LEAFLETS. New Issue. 1. *Hunting Skunks*, G. W. Foote; 2. *Bible and Teetotalism*, 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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Chairman of Board of Directors—MR. G. W. FOOTE.

Secretary—MISS E. M. VANCE.

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

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

The liability of members is limited to £1, in case the Society should ever be wound up and the assets were insufficient to cover liabilities—a most unlikely contingency.

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

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

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

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

Being a duly registered body, the Secular Society, Limited, can receive donations and bequests with absolute security. Those who are in a position to do so are invited to make donations, or to insert a bequest in the Society's favor in their wills. On this point there need not be the slightest apprehension. It is quite impossible to set aside such bequests. The executors have no option but to pay them over in the ordinary course of administration. No objection of any kind has been raised in connection with any of the wills by which the Society has already been benefited.

The Society's solicitors are Messrs. Harper and Battcock, 23 Rood-lane, Fenchurch-street, London, E.C.

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Friends of the Society who have remembered it in their wills, or who intend to do so, should formally notify the Secretary of the fact, or send a private intimation to the Chairman, who will (if desired) treat it as strictly confidential. This is not necessary, but it is advisable, as wills sometimes get lost or mislaid, and their contents have to be established by competent testimony.

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