

THE Freethinker

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The only true conquests—those which awaken no regret—are those obtained over ignorance. The most honorable, as the most useful pursuit of nations, is that which contributes to the extension of human intellect.

—NAPOLEON.

Shelley and Mr. Robert Blatchford.

WHEN I was fighting the late Rev. Hugh Price Hughes over the "Atheist Shoemaker" conversion, it will be remembered that the late Mr. George Jacob Holyoake interposed behind the scenes and, after a ridiculous "investigation," gave the head of the West London Mission and his "Sisters" a written certificate of genuineness. Only a few days after Mr. Holyoake went through that extraordinary performance I was unexpectedly placed in full possession of the facts. This was a tremendous surprise to everybody; and the worst of it was, in one way, that it showed the real value of Mr. Holyoake's "investigation." I had this in my mind when calling, about other business, on an old personal friend of Mr. Holyoake's. I was anxious to let him see that I was very sorry for Mr. Holyoake's unhappy intervention, that I hated the idea of a personal quarrel with him, and that I was grieved, to that extent, at the course which events had taken. "Oh," said the old personal friend, "you can't help that. If he gets between you and a parson in a fight, he must take the consequences. That's his lookout. He'd no business there."

Now I am similarly sorry to have Mr. Robert Blatchford between me and the defence of Shelley's reputation and character in the present case. Let me not be supposed to think that Shelley needs my defence. He needs no man's defence. Having been dead nearly a hundred years, he has by this time approached the spot where he is to shine for ever in the firmament of fame. Gravitation settles all positions in the course of time. The tumultuous controversies of the day—with its popular geniuses and its epoch-making books—carry heavy dull things into the upper air, as they sink ethereal things into the dust; but the tumult all subsides, the controversies sink into silence, and what has weight and what has none is settled at first beyond dispute and finally beyond question. Every now and then a Shaw or a Tolstoy—no mean critics in this instance—have a "go" at Shakespeare. They throw a pail of slops up at the sun. It never reaches the sun, but it reaches *them*. The whole thing is absurd. The position of a great poet—this time the very greatest—cannot be challenged with any prospect of success after the lapse of three hundred years.

I repeat that Shelley needs no defence. Why, then, it may be asked, do I stand up to defend him? I do it to please myself, in the first place. I hate to see him slandered, reviled, and depreciated. I prefer to see his laurels upon his brows rather than in the hands of a presumptuous assaulter. In the second place, Shelley was an Atheist, and for that very reason is extremely open to misrepresentation, and calumny, and belittlement. Men of genius on the Freethought side are one of its valuable assets. It is well, there-

fore, to prevent their being either intellectually or morally dimmed by false or foolish criticism.

Mr. Blatchford had been writing, just as the fit took him, about a good many poets. What he said was of no particular value except to those who are interested in his personal preferences. I merely smiled when he declared that Shelley was not a great poet at all, and that there was little, if any, music in him. But when he defied anybody to find him "any really great poetry in the works of this vastly overrated poet," I ventured to point out that the challenge was couched in impossible terms. Mr. Blatchford cried out "Find me" great poetry in Shelley. That could not be done. Yet the fault was not Shelley's. Strange as it might seem to him, it was Mr. Blatchford's. Shelley was one of the most imaginative of poets, and Mr. Blatchford had no imagination worth speaking of. There was no abstract quality in his mind; that was why he made such a muddle of Determinism the moment he passed from the physical to the psychological region. He should therefore leave Shelley alone.

That was plain-speaking, but no plainer than Mr. Blatchford's dicta on Shelley. Right or wrong, it was founded on Mr. Blatchford's public exhibition of himself in his writings. Whoever criticises others also criticises himself. Tell me what you think of this or that great genius, and I know what to think of you. This is specially a case of judging a man by the company he keeps, because everything is voluntary. Many critics forget this, and I take Mr. Blatchford to be one of them. When he runs down a great poet he invites the question, "Do you understand great poetry?" He certainly does not understand Shelley. And the reasons are those I assigned. Shelley is too imaginative for him, and Mr. Blatchford has no abstract quality in his mind. It is one of the most concrete minds in English journalism. He rarely even uses a metaphor. As to his handling of Determinism, if he will put aside the Mikado veil for an hour, and ask some candid friend who is known to understand Determinism what he really thinks of *Not Guilty*, he will probably receive the greatest shock of his lifetime.

Mr. Blatchford will not plead guilty to any want of imagination. He names a scratch collection of authors, beginning with Shakespeare and ending with Henry James, that he has "the right kind of imagination" for understanding, but it appears, he says, that "it is not the right kind of imagination for Shelley." He evidently thinks this is absurd. But he proves it is not so. I had said that such a line as "Pinnacled dim in the intense inane" would not be attractive to Mr. Blatchford and would very likely be unintelligible. And this is his reply:—

"I wonder why Mr. Foote says the line 'Pinnacled dim in the intense inane' is not attractive to me. I never said so. Who told him? And why does he suppose it will be unintelligible to me? It is not. I understand it fruitfully: 'Pinnacled dim in the intense inane' describes with wonderful felicity Mr. Foote's mental situation: he might have been measured for it."

That is how Mr. Blatchford ends a discussion on the genius of a great poet! No doubt he will be surprised at my reproducing it. Let the galled jade wince! I am satisfied. I lured Mr. Blatchford into showing his ignorance of Shelley. "Pinnacled dim in the intense inane" is the last line of the third

Act of *Prometheus Unbound*. Anyone who knew the context would be aware that it could not by any possibility apply to a human being. If it could apply to me, the immediately preceding line would make it a magnificent compliment. I then should be what I never can be—

"The loftiest star of unascended heaven
Pinnacled dim in the intense inane."

Mr. Blatchford does not understand. And he does not know Shelley.

Neither the opinion of Mr. Blatchford, nor my own, settles the question whether Shelley was a great poet. I pointed out that poets, like other persons, have to be tried by their peers, during many generations. I also pointed out that the poets, who are entitled to sit on that jury, have passed judgment, and "in this case there is no court of appeal."

"Here is a Freethinker," Mr. Blatchford cries, "invoking authority against the heretic." Nothing of the sort. The authority in this case is simply the judgment of experts, wielding no force, pronouncing no penalties, passing no sentences. From that judgment there is no escape. Mr. Blatchford summons Tom, Dick, and Harry from the streets—or from his own readers. Begging his pardon, one has to accept their verdict at the ballot box; not that they are always wise, but because there is no time to wait; but when they present themselves to decide a matter of this kind one begs to bow them out with a most decided "good morning."

Mr. Blatchford, with more imagination, would see that bringing in Bibliolatry is beside the mark. Great men who "acclaimed the Bible as the Book of Books" were taught to believe it so in their childhood—and they all belonged to the religion that taught them. There was no mental and moral freedom in the case. Of course there is an appeal against their judgment on that subject. But what analogy is there between the two cases of the Bible and Shelley in this respect? Mr. Blatchford has fallen into a rank fallacy.

What standard of judgments on poets does Mr. Blatchford himself set up? The standard of poetry, he says, is "the best poetry." This is really arguing in a circle. Even if it were not, it leaves all in confusion. What is "the best poetry"? Here is some of it, reply half a dozen well-known poets, pointing to various parts of Shelley. "Nonsense," says Mr. Blatchford, "most of it is rubbish." So much for that standard.

One of Mr. Blatchford's scratch poets and novelists that he has "imagination for" is Robert Browning. I should be surprised if "Saul" were one of his favorites. But let that pass. I want to show that Mr. Blatchford's own poets, so to speak, have lauded Shelley to the skies. And I will take Browning first. The following poem of Browning's is, in its grand dramatic style, a superb compliment to Shelley:—

"MEMORABILIA.

Ah, did you once see Shelley plain,
And did he stop and speak to you?
And did you speak to him again?
How strange it seems, and new!

But you were living before that,
And you are living after,
And the memory I started at—
My starting moves your laughter!

I crossed a moor with a name of its own
And a use in the world no doubt,
Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone
'Mid the blank miles round about—

For there I picked up on the heather,
And there I put inside my breast
A moulted feather, an eagle feather—
Well, I forget the rest."

Swinburne is a poet whom Mr. Blatchford has lately been advertising. I assure him it is quite unnecessary. I lectured and wrote on Swinburne myself nearly forty years ago when publicity was useful to him. He does not want it now. It is late in the day for "doing something" for him. In any case, no man ever praised Shelley more rapturously than Swinburne.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded)

The Origin of Life.

THERE is an argument that has always held a place of high honor in religious controversy. This is the argument from ignorance. It has ranked high, because it is, to the religionist, of first importance. One has only to leave the more superficial of religious beliefs, and come to such fundamentals as the belief in God and a future life, to discover that both, although originating in what men then thought they knew, now depends entirely upon what we do not know. No one has ever been able to prove that there is a future life, but, on the other hand, no one has ever been able to demonstrate that there isn't, and so the believer goes happily on his way. In the case of the belief in God, this attitude is still more pronounced. Nine-tenths of the arguments for believing in a God ultimately turn upon our ignorance of natural processes. We do not know how such and such things are produced, and, not knowing, we must believe in God. It is an admission that, if we did know, there would be no need to believe in Deity. To the believer, God is the almighty performer behind the scenes. We must believe he is there, because we see the scenes moving and the characters making their entrances and their exits. He admits that we do not know how the scenery and the characters are worked, and is afraid that if we did know, or when we know, we shall dispense with God altogether. But meanwhile, he says, we don't know; and, as we don't know, I can claim that my theory is the correct one.

That is why the religionist pounces with such joy upon the admissions of scientific men that their knowledge of things is not complete. The sweetest morsels in a scientific lecture or book are, "We do not know," "We cannot say," or "We may never be able to explain." He darts on them, tastes them, declares them to be good, and straightway offers them as a truly acceptable sacrifice at the altar of his Deity. And if ever "the Lord smelled a sweet savor," he believes that he does so on such an occasion. He feels that while man is ignorant, God is secure. Let him once know, and the game is up. It is not for nothing that one of the earliest fears of the Biblical Deity was lest man should eat of the tree of knowledge. There is no other intelligible explanation why religious people should regard with such dread all attempts to explain the origin of life, and exhibit so much joy over every failure. With ordinary scientific questions the religious man has no particular interest. If it is a matter of manufacturing rubber, or diamonds, determining the cause of a disease or the occasion of an earthquake, he is a quite disinterested spectator. If not completely successful, it is admitted that scientific men have such problems well in hand, and that the explanation falls well within the scope of their methods. But when it is a question of the origin of life, he feels himself at bay. If scientists can explain this, what is there left for God to do? As it is, things seem to go on very well without his interference, and, if he cannot be believed to be operating in the far-off beginning of things, churches and chapels may as well close their doors.

Professor Schafer's address as President of the British Association will fall on this class of people as something of a bombshell. To those who have kept in touch with the main drift of biological research during the past twenty years, Professor Schafer's address will come as a very welcome statement of the real situation in the scientific world. Experiment has followed experiment, and much that was suggested as mere theory a quarter of a century ago has now taken rank as established fact. More and more vital problems are seen to become problems of synthetic chemistry. Over ten years ago it was shown, at a Congress held in Turin, that the heart of a hare, hung in a room that was kept at the proper temperature, and irrigated with an appropriate liquid, could be kept beating for hours, as though it were still in the animal's body. The experiment

has been successfully repeated even with the heart of a man. In various forms, this has now become a stock laboratory example. Not only with the heart is this the case, but almost any organ, or muscle, or nerve, or gland can be separated from the body and made to function at the proper chemical stimulus. Loeb's experiments in fecundating the unfertilised eggs of the sea-urchins with a solution of chloride of magnesium is well known, and points in the same direction. It was also shown by Loeb that mere chemical stimuli will cause a fly to lay eggs. He also demonstrated the large part played by the chemical and mechanical action of light on insect life in producing phenomena that were specifically classed as instinctive, vital, or as proofs of a nascent intelligence.

There are hosts of facts of this class now available, all, of course, well known to the student of science, but carefully kept from the religious-minded by their spiritual guides. Personally, I do not suppose that there are many scientists, capable of speaking authoritatively on this subject, who doubt that the production of life is as natural as is the origin of anything else in nature. Their scepticism is directed to our knowledge of the mode of origin, not to its occurrence. And with calculated dishonesty religious leaders emphasise this candid criticism as disbelief in the natural origin of life. Unfortunately, in this country, at least, there is a tendency with many scientific men, not only to hide their disagreement with current religious views but to go out of their way in order to show the possibility of harmonising the scientific and religious positions. And as this usually takes the form of discovering certain religious implications in scientific teachings, the position is still further confused to the average man or woman who has no particular scientific knowledge, or no special grasp of scientific method.

The really admirable feature of Professor Schafer's address is that he stated clearly, boldly, and without dishonoring qualifications, what Sir Edwin Ray Lankester properly described as "the recognised scientific position." It was significant because it was outspoken, important because it was honest. Without the least reservation Professor Schafer declared that "the problems of life are essentially problems of matter," while "the idea of immediate supernatural intervention in the first production of life," was quietly set one side as being "devoid of scientific foundation." Those who have been led astray by recent writing and talking as to the wholly discarded doctrines of Materialism may well rub their eyes and wonder whither their guides have been leading them. The deliverance of the President of one of our most important scientific conclaves shows the much hated Materialism to be as much alive and as active as ever.

"We are compelled to believe," said the Professor, "that living matter must have owed its origin to causes similar in character to those which have been instrumental in producing all other forms of matter in the universe," and although he is convinced that as ever the constitution of the important cell nucleus is of no very great complexity, "we may hope one day to see the material which composes it prepared synthetically." But a much needed warning is raised to the expectation of solving the question of the origin of life by looking for the production of fully formed organisms in hermetically sealed flasks. These organisms, minute and comparatively simple in structure as they are, yet represent in themselves a long process of evolution. The search must be rather for that primitive material which would represent a real nexus between the organic and the inorganic, a material that may for long escape detection because it will be found so difficult to differentiate it. This warning strikes the true evolutionary note, and discloses the man who not merely talks the language of evolution but thinks in terms of evolution. And this class of thinker is not by any means common even to-day.

It has often been assumed that the production of life must depend upon such an unusual combination

of forces and conditions that it could only have originated during some past and never-to-be-repeated phase of the earth's history. Professor Schafer queries this assumption, and says he has vainly sought for some valid reason for believing that the earth was more favorably circumstanced for the production of life than it is at present, and asserts that no one can be quite sure that the evolution of living matter may not be happening still.

"The process of evolution is universal. The inorganic materials of the globe are constantly undergoing transition. New chemical combinations are constantly being formed and old ones broken up, new elements are making their appearance and old elements disappearing. Well may we ask ourselves why the production of living matter alone should be subject to different laws than those which have produced, and are producing, the various forms of non-living matter; why what has happened may not happen? If living matter has been evolved from lifeless matter in the past, we are justified in accepting the conclusion that evolution is possible in the present and in the future. Indeed, we are not justified in accepting the conclusion; we are forced to accept it. When or where such change from non-living to living matter may first have occurred, when or where it may have continued, when or where it may still be occurring, are problems as difficult as they are interesting, but we have no right to assume they are insoluble."

Here, then, is a plain, straightforward confession of faith by one who is speaking on a subject that falls within his own department; and it is a complete reply to those who, like Sir Oliver Lodge, hold that the mechanical explanation of organic nature breaks down. It has not broken down; and even if it had there would be no other explanation to take its place. The *Christian World* says that "there are touches in the address" which indicates that Professor Schafer "is not a mere materialist, and does not dismiss the conception of a God, Creator, and Governor from the scheme of the universe." If Professor Schafer is not a Materialist, it is impossible to say what he is, and the word has lost its meaning. Of course, he may not be the Materialist of the Christian imagination; but he is evidently a Materialist in any proper sense of the term. It is true that the Professor does not in so many words dismiss a "God, Creator, and Governor"; but he certainly finds no use for him. He leaves God with nothing to create and with nothing to govern. He acts like a legislative assembly that does not finally dethrone a king, but which takes from him all power, all revenue, and all dignities. The God that Professor Schafer leaves the religious world does nothing, and never did anything. The world of life began without him and goes on without him. And the Materialist would be indeed hard-hearted who would deny the *Christian World* whatever comfort may be derived from the contemplation of such a poor substitute for a once omnipotent creator.

C. COHEN.

The Cost of Truth.

THERE is a general impression abroad that Freethought is a city of refuge into which intellectual and moral cowards make their escape. It is taken for granted that Freethought is cheap as well as free. In reality Freethought is neither free nor cheap in the senses intended by its maligners. A Freethinker is by no means a person who is at liberty to think just as the whim of the moment may dictate, without any reference to law, the nature of things, or truth, but, rather, one who has worked out his own emancipation from the trammels of superstition, tradition, or external authority. In other words, a Freethinker is a man or a woman who has paid down in hard mental cash the full price for truth; and on no other terms whatever is truth procurable. The possession of it does not run in families, like blood. Truth is known only to those who have personally acquired it by purchase, or sacrifice. Freethinkers believe that they are in

possession of some of the truth about the Universe; but each one of them has had to search for this little fragment with agonising persistence. Nature does not carry her secret on her forehead, or on the palm of her hand; she has hidden it as in a deep mine; and in order to get at it and fetch it up to the surface, we must dig and dig with might and main. No, Freethought is not to be had merely for the asking, but as the reward of considerable toil and pain. Indeed, to think at all in a world chock-full of conventional conformities is an infallible sign that one is willing to give quite as much as one expects to get. The conventionalist is a willing or unwilling slave. He never thinks, but merely conforms to the customary, or imitates the crowd; but the moment a man begins to think he is potentially independent and free. He resolves to stand alone against the world, if necessary, to be himself, and look at the Universe with eyes undimmed by prejudice, and to find his own path through the jungle of existence. In short, every thinker is of necessity a *free* thinker: to think in bonds is a natural impossibility, like flying without wings.

Now, while thinking *in* bonds is impossible, it is encouraging to reflect that many succeed nowadays in thinking themselves *out* of bonds. But to do this is costly, more costly than the thoughtless are capable of realising. Until quite recently, a thinker was an oddity in Christendom who only deserved to have his head cut off, and who got what he deserved. Bruno was such a monster, and he was burned to ashes in consequence. Servitus was another freak, and John Calvin had compassion upon society by putting him out of the way. In the days of her glory the Church was a slave-owning institution, and hated nothing so much as the idea of freedom, nor punished anything quite so severely as the attempt to smash the manacles. The Spanish Inquisition was simply an office for the stamping out of the least tendency to insurrection among the slaves. To think was a mortal sin, because it inevitably led to rebellion against the slave-holder. A slave has no rights, but only duties that ought to be treated as privileges. The slave-owning institution still exists, but, happily, robbed of most of its ancient powers. The Prohibition Party is daily gaining strength, and it is already self-evident that the days of the Church's tyranny are numbered, that mental slavery is doomed, and that the glorious reign of liberty is drawing nigh. And yet even to-day great is the cost of intellectual freedom. Everyone who obtains it has to pay a frightfully high price for it. Yes, even now the man who thinks for himself gets burned metaphorically; and except through the fires of persecution there is no road open to the republic of liberty. Almost every living Freethinker knows by a bitter experience how true this is. He has been compelled to smart under the momentous discovery that what his ancestors and himself had always cherished as truth was error; and no one that has not made it can realise how painful a discovery that is, at first. The wish to believe often outlasts the power to believe; and while this state of things continues most excruciating is the mental torture; but stronger even than the desire to believe is the dread of unbelief. Many a man has felt that he would rather part with life than with the faith in which he had been trained from infancy. To such a man truth is already visible, only he is not ready to pay the price demanded for it. He perceives clearly that what he once held to be truth is a lie, only he still feels that a lie, which may be truth after all, is preferable to nothing.

When at last the wish to believe is extinguished a marvellous reaction sets in. This is the Baphometric Fire-Baptism of which Carlyle speaks in his *Sartor Resartus*—the Baptism which results in a complete change of attitude towards everything. The old things have passed away, and behold all things are become new. The amazing thing now is not that the man no longer believes, but that he ever did believe. He now sees with the utmost clearness how absolutely unbelievable the whole system

of supernaturalism is. Everything in it and about it strikes him as ineffably absurd. Not only the incarnation of God in the nature of man for the salvation of a world created by himself, but lost through setting itself up in defiance of the Divine will, but the very existence of God as an infinitely powerful, wise, and benevolent Being, impresses the mind as an essentially incredible superstition. It is quite true that the overwhelming majority of the Freethinkers of the eighteenth century were earnest believers in God. With scorn unspeakable did they reject supernatural religion, with all its rites and ceremony; but they adhered with passionate devotion to what they called natural religion. They spat on Christ with disdain; but they worshiped God with humbleness of heart. To-day the belief in God is looked upon as unreasonable as that in the Bible and the Christian religion; and our wonder of wonders is how such men as Voltaire and Paine, so rational in all other matters, could be believers in God. It is only fair to add, however, that the God whom they adored was believed to have nothing to do with the government of this world. In relation to the events of the cosmos he was only an interested spectator. We hold, on the contrary, that if the Deity made the Universe, he must be held fully responsible for its behavior. Herein lies the complete explanation of the Atheism of the present generation of Freethinkers. They differ from their predecessors by the ampler consistency of their system. Their contention is that, Nature being all we know, it is degrading as well as preposterous to believe in anything beyond it. Nature is our all in all, at once our tyrant and slave, our conqueror and conquest, the arbiter of our destiny and supplier of our wants; and our duty towards it is to understand, control, and obey it.

Yes, great is the cost of truth. In exchange for it we have to give reputation, social status, material interests, even the right to fairplay and justice. A high dignitary of the Church of England said not so very long ago that it ought to be considered a disreputable thing to be an infidel. Any departure from the conventional religion of Great Britain, especially any open attack upon it, is in the eye of the law a punishable crime; and there are always those about who are more than delighted to put the law in operation whenever they get a chance. Though called the freest country under heaven, England is almost the only country in which free speech is not allowed. Nearly every newspaper, every pulpit, every political platform is bound and gagged in the most outrageous fashion. Even the Houses of Parliament are inhabited by miserable slaves whose speech and vote are strictly under the control of the party to which they may happen to belong. We are all free to conform to the views held by the majority; but the moment we have the courage to be nonconformists, we are cast out before a shower of cuffs and kicks. And of all forms of nonconformity the worst and most severely boycotted is that which ventures to raise its voice against the popular religion. Consequently few there be who have the temerity to commit a crime so entirely detested. Passive Freethinkers are numerous enough throughout the length and breadth of the land; but militant ones are few and far between, because of the abuse, derision, and obloquy with which they are persistently covered. Even George Meredith, great and noble as he was, had not the strength to assail the Christian religion openly, though his poems in particular constantly exhale Freethought sentiments. It is by no means an easy thing for a man with domestic responsibilities to face the consequences of a public attitude of an unqualified opposition to Christianity. In many instances the price is too heavy to be paid, not because of cowardice, but because of a conscientious sense of duty towards dependents.

And yet, great as the cost of truth is, the compensation for loyalty to it at any cost is greater. Once a man publicly espouses truth the interior of his being thrills with rapture and becomes the abode of an

all-conquering peace. He is in a state of perfect mental equilibrium and fears nothing. The powers of the world to come no longer alarm him; and his one desire now is to be at peace, not only with himself, but with all his surroundings as well. Inward peace is the sublimest and most precious reality within our reach, because he who has it is bound to work with all his might for the triumph of universal peace. The chief reason why the Freethinker attacks the Christian religion is that it has always been, and still is, in spite of all protestation to the contrary, the strongest and most active enemy to peace. It is well known that the Churches are largely responsible for the social and economic conditions which are causing so much bitterness and unrest at the present time. They have persistently overestimated the importance of the individual as a potential citizen of a future world, and almost totally ignored his duties and obligations as an actual citizen of the present; but for doing this they are not to blame, because they came into existence in order to do it, and nothing more. They have done it with a vengeance, and society has suffered incalculable injury in consequence. Therefore, the Churches need to be superseded, not because they have neglected their duty, but because they have done it only too well. They must be superseded by institutions whose one object shall be to train earth's citizens for the efficient fulfilment of their mission as such. This is the work in which Freethinkers ought to take an active part, the work of getting rid of the Churches as Churches, and of erecting a social view-point, from which each member of the race shall realise the necessity and have a foretaste of the joy of working for the welfare of the whole. The consciousness of doing something to further so grand an end is compensation enough for whatever apparent sacrifice anyone may have made in becoming an avowed advocate of Freethought.

J. T. LLOYD.

Niemojewski, Drews, and the Historic Jesus.

OUR readers will remember the case of our friend and colleague, the learned Andrzej Niemojewski, who was condemned to twelve months' imprisonment at Warsaw for publishing blasphemous common sense about the Catechism. Not content with this savage piece of Christian charity, the bigots prosecuted Niemojewski's celebrated book, the *God Jesus*, the German translation of which I had the honor some time ago of introducing to the notice of English Freethinkers (*Freethinker*, June 4, 1911). The court before which the case was tried acquitted Niemojewski, but the irate friends of God carried the matter to a Court of Appeal, so that, in the meantime, the Polish edition was seized and its circulation made illegal, and thereupon the possibility of a swinging additional sentence became the only Christian consolation of Niemojewski's prison hours. The happy news now comes to us that the Court of Appeal at Warsaw has confirmed the acquittal pronounced by the lower court, the result being that this learned book, which has won the highest praise from the "Master of those who know"—I mean Dr. Arthur Drews—will be free to take its place in the libraries of the learned, and resume its work as one of the highest disseminators of light concerning the astral origin of the Christ Myth. So that here is a case in which a man, marked out in Russia for prison as a blasphemer, has a better chance of escaping the clutches of the bigots than he would have had had his learning and researches been made here in England, where, as Mr. Foote points out, the accusation of blasphemy never fails to bring forth fruit in conviction and sentence.

It was at first thought that Niemojewski would not have the satisfaction of attending the Munich Congress, as his release from prison was timed to

take place on September 14—i.e., about ten days after the conclusion of the labors of the Congress. In order to make some amends for the unavoidable absence of their great leader, the Polish Freethinkers nominated George Kurnatowski and other comrades to represent the movement at Munich, but, wondrous to relate, the authorities, in view of the decision of the Court of Appeal, have released Niemojewski before his time, so that the most brilliant and profound scholar that has yet fallen during action in the front rank of the Freethought battle now raging throughout the world will be one of the most striking personages at the Munich Congress. At the last International Congress in Eastern Europe—at Prague in 1907—Ferrer, but recently escaped from his thirteen months' incarceration in Madrid, where he, too, had fallen away among thieves, was the central figure amidst the Freethinkers gathered in the Bohemian capital from all parts of the world. The next Congress in Eastern Europe—that at Munich—still finds a martyr amongst the assembled apostles of Freethought—a fact that witnesses to the undying hatred of Christianity to human reason, to its unsated appetite and thirst for Freethought flesh and blood, and its scorn for the intellectual rights of heretics in all countries, under all regimes, and beneath the diverse banners of all its multiform creeds. Christianity—like Christ—is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever—a persecuting creed, meanly contemptuous of mental freedom, always willing to smite down the critic and unbeliever, and unscrupulous as to the calibre and quality of its victims so long as a cheap victory for itself and much suffering for others may be secured by the exercise of its arbitrary power to kill, imprison, fine, and boycott the unbeliever. In Spain, in 1909, it murders the Educationalist, the Rationalist, the active founder of schools dissociated with religion. In Poland, it is the learned and abstruse student of the astral theory of the origination of the Christian God Jesus. In England, it has so far fallen from its high estate that vulgarity in exposition and grammatical lapses, combined with proletarian directness of speech, accentuated by the employment of the Christian word "damn" (a locution quite permissible to parsons at the lectern or in the pulpit), are the small things that bring down the wrath of the English God and the scolding sentences of English magistrates and judges. And our recent experience of Christian bigotry teaches us that when this holy religion can kill, it kills without mercy; when it can punish learned "blasphemy" with twelve months, it cheerfully does so; and when its keen delight in inflicting suffering on its opponents is whittled down by public opinion to a niggling three or four months' imprisonment, the Cerberus of Christian ferocity, once fed with the roasted bodies of heretics, with the strangled and mutilated frames of unbelievers, or with the wholesale holocausts of the St. Bartholomew massacres or the Holy Inquisition, contents itself with such paltry sops as have recently fallen into its maw from the stupid outbreak of persecution now raging in this enlightened England.

When we see the Russian Government, so noted for its knouting disregard of the intellectuals, voluntarily reducing a blasphemy sentence, and its highest judges declining the temptation to reverse the intelligent verdict of an inferior court in exculpation of a learned, but dangerous book, which offers a ruthless attack on the historical side upon Christianity, it is obvious that there are some things that are done better in Russia than in England. Who ever heard of a blasphemy prosecution failing in England, or of a blasphemy sentence being out down in our happy land?

It is not only in Russia where our patriotic pride is taught in these matters a lesson of humility. In Germany, too, we are put on a lower pedestal of national conceit, so far as regards intellectual freedom for the exercise and interchange of ad-

vanced heretical opinion. I have not yet seen any reference in the English papers to a momentous religious discussion which took place in Berlin on January 31 and February 1, 1910. The subject was a profoundly revolutionary one, "Did Jesus ever live?" and the controversy, which was organised by the Berlin group of the German Monist Union, awakened throughout the empire an enormous amount of interest. Verbatim reports were taken of the various speeches, and these were published on behalf of the Monist Union, and form excellent propagandist material. Quite recently a French translation was issued, and the publisher has been good enough to send me for review this most interesting and really remarkable book.* I cannot trust myself at the fag-end of an article to deal with the fascinating charm of this unique contribution to the literature of controversy as between Christian and Freethinker. Here we have for two long nights a learned discussion engaged in between Dr. Arthur Drews, who attacked the historicity of Jesus, and a number of profound theologians (like Von Soden) and Lutheran pastors, and—wonder of wonders—not one single word of acrimony, not the slightest personal aspersion intervening to mar the faultless good taste and consistent adherence to the terms of discussion, whether on the one side or the other. The best that can be said by learning and eloquence on either aspect of this thorny subject was said on this occasion. The serene calm and philosophic detachment of the disputants on both sides are not more creditable to the trained intellect of the speakers than to the discipline and restraint of the very large crowd of partisans, Christian and Freethinking, who listened and applauded amidst perfect order and mutual toleration. I fear it would be impossible in London to organise a discussion of such transcendental importance, attended by learned disputants of equal distinction and merit, or conducted by controversialists who would know how to attack and defend the historicity of Jesus with a single eye to the documents and the evidence, and an absolute disregard of any applause save that of their own sense of historic veracity. The French translation is now in its second edition, and it deserves the widest circulation, as the one and only volume of controversial literature (in my experience, at least) wherein both sides say their say from their different antagonistic points of view, without deviating a hair's breadth from the line of perfect courtesy. I wish I could look forward to seeing this book translated into English. In the meantime, I beg most heartily to recommend it to the student and the thinker. Later on, I hope to be able to speak in some detail of this remarkable book. In order to end where I began, I may add that Niemojewski attended this discussion, and was referred to in admiring terms by Dr. Drews, who opened the debate and cited his views in support of his general contention.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

THE CHURCHES.

We know that a system is doomed that compels men to avow belief in what they feel is not true. What have all the Churches together done for the masses? General Booth told me the last time I saw him that, at the end of his long life, he mournfully realised that the state of the people was worse than when he started the Salvation Army. The Salvationists and the Churches have done something, but have not overtaken the mere increase of the populace. The Churches have failed because the rival dogmas they teach are incredible to the majority of mankind. Failure is not due to defects in the many earnest and noble teachers and preachers who have taken orders, received the tonsure, or accepted "a call" to the pastorate of Nonconformist chapels, but to the fact that they are not agreed about their Message, nor what it is, nor on the evidence for its truth. The Message, therefore, is rejected by the masses.....If there be any truth in religion, that truth must surely be as clear to every one as to anyone."—*Vanoc* in the "*Referee*" (Sept. 1).

* *Jésus a-t-il vécu? Controverse religieuse sur le Mythe du Christ* (Paris: Albert Messein, Editeur, 19 Quai St.-Michel; 1912, pp. 178; 1 franc 50 cents).

Acid Drops.

The attack on Secular Education at the Trade Union Congress was very skilfully engineered. Behind the coarser hand of Mr. Sexton was the skilful hand of his Church. The Catholic Church wanted to get rid of the overwhelming Congress vote in favor of Secular Education. To do this openly and straightforwardly was impossible. The overwhelming vote would have been cast again in reply to any open challenge. The Church therefore devised the cunning policy of working on the sympathies of the Miners', whose vote was enough to swamp that of all the other Unions put together. The Catholic miners made it appear that Secular Education was a form of persecuting them—that their children would be deprived of religious education, and that miners ought not oppress miners in that way. It was simple sophistry, of course, but the average working man is not yet a philosopher, and the mass of the miners were easily taken in by that pathetic appeal. They proposed, and they carried, that in the interest of peace and good fellowship the question of Secular Education should not be discussed at future Trade Union Congresses. It was a foolish resolution; one Congress has no moral or legal power to decide what the next Congress shall or shall not discuss; and this foolish resolution is sure to be broken sooner or later. The Catholic Church wins—on a side issue, by getting rid of a detested question. But that is all. There has been no vote against Secular Education, *per se*; consequently, the last vote in favor of it still stands. We are glad to be able to quote the *Daily Herald* on this point:—

"Judging from the feeling of the delegates present, the majority, which was eventually shown in favor of the resolution, can in no sense be interpreted as a vote against Secular Education, but rather as the expression of the general desire to avoid further friction in Congress on this question. Secular Education remains a plank in the Trades Unionist platform, the Miners' resolution leaves it as firmly nailed down as ever."

This will be seen clearly enough when the question of Secular Education becomes a burning one again—as it is bound to do when the Government introduces its promised Education Bill.

Mr. Will Thorne, M.P., the Congress chairman, was straight enough. He plainly told the Congress that he hoped the Miners' resolution would be voted down. Mr. G. H. Roberts, M.P., spoke to the same effect. Mr. John Ward, M.P., made a fool of himself. He objected to "this sectarian spite being introduced into their Labor affairs." But who introduces it? Those who want their religious ideas taught at the public expense; that is, at the expense of people who repudiate them and even detest them. Secular Educationists want to banish the ground of "sectarian spite" altogether, by excluding from the public schools a subject on which nothing is really known, and about which people are sure to quarrel acrimoniously. Mr. Ward declared that he wanted his children religiously educated in the public schools. It is an impudent want. He is only entitled to have them educated religiously in places supported exclusively by himself and others who share his opinions. Public money is all citizens' money; those who differ as well as those who agree.

The chairman, Mr. Will Thorne, M.P., pointed out the unwisdom of adopting a resolution worded in this manner, and invited the Congress to vote against it. His advice was overruled; but it is doubtful whether future Congresses will hold themselves bound down by a resolution of this character. Every meeting has, and should have, every power to regulate its own deliberations; but it is folly to expect that all future gatherings will accept this ruling as final. As the chairman said, the resolution stultified the Congress, and robbed them of the very liberty that they professed to enjoy. A body of workmen engaged in forging chains intended to restrict the liberties of future gatherings of workmen is one of the sights that only an enemy of democracy can find pleasure in contemplating.

To those speakers who argued that the Trades Union vote in favor of Secular Education did not represent the opinion of individual members, the Chairman had a ready and apt retort. The resolution had been passed year after year for some years, and, if it had not fairly represented the opinions of those who sent them, their instructions would have been to vote against it. For our own part, we haven't the least hesitation in saying that had there been the slightest chance of rescinding the resolution in favor of Secular Education, the attempt would have been made. Those who have been intriguing against it all along would have been only too glad

to have done this. But they knew that Secular Education in State schools represented the settled conviction of the vast majority of trades unionists. So the most they could hope for was that the Congress should leave it alone in future. And, as it is, the present position stands thus: the Trades Union Congress, having affirmed its belief in the policy of Secular Education, declines to further discuss the subject.

The new "General" Booth's first move displays all the family's characteristics. He asks the public—and the newspapers help him handsomely at the game—for £150,000. This is for a national memorial to "General" William Booth, which is proposed to take the shape of a training institute for officers of the Salvation Army. We are not suggesting that they don't want training. They want it badly. But it would be a great waste to spend £150,000 on them. £5,000 would be nearer the mark. The fact is, as we have often pointed out lately, that the Booth family all suffer more or less from megalomania. This it is, together with their passion for money, which explains their big financial demands on the British nation. They talk of their "Army" as though it were synonymous with Christianity, instead of being a small sectional denomination, with the most antiquated theology, unscientific methods, and barbaric form of government.

"General" Bramwell Booth overlooks one very important fact. We refer to the death of Mr. W. T. Stead, who went down with the *Titanic*. The loss of Mr. Stead is so recent that it has not yet produced its full effect. Mr. Stead did more for the Salvation Army than anyone else but the "General." They might have been called its two living pillars. It is curious that both of them died in the same year—and the younger one first.

Ex-President Steyn always showed himself a man of principle and courage, but he continues to be old-fashioned in the matter of religion,—the result, of course, of his early false training. We see by a *Cape Times* cutting that he has been laying the foundation-stone of a new Dutch Reformed Church at Reitz, and he told his audience that "the Church" was more necessary than ever in this age of Materialism. Money was being spent by millions on warships and armies while thousands of people did not know where to look for the bare necessities of life. What was the remedy for this state of things? *Prayer!* The cause of the South African war was the lack of proper prayer on both sides. "If it should ever happen that the people became estranged from the Church, then they must write 'Ichabod' over the door." If he means the *Church door* we agree with him.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in South Africa has issued a Pastoral Letter on Sunday observance. We gather from it that the clergy out there are fast losing their monopoly of "the blessed Sabbath." They confess that they regard "with very grave misgivings the persistent encroachment that is being made upon the sacred uses of this day." Not only is labor going on in gold-mining and other industries, but there are "Sunday sports, concerts, and popular entertainments, and suchlike uses of the day, which inevitably divert the mind from the devotional spirit that ought to prevail." Finally, a call is made upon "every citizen" (a large order!) to "use his electoral rights in resisting anything that would tend to the secularising of the Lord's Day." From which it appears that the South African clergy are feeling the draught badly.

In Natal the growers are suffering, not from too much rain, but from swarms of locusts. The *Christian World* says, in a rather superior tone, that the coolies "crowd into their temples carrying offerings to their Joss, which they lay before him as a supplication for help in their dire emergency." This is, of course, very foolish on the part of the coolies; but we wonder wherein the difference lies between the conduct of these coolies and the Christians praying for a cessation of rain or for the salvation of the crops? Man for man, what is there to choose between the Christian and the coolie? Joss for Joss, what is there to choose between the Joss of the Christian and the Joss of the coolie? Yet we send missionaries out to the coolies to teach them the error of their ways. They must give up praying to their Joss and pray to ours instead. Neither of them do anything; but theirs is the wrong one. A visitor from another world would have no hesitation in placing Christian and Joss upon the same level.

The Annual Report of the Church Missionary Society says that there is great need of Christianity in China because of the superstition and cruelty that exists. There being no

superstition and no cruelty in England, we are naturally anxious to prevent its existence in other places. But it appears that one great obstacle to the spread of Christianity in China is that "Atheistical books, written in an attractive style, are circulating widely," and Archdeacon Moule reports that "the deadly poison finds a resting-place in the hearts of many Christians, especially the young men." This is very sad. First of all there is the trouble of catching the convert, and then, when he is caught, the deadly poison of attractively written Atheistic literature seizes him, and he is lost again. China is really awakening. And as Christianity couldn't get the Chinese while they were half asleep, it will stand small chance of success once they are wide awake.

The same Report says that in Japan "a great hindrance to the spread of Christianity is the failure of individual Japs to appreciate their own personal need of salvation." Exactly; the obstacle to Japanese becoming Christians is that they don't see any benefit that is likely to result from the change. Which is precisely what we have always said.

The only thing the Christians are always ready to give to the Heathen is Christianity. They know its value.

"Seven condemned criminals, six Italians and one negro, were put to death in Sing Sing Prison, New York, on August 12. Five of the Italians were members of a gang who had committed robbery and murder. The sixth had cut his wife's throat. All were Catholics, were accompanied to the death-chair by three or four priests, and the last act of each was to kiss a crucifix. The negro, who had shot a policeman, had a Protestant clergyman for a spiritual guide, with whom he knelt and repeated a prayer. Admitting his guilt, he paid the penalty without protest, and even with cheerfulness, while owing either to a difference in their nature or nationality or their religious training the Italians observed an opposite course, declaring their 'innocence,' approaching the death-chair with trembling, and departing this life with lies as well as the crucifix on their lips. They had been adherents from their youth up of a Church which does not inculcate the practice of truth-telling except to priests, to whom, probably, the crimes of these men had been confessed. Believers in the efficacy of repentance, confession, and prayer will have to hold that the souls of the seven are now with God and entering upon an eternity of happiness, for unless the attendance of the spiritual guides means this it means nothing. Leaving them with the angels, we may turn our eyes back to earth and inquire what a religion is worth, belief in which does not serve to deter the votary from robbing and killing his fellow-men." —*Truthseeker* (New York).

Rev. M. S. Bell, of Kingswood, Birmingham, is angry with those whose who suggest that harvest festivals and thanksgiving services should be dropped this year. If the English crops are spoiled, are there not plenty of good crops abroad, and can't we buy them? Certainly, but those who have lost the English crops won't have much money to buy with. They can't make up their losses in that easy fashion. Mr. Bell didn't think of that. But allowance must be made for his mental upset,—for he sees in these impious suggestions "the tendency of present-day England to drift into paganism and agnosticism."

Following the example of the Rev. G. S. Streatfield, the rector of Bridgham, Norfolk, announces that he will have no harvest thanksgiving this year. He rightly says that it would be meaningless to have such a service while corn crops are rotting in the fields. We congratulate both these gentlemen on the amount of common sense shown by their decision. It is not as complete as we would wish, but it is something. Perhaps, on further reflection, either these two clerics, or, maybe, other people, will see the folly of such a service on any occasion. But to ask men to return thanks for the present harvest is not only to ask them to take part in a foolish ceremony, it is really an insult to their manhood. They are ordered to be grateful for all that God does, no matter what it is or how it is performed. It allows them the privilege of giving, but not of withholding. They may praise but they may not condemn. And we repeat that a religion such as this robs people of all true manhood. Resignation under adversity may be a good thing, but to return thanks for adversity that calls forth the resignation is carrying the joke a little too far.

The *Christian World* does not agree with the rector of Bridgham, which is only natural. Its agreement would disagree with its readers. It asks: "Is there not all the more reason to thank Him for the world's harvests, out of which the people will be fed, whatever may have happened to the

crops in particular localities?" This plea, not very cleverly, evades the whole point. It is asked, why expect farmers to return thanks for a harvest that is not there? The *Christian World* replies, because it is somewhere else. It is all right in Russia, or Argentina, or America, or somewhere else. But how does that benefit the British farmer? His crops are gone, his landlords will demand the rent, and to many the year will spell famine. Nor does it end with the grower. The price of milk and foodstuffs will either rise or remain high during the winter, and while most will manage to pay the increased price, to many it will mean privation of some kind. Yet we are advised to be thankful because bad as things are, they might have been worse. We agree; but that things might have been worse than they are is no warranty for thanking God because they are as bad as they are. It is the gratitude of the slave thanking his master because, although he has nearly killed him, he has still left him alive. Many of the old hymns describe Christians as worms. Evidently, some of them do not belong to the variety that turn.

It is the dull season again and the newspapers are once more writing up the Young Men's Christian Association, and London is being agitated over the question of the membership of the Tottenham-court-road Institute. According to the *Daily Chronicle* it is "one of the finest clubs in the world"—yet a big effort has to be made to fill it!

Religion justifies anything—even impudence. The Coventry and District Free Church Council is preparing to take a religious census of the town. A staff of 800 Paul Prys are to visit all the homes, hotels, boarding-houses, etc., in Coventry, and get the people found there to state what religious denomination they belong to. Self-respecting people would tell these Paul Prys to mind their own business. But self-respect is not common where religion is concerned. The instruction to the Paul Prys who find people that want to argue is "Don't." That's wise, anyhow.

Rev. Sanders Etheridge, Courtsmouth, Haslemere, Surrey, left £12,872. Not as big a camel's hump as some, but a fatal obstacle to going through the needle's eye. Rev. Edward Alexander Theed, Roman Catholic priest, Plymouth, left £6,340. That is enough to secure him a good singing. Both reverend gentlemen have our sympathy. "And in (ahem!) he lifted up his eyes, being in torment."

Another poor Christite gone down the wrong turning! Rev. Edmund Thomas, rector of Guiseley, near Leeds, left £53,463. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth."

Mr. G. R. Sims is original—in some things. He has just been telling his *Referee* readers that the old practice of burying a suicide at four cross-roads was "a Christian idea of sympathetic consideration for the unhappy dead," the roads forming a cross over the body, and the cross being "the emblem of God's promise to the worst of sinners." Nonsense, Mr. Sims, nonsense! And don't you know it is? The suicide was buried in unconsecrated ground, and the special position of the grave was an added indignity. People trod upon him from whatever point of the compass they came.

Tom Hood understood this matter a great deal better than Mr. Sims does; witness the last verse of his "Faithless Nelly Gray":—

"A dozen men sat on his corpse,
To find out why he died—
And they buried Ben in four cross-roads,
With a stake in his inside."

Even the stake was not a mere fancy of Tom Hood's. It was driven into the suicide's body.

A witness at Brentford said that the prisoner "was too drunk to stand." "Me!" exclaimed the prisoner. "Why, I stood drinks all round." This comes of one word often having several meanings. And if you turn the light of this fact upon the Old Testament, which was written all that time ago, and in Hebrew—a language that ran from right to left, without any vowels or so much as a break between the words—you will understand why it is such a funny old book now.

Birkenhead Conservatives had a fit of economy, and resolved to spend less on newspapers, especially halfpenny ones. The *Daily Mail* and *Express* don't appear to have been involved in this access of thriftiness, but the *Daily News* and *Chronicle* were both sacrificed. That they were both Liberal was, of course, an accident. But such things

will happen. That is what we are told when the *Freethinker* is excluded from the Public Libraries. The Liberals tell us so as well as the Conservatives.

"Two things," said Kant! Who doesn't know the rest? It is a rare old controversial "chestnut," and it naturally turned up in the *Daily News* article on Professor Schafer's address to the British Association. When a knowing reader sees it he smiles and passes on. No doubt it still imposes on the unknowing. It reads so nicely, and then there is the proud satisfaction of agreeing with Kant. Perhaps the other way about is nearer the mark.

The *Daily Mail's* correspondent at Rome is responsible for the following:—

"Mgr. Liviero, Bishop of Citta di Castello, on the Tiber, was administering confirmation in the cathedral of that town when he noticed that a girl was wearing a blouse with sleeves which he considered far too short. He interrupted the ceremony and called on her to withdraw.

"As his advice was not followed, and as she remained in church after the service, he walked up to her and attempted to eject her. Several young men, including the son of an Italian deputy, at once took the girl's part, and the bishop retired to the sacristy.

"In the evening a demonstration took place before the episcopal palace, and when Mgr. Liviero appeared at a window, intending to address the populace, he was pelted with tomatoes and other vegetables and obliged to withdraw."

It is astonishing how these ecclesiastics are obsessed by female nudity. But why should the laity waste "tomatoes and other vegetables" upon them? Was it a symbolic in this case? Did they mean that the Bishop wanted cooling?

People are screaming that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. Nobody cares who wrote Bacon. There is no run upon his writings at the booksellers. All the interest is in "the other fellow." Just so. And that settles the question.

"Whiskey Emanuel" was the christening label of a black baby in British Guiana (see *D. Chronicle*, Sept. 7). We wonder which half of his child's name the negro father preferred.

A South African correspondent sends us the following cutting from *Grocott's Penny Mail*, the oldest publication of Grahamstown:—

"An intensely amusing episode is to be recorded in connection with the benediction of the nave of the Cathedral on Tuesday last. The great building was holding a huge congregation. Among the occupants of the seats near the western door sat a gentleman. You would not call him old, but his hair has been dusted as it were with snow and his face is deeply lined. It was evident he had had his battle with life. Next to him sat a boy of about a dozen summers. He had a fresh and chubby face; he resembled one of the three lads in Reynolds' famous picture 'The Choristers.' The pealing anthem was swelling the note of praise when this juvenile, who apparently was wrapt up in the solemnity of the occasion and the proceedings, tugged the coat sleeve of the elderly gentleman who, by the way, was no relative of his, and said, 'Daddy, can you give me sixpence?' Believing that the boy required the money for the collection, he was promptly handed the nimble coin. Before the plate was passed round, however, a hymn had to be sung. Then softly, on tiptoe, the little lad stole out of the church into the night. A further report states that he wended his way in the direction of a bioscope entertainment!"

The human boy is generally too many for his pious elders when he gets a chance.

The writer of "By the Way" in the *Witney Gazette* (Oxon) asks the "someone" who sent him a copy of the *Freethinker* not to send him any more. "My mind is made up," he says. But nobody's mind should be made up like that. It is fossilisation.

There are no destitute people in London, so a Dogs' Club is being organised at No. 17 Park-lane. It is to be a swell affair, with a hygienic cloak-room and other luxuries, including a "medical adviser" on the premises. We are not told whether there is to be separate accommodation for "ladies" and "gentlemen"—properly labelled to prevent misunderstanding.

The Calvinistic Methodist Churches of Flintshire is petitioning the Government against the delivery of letters on Sunday. If they mean their own letters, we see no reason, except perhaps a practical one, against their being accommodated. But if they mean other people's letters, they show the usual modesty of religionists.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

September 29, Manchester.

October 6 to December 15, every Sunday evening, Queen's (Minor) Hall, London, W.

To Correspondents.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1912.—Previously acknowledged, £182 19s. 5d. Received since:—T. W. Key (S. Africa), 10s.; R. E. D., 10s.; W. Dodd, £1; A. W. Coleman, £1 1s.; Greaves Fisher, 5s. 2d.; W. H. B., 2s. 6d.; R. Lancaster, £1.

Walworth, London: R. H. Side, senr., £2; Bartrum Side, 10s.; E. D. Side, £2; Mrs. E. D. Side, £1; Beatrice Side, 10s.; Mrs. L. F. Side, 2s. 6d.; R. H. Side, junr., 2s. 6d.; A. C. Side, 2s. 6d.; R. D. Side, 5s.; H. W. Side, 2s. 6d.; E. B. Side, 2s. 6d.; H. W. Wilkinson, 2s. 6d.; W. G. Knight, 2s. 6d.; J. Moxley, 2s.; Mrs. H. W. Wilkinson, 2s. 6d.; Mrs. W. G. Knight, 2s. 6d.; total, £7 9s. 6d.

C. E. BOURCHIER.—See paragraph. Thanks.

E. B.—Much obliged.

T. W. KEY.—Thanks for cheque and cutting; also for your friend's subscription to the *Freethinker*. We wish all our friends would try to get us new subscribers.

"FIGHTER," writes: "Re your article on the London County Council, I say 'Bravo!' And I show my appreciation of your pluck and determination by sending you my guinea towards 'the sinews of war.' I shall look forward to the coming fight with great interest." This correspondent hopes the circulation of the *Freethinker*, which he is exerting himself to promote, is increasing. We can answer the question better shortly. It is satisfactory to hold on during the summer months.

W. P. MURRAY.—Mr. Bryce will doubtless oblige with the name of the publisher of the *Shadow of the Cathedral*.

COL. B. L. REILLY, enclosing cheque for fighting the London County Council, wishes us "complete success in the contest."

E. BURKE.—The cutting is indeed amusing. We sympathise with you in having to reply to such absurdities.

BERNARD MOSS-MORRIS.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.

PRETORIA FREETHINKER.—Cuttings welcome. See "Acid Drops."

E. T. JARVIS.—We cannot deal with the "colored parson" case in that stage. It wouldn't be fair. Besides, scoundrels are none the worse for being black or the better for being white.

G. BRADFIELD.—Noted in "Acid Drops." Glad our Dolet articles were "much appreciated" by Cheltenham friends.

J. L. RAYMOND.—We join you in the hope.

W. DODD.—The President's Fund is, as you say, moving more canal-like than river-like. It may be the absence of summer. We have suffered ourselves a bit from that cause.

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

R. DANIELL.—Glad to have your good wishes in the fight.

C. C. WESTON.—We have already dealt with the Bishops on praying for rain.

B. F. O. D.—With regard to Charles Bradlaugh's death, the particulars are supplied in his daughter's pamphlet, which you appear to know. We cannot add to that record, nor can anyone else. Mrs. Bonner, the nurse, and the doctor, were the only persons who saw him during his last illness, and their testimony is printed in the pamphlet. Voltaire did not die "a believer." See our *Infidel Death-Beds*.

A. M.—Christian charity causes more ill than it alleviates. We will bear your suggestion in mind.

E. LUNN.—Thanks for what you are doing to push our circulation.

DAVID WATT.—We know we are welcome at Glasgow.

H. SMALLWOOD.—The Shenstone affair is too much a Church domestic squabble.

JAMES NEATE.—You are right. The N. S. S. has got to fight.

W. D.—A returned letter awaits you here marked "gone away."

W. H. B.—One of the letters we like reading.

P. MORRISON.—You are welcome to the *Freethinker*. We can spare it as long as you live to read it. We are delighted to hear of Mr. Jessop's kindness.

SOME correspondence stands over unavoidably till next week.

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.

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.

Our Fighting Fund.

[The object of this Fund is to provide the sinews of war in the National Secular Society's fight against the London County Council, which is seeking to stop all collections at the Society's open-air meetings in London, and thus to abolish a practically immemorial right; this step being but one in a calculated policy which is clearly intended to suppress the right of free speech in all parks and other open spaces under the Council's control.]

"Fighter," £1 1s.; W. A. Yates, 3s.; Col. B. L. Reilly, £1 1s.; R. Daniell, 2s.; J. Pendlebury, £1 1s.; J. T. G., 5s.; A. W. Coleman, £1 1s.; E. Lunn, 2s.; David Watt, 3s.; James Neate, 10s.; H. T. C., £1 1s.; W. Cromack, 2s. 6d.; W. H. B., 1s.; E. Starling, 1s.; Thos. Judge, 2s. 6d.; E. Parker, 5s.; Vincent, 2s.; G. W. Foote, £1 1s.

Sugar Plums.

We postpone for another week, for sundry reasons, the full announcement of the Sunday evening Queen's (Minor) Hall lectures which Mr. Foote will start on October 6 and continue till December 15. London "saints" are requested to bear this enterprise in mind meanwhile.

An advertisement of the Bradlaugh Dinner appears elsewhere in this week's *Freethinker*. It is to be held at the Holborn Restaurant on Wednesday evening, September 25. The tickets are only 3s. each. Mr. Foote presides on this occasion, and it is his intention to lay emphasis on Charles Bradlaugh's career as a propagandist of Atheism, and its relation to the trend of thought in England to-day. It is to be hoped that a large attendance will show the constant and undiminished respect in which Charles Bradlaugh is still held by those who knew him in the land of the living—more than twenty years ago.

Charles Bradlaugh's daughter should always be in evidence at this Annual Dinner. We trust she has been duly invited and asked to speak. We have not heard whether her son will be present again. It will be remembered that he made a very interesting *début* as a public speaker at last year's dinner.

The legal fight with the London County Council cannot begin till after the Long Vacation, in October. Meanwhile we beg the friends of free speech, and all that pertains to it, to supply the sinews of war for this fight. We beg to assure those who may not quite follow all the facts that this is a very serious matter, and that if the battle be avoided it can only be by an ignominious and disastrous capitulation, which will leave free speech at the mere mercy of the London authorities in future.

The N. S. S. is not idle in the meantime. It is organising a protest meeting, with a view to common action, of all the societies affected by the County Council's despotic action. An effort is also being made to induce the Parks' Committee to receive a deputation on the subject.

Miss Vance would be glad to hear as promptly as possible of any other than the old-established Societies that have had their "permits" stopped by the London County Council.

Mr. Foote's *Bible and Beer* has long been out of print and a new edition—with some revision and a few important additions, notably the explanation of the religious origin of the cross on beer barrels—has for some time been in type. Mr. Foote was undecided what to do with it. At length he came to the conclusion that he would let it be used to start the cheap series of Pioneer Pamphlets he is editing for the Secular Society, Ltd. The pamphlet is now in the press and will be ready for sale in a few days. It runs to forty pages, and the price is only one penny. There ought to be a great run upon it, especially in Mr. Gott's hands under the Northern Tour.

Bible and Beer will be followed by *Deity and Design*, in which Mr. Cohen deals with the design argument in the light of evolution, with special reference to the theology of Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace. The third number of this Series will be another pamphlet by Mr. Foote, long out of print, namely *Christianity and Progress*—which is recommended in Mr. Robert Blatchford's *God and My Neighbor*. Mr. Lloyd will contribute a pamphlet, but the subject and title are not yet decided. Mr. W. Mann's *Modern Materialism* will be warmly welcomed. Mr. W. Heaford, we hope, will

contribute a Life of Ferrer, and Mr. A. B. Moss something special from his own pen. Pioneer Pamphlets, it may be seen, is not to be filled with refuse.

Mr. Foote has also given the Secular Society, Ltd., the right to publish a cheap new edition (the old one has been for some time out of print) of his *Bible Handbook*, which is to be got through the press as quickly as possible, though not hurried, as accurate printing is absolutely essential in such a work. This work only needs reprinting. It was done once for all. Mr. Foote cannot afford to print and publish it as cheaply as the Secular Society, Ltd., can; but he can forego any literary profit in view of the advantage of seeing the book doing its widest work in the world.

Mr. Cohen's *Determinism or Free Will?* is to have a companion in a similar volume on the question of the Soul and a Future Life. Mr. Lloyd has been writing it during the summer and the manuscript is now finished. After being read carefully by Mr. Foote, who is (for the present) acting as honorary general editor of the publications of the Secular Society, Ltd., it will be sent to the printers, and probably issued some time during the autumn.

Mr. E. Burke's excellent letter in the (Wood Green) *Sentinel* on the career of the late General Booth has evoked several replies, which he will answer collectively when his orthodox critics have finished. Meanwhile, the *Sentinel* is to be congratulated on its love of fairplay. It gives all sides a hearing.

We are glad to see that the *Spectator*, at least, is fairly confident that the Trade Union Congress is not likely to respect the resolution *re* Secular Education passed at this year's meeting. "Protestant miners joined with Irish Catholics," our contemporary says, "to bring about this boycott of a great problem. But we doubt if future Congresses will adhere to it. Certainly no other European Labor Party could have made such a proposal, least of all have accepted it."

We overlooked an article on the Blasphemy Laws in the *Inquirer* of August 17, signed "W. Kent." It is ably and soundly written, if we make a little allowance for the Unitarian point of view. The writer says that Carlyle, who endeavored to prove the existence of the devil to Emerson by taking him to the House of Commons to hear six hundred "talking asses," was "as much a blasphemer as Foote or Blatchford." "Something very sinister" is noted in the fact that "the majority of the victims of these (blasphemy) prosecutions have been poverty-stricken not only in body but in mind." "We have ourselves," Mr. Kent says, "heard Mr. G. W. Foote express himself about the Deity in terms quite analagous to those for which punishment has been inflicted, without any action being taken." Quite so. The policy of the "blasphemy" prosecutions is really contemptible. They used to attack the leaders of Freethought. Now they scarcely attack anybody but the helpless. They "go for" common soldiers, and even camp-followers. There are points in Mr. Kent's article with which we do not exactly agree. We do not understand, for instance, why people's religious convictions should be treated with greater respect than their convictions on other subjects, especially as their religious convictions are for the most part nothing but inherited beliefs. Still, we congratulate Mr. Kent on his reasoned condemnation of the Blasphemy Laws, and his appeal for their total abolition.

Professor Schafer, in his address to the British Association, quoted the famous panegyric on man in one of the wonderful prose passages of *Hamlet*:—

"What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!"

Professor Schafer appreciated this golden eulogy, but he warned his audience against the swelled-headedness that might result from it. The man of science ventured to put in a proviso and a precaution against the enthusiasm of the poet. But it was unnecessary. The poet had anticipated him. Shakespeare did not end with the word "god." He went on first to clinch the eulogy by calling man "the beauty of the world" and then to correct his false pride by calling him "the paragon of animals." Which is exactly what Professor Schafer wants man to believe. Right down to the last detail Shakespeare went by finally calling man "this quintessence of dust." Thus the Master gave the whole truth of human evolution in a nutshell. Being a Freethinker, and probably an Atheist, his astonishing genius saw clearly where smaller men's vision was clouded with prejudice and superstition.

The Supernatural.

"All history shows that, in exact proportion to the intellectual progress of nations, the accounts of miracles taking place among them become rarer and rarer, until at last they entirely cease."—W. E. H. LECKY, *History of Rationalism*; 1900; vol. i., p. 145.

"Hence it is that, supposing other things equal, the superstition of a nation must always bear an exact proportion to the extent of its physical knowledge. This may be in some degree verified by the ordinary experience of mankind. For if we compare the different classes of society, we shall find that they are superstitious in proportion as the phenomena with which they are brought in contact have or have not been explained by natural laws.....The hall of science is the temple of democracy."—H. S. BUCKLE, *History of Civilisation*; 1904; pp. 212, 520.

"The extant forms of Supernaturalism have deep roots in human nature, and will undoubtedly die hard; but, in these latter days, they have to cope with an enemy whose full strength is only just beginning to be put out, and whose forces, gathering strength year by year, are hemming them round on every side. This enemy is Science, in the acceptance of systematised knowledge, which, during the last two centuries, has extended those methods of investigation, the worth of which is confirmed by daily appeal to Nature, to every region in which the Supernatural has hitherto been recognised."—PROFESSOR T. H. HUXLEY, *Science and Christian Tradition*; 1902; p. 32.

It is said that "Man proposes, but God disposes," a saying we once heard parodied by a lady, who said that it should read, "Man proposes, but woman disposes."

However, it is a fact that we often propose doing a certain thing, and circumstances decide otherwise. For instance, we intended writing upon stars and planets, their origin and destiny; but, seeing an advertisement that the new scientific quarterly magazine, *Bedrock*, contained an article by Ivor L. Tuckett, M.A., on "Psychical Researches and 'The Will to Believe,'" we obtained a copy, and finding the article good, we were further induced to obtain a copy of the same writer's lately published work, *The Evidence for the Supernatural*.^{*} And this work has quite eclipsed the stars and the planets, for the time being. Whether God "disposed" matters upon this occasion is a problem we willingly hand over to those who believe in his existence.

The title of this work is rather misleading. It should have been "The Evidence against the Supernatural" or "The Evidence for the Supernatural Examined," for the evidence for Spiritualism, telepathy, prayer, and miracles is subjected to a searching analysis, and shown to be altogether valueless.

In the Preface the author modestly observes:—

"I have little expectation of convincing by my arguments those whose beliefs were formed irrevocably in childhood; but I hope that I may succeed in so influencing the mental atmosphere of the present day that future generations may find it easier to discover and hold to whatever is true in the sphere of the so-called supernatural, and that superstitions such as belief in witchcraft may increasingly be relegated to the past."

Let those enthusiastic youths and maidens who dream of the emancipation of the people in a single generation take heed; the defences of superstition are not going to fall to the sound of trumpets like the fabled walls of Jericho. The rationalising of the people is a slow and painful process; the majority of mankind hug the superstitions they have been taught to believe during childhood, parting with them with reluctance and regret, often regarding the truth-bearer with ill-concealed fear and hatred.

Herbert Spencer, when young, thought that he had only to place conclusions based upon facts before the public to see them at once welcomed and embraced; in after years he rather sadly confesses his disillusion. Writing to Dr. James, of Brooklyn, he observes: "In my earlier days I constantly made the foolish supposition that conclusive proofs would change beliefs. But experience has long since dissipated my faith in man's rationality."[†] Another

^{*} Published by Kegan Paul; 7s. 6d.

[†] Cited in the *Freethinker*, July 19, 1891; p. 344.

great thinker—John Stuart Mill—has observed: "I had learnt from experience that many false opinions may be exchanged for true ones, without in the least altering the habits of mind of which false opinions are the result."*

For instance, you may convince a man that the stories of the Creation and the Deluge, as recorded in the Bible, are not scientifically true; but if he retains his belief in a God and the supernatural, you have not changed his habit of thought; he is not a Rationalist. His thoughts are vitiated at their very source; everything mysterious, everything he does not understand, he will be ready to attribute to the supernatural. In fact, Mill declared that no great improvement in the lot of mankind is possible "until a great change takes place in the fundamental constitution of their modes of thought."

Therefore the warfare of science with religion must go on until every trace of belief in God and the supernatural has been eliminated from the human mind; and books like the one we are now dealing with are valuable helps in this direction.

Every Freethinker is familiar with the good old tale of the infidel struck dead in the midst of his blasphemies. To-day God seems too busy to attend to these cases himself, so his delegates have invoked the law to defend the All-Powerful, until now it is not the thunderbolts of an enraged Deity that the Freethinker has to contend with, but fine or imprisonment at the hands of a petty magistrate. But these God-struck-him-dead tales generally bear the marks of fiction plainly stamped upon them. Like the fairy tale, it happened "once upon a time"—at no particular place, at no particular time, to no particular person; and if you are inquisitive as to any of these particulars, that is a further proof of hardness of heart.

However, Mr. Ivor Tuckett tells us of an authentic case of supposed divine vengeance. It happened a long while ago, it is true, and therefore cannot be investigated now. It happened, in fact, to be precise, on January 25, 1753, and a monument erected by the Mayor and Corporation of Devizes stands in the market-place of that town to transmit the record of the Divine fury of our Heavenly Father to future ages and nations yet unborn.

It appears from this record that one, Ruth Pierce, agreed with three other women to buy a sack of wheat in the market, each paying her due share. One of the women, in collecting the money, discovered a deficiency, and taxed Ruth with not having paid her due proportion. Ruth protested that she had paid her share, expressing the wish that "she might drop down dead if she had not." Upon repeating this wish, "she instantly fell down and expired, having the money concealed in her hand."†

As Mr. Tuckett observes, "there is no question of the facts; but at the same time they do not prove that God struck her dead." There are numerous instances where the fear of the terrible consequences of some act had led to syncope—sudden stoppage of the heart—and death; and he cites a case recorded by Judge Maning in his book on *Old New Zealand*, where a Maori, having unwittingly eaten some food reserved for a chief, died soon afterwards from the fear awakened by his belief in the terrible consequences which would overtake him for having eaten this sacred food. And again:—

"Similarly, I have myself seen at least two men drop down dead from the nervous fear engendered by having been examined at a hospital and seeing the terrible word 'asthenia' written on their paper as the disease from which they were suffering. I may add that 'asthenia' merely means weakness, and is often written when it is difficult to make out any definite disease. In both cases the men had enlarged hearts, with the walls weakened by fatty degeneration."

There is no doubt that this woman was suffering from heart disease, and the excitement brought about her death, which was taken as self-evident witness

of her guilt; the money being "concealed in her hand" and the reported "consternation and terror of the surrounding multitude" being probably touches put in to make a good round story of it.

The citizens of Devizes who erected this monument evidently regarded God as a violent and jealous-minded despot, always on the watch for any infringement of his dignity. As Colonel Ingersoll has remarked:—

"The theologians have insisted that crimes against men were, and are, as nothing compared with crimes against God. That, while kings and priests did nothing worse than to make their fellows wretched, that so long as they only butchered and burnt the innocent and helpless, God would maintain the strictest neutrality; but when some honest man, some great and tender soul, expressed a doubt as to the truth of the Scriptures, or prayed to the wrong God, or to the right one by the wrong name, then the real God leaped like a wounded tiger upon his victim, and from his quivering flesh tore his wretched soul."*

We have all heard or read of dreams wherein the supernatural figures very largely. Mr. Tuckett tells us of one that has been handed down in his family orally through three generations, and which he compares with a similar one told by the late Baron Huddleston. It is to the effect that a certain Mr. Shepherd, a woollen manufacturer living in Plymouth towards the close of the eighteenth century, woke one night to rouse his wife and tell her that he had had a dream that he must go to Launceston, which was then the assize town for the county of Cornwall, but for what reason he did not know. Mrs. Shepherd, like a sensible woman, persuaded him to go to sleep again, reminding him that he neither knew anyone there nor had he any business to take him to that town. Upon falling asleep again, it was only to have a repetition of the dream; and upon it being repeated a third time Mr. Shepherd arose, saddled his horse (this being in the days before railways), and set off on his journey. Arrived at Launceston, and not knowing what to do, he learned from the ostler that the assizes were being held in the Castle that day. A man being tried for murder, he thought to pass the time by going to the court to hear what it was about. The prisoner was charged with the murder of a little girl at Penzance, and as Mr. Shepherd entered the court the judge was asking the prisoner if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him. The prisoner looked round the court, and said: "Yes, my lord; a gentleman has just come in who can save my life if he chooses," and pointed to the new-comer. Mr. Shepherd was at once placed in the witness-box and asked if he knew the prisoner, but answered with reluctance that he had never met the man before. But the prisoner persisted, saying: "Do you not remember that I met you in Sutton-road in Plymouth on such a day?" (mentioning the date of the murder at Penzance). Mr. Shepherd replied that he had no recollection of that circumstance whatever. The prisoner then said: "You took a little red book out of your waistcoat pocket and put down in it my name and address, with the date, saying that you had no work for me at present, but that you might have some at a future time." Mr. Shepherd remarked: "Well, that is a habit of mine, and I have the little book in my waistcoat pocket now." It was produced, with the prisoner's name written in it, together with the date, which was the very day on which the murder was committed at Penzance. And as it was impossible in those days of slow travel to commit a murder at Penzance and to ask for work at Plymouth on the same day, an alibi was clearly proved and the man's life saved.

Compare this with the following story told by Baron Huddleston, which Mr. Tuckett quotes from *The Story of Crime*, by H. L. Adam, which, stripped of superfluous words, runs as follows: Some years ago a man was charged with robbery with violence, at that time a capital offence. During the trial a

* *Autobiography*; 1873; p. 238.

† *The Evidence for the Supernatural*, p. 21.

* *Oration on Voltaire*, pp. 23-4.

stranger, who was apparently holiday-making, called at a neighboring inn, the landlord of which took him to hear the trial. Upon entering the court the prisoner had been convicted, and was being asked by the judge whether he had anything further to say. He replied that he was innocent, and that at the time he was miles away from the place. The judge observed that he was unable to prove this, when the prisoner, catching sight of the stranger just entering the court, exclaimed: "Yes; there's a man that can prove it. On the day in question I carried his portmanteau on to a vessel at Dover. It came open and a toothbrush fell out, and I put it back after it had been wiped. Ask him." The stranger declared that he was unable to recollect the incident, but if he were allowed to refer to his diary he would be able to say for certain. His diary was fetched from the inn, where sure enough there was an entry in confirmation of the prisoner's story, and the prisoner was discharged. Subsequently, however, both men were hung for sheep-stealing. The visitor to the inn was merely a confederate, and the alibi was a "got-up" affair.

There is little doubt that the first-mentioned story is an elaborated version of the second one, especially when we are told that it had been transmitted by word of mouth through three generations. To show the untrustworthiness of this means of transmission we have only to remember the parlor game which consists in transmitting a tale, or a short account of some incident, from one to another until it has gone round the circle, the fun consisting in comparing it with the original description before it started on its travels.

(To be continued.)

W. MANN.

Holidays—and Religion.

SUNDAY morning. 11.30 by the clock. The righteous are worshipping. My baby and I are paddling. We are the only couple to take the water, though the sun is shining genially, the air is warm, and the tide low. We are watched by hundreds from the promenade, and by a few of the bolder spirits who have sufficient courage to come to the sand, and who sit reading. Yesterday, at this hour, the beach swarmed with merry children; but to-day is Sunday, and, though ladies may display gaudy robes, they may not uncover dainty feet. Reverence, if not felt, must be aped, and the bairns who yesterday were unkempt and at ease are to-day starched and combed—and uncomfortable and impatient. From the promenade they watch, wide-eyed and envious, my baby as she builds castles for the water to destroy.

A couple of days ago I read in one of Mr. Belloc's books that the Catholic Church "makes men." I am writing from memory, and on the beach, so I may not have it quite right; but I think he said that the men made by the Catholic Church were not boasters, nor swaggerers, nor bullies, nor fools, but human beings, different from beasts, capable of firmness, discipline, recognition, tenacity. It is like Mr. Belloc to say things like that, and whether it be true or not, it has given me the key to this other thought, which is true—the Protestant Church makes cowards.

Those people on the promenade want to come down here to the sand. To their friends they would confess as much, though one might well pity any poor stranger who would suggest such a thing. I mentally apostrophise them thus. I would like to take all you promenaders into a large hall. I would like Mr. Never-Mind-the-Name to deliver an address to you on Independence. I would like you to have five minutes' silent prayer as they do in the Churches, with closed eyes and bowed heads, and I would like each one of you to decide to take your amusements independently of the opinions of your neighbors. I would guarantee a crowded beach this afternoon, and the dear old British Protestant Sunday should no longer make cowards of you all.

Further up the beach there is a ragged man with two dogs. He is throwing a stick into the water for his terriers to fetch out. He comes towards us, and I perceive that his face is like a ferret's, and his nose lacks character. He stops near me, speaks quietly to his dogs, and bends down to stroke their ears as affectionately as a mother fondles her baby's hair. I am reminded of a sight I saw two days ago. There were no less than five portly parsons panting up the promenade, and their faces did not betray humility any more than mine does—but I don't lay claim to any special humility, and they do. I recall the five clergymen, I glance up now to the well-dressed people on the promenade, my eyes wander back to the man with the dogs—and I say aloud: "There are better things in life than Churches and Respectability!"

"What did you say, daddy?" asks my baby, in some surprise.

"Let us complete our castle, my dear," I reply, "for it will soon be time for lunch."

R. NORTH.

The House of Prayer.

THE rain-refreshed air is alive with the merry pipings of birds. Every tree, and there are many, seems to be a house of beauty and of song. Hundreds of larks are singing, in the sunshine, over the strath behind me; and in the woods the cuckoos make low soft notes of greeting to each other. Blackbirds and mavis are rejoicing above the bushes of the nursery over which I look to the fir-clothed hills; and the flowers, having drunk their fill of the night rain, are spreading their rich, rare colors to the sun.

Nature makes no difference because to-day is the Sabbath. The everlasting warfare of her various parts continues, heedless of the distinction of days; and her songs are as glad some to-day as they were yesterday. Her beauty is not less evident, nor more evident, because this is the Lord's Day. The sparrows do not cease their bickering to praise God; nor does man; for beneath the common solemnity of the master in his pew, and the underpaid worker in his, alongside, there surges and seethes a war little different, some think, to the irresponsible conflict of unhuman nature. The deep dark green of the luxuriant tree foliage, and the emerald of the fruit bushes and vegetable rows are not more lovely because this is the day set apart as God's day.

Nature remains the same, unhyocritical, owing no allegiance to other than her own laws, obeying only her own forces. She bows to no God; and there is none in her or behind her; for an unmoral God we cannot conceive.

Forgetting the little limitations, forgetting the puny power he can exert over the larger nature, of which he is but a part, forgetting how easily it can overwhelm him, Man so gives the wind to the wide wings of his fancy that he flies beyond the certainty of things, dreaming vanities and feasting on foolishness. Boundless as is the scope of Nature, and wonderful, man's conceit is as boundless and more wonderful. Startling are the seeming anomalies of Nature, yet more startling are man's imaginings. Full of strangeness, too, Nature is; but the strangeness of the pictures of man's mind passes surprise. They give us more gravely to ponder, even while they make us laugh. They attract like a loadstone. Nay! we cannot liken those dreamings of Christ, of God, of the Soul, of Heaven, to the loadstone. Their peculiar fascination, explainable as it assuredly is, occupies an essentially different position, and demands, besides a similar scientific analysis, an essentially different recognition. They have eaten so successfully into the minds of the many, and have partaken so liberally of the mind's food, that, like maggots and the cheese, there are more holes and maggots than cheese.

Perhaps that is why these beloved brethren are thronging to church, this glorious summer morning. They have not yet learned to distinguish the maggots

from the cheese, nor has their taste yet been raised above a liking for live stock. The maggots of superstition are still palatable to them. God, and Christ, and the Soul, and Heaven still eat greedily of the food that Nature provides, and the Christian, in turn, devours them, smacking his lips in a contentment whose covering of appropriate sanctity burlesques the feast.

The hour of prayer approaches; and from the kirk steeple on the brae facing me the bells suddenly ring out, drowning the melodies and chorals of the birds for an instant. But the birds sing on unconcernedly, and, if their music is diminished by the din, the comparison makes it more delightful, and I am glad that Nature can transcend what the proudest Religion can do. The bellringer becomes tired of playing the church's pathetic and benevolent appeal, "Come unto me." The jangling changes to slow solemnity, very slow, and very solemn. With prolonged notes he is playing the sad hymn, "This is the house of prayer." The musicians of the air seem to be laughing merrily now. And no wonder! For the absurdity of the bell-hymn is as palpably grotesque as the comical wailing of an intruding cat at a joyful wedding party, where the merry-makers are all purged of the silly superstition religion breeds and fosters. In the warm, brilliant light of the sun, in the freshness and beauty of the hills and trees, in the sparkle of the raindrops reflecting the sunrays, in the vigor and vitality of the ceaseless singing of the countless birds, the sadness and staleness of that melancholy hymn fitly consummate the morbidity of religion. Nature, even in her places of great desolation, retains a grandeur that appeals to our strength, never to our weakness. Religion fastens to our weakness, preys upon it, not to consume it, but to fertilise it. The house of prayer is a breeding-place of human weakness, of folly, of impotence. It is the slaughter-house of nobility, of strength, of freedom.

The last jangling note has lost itself amongst the breasts of the hills, just as the last appeal of organised religion will, some day, perhaps not very far distant, lose itself for ever in the deep silence that will fall upon days best forgotten. And now the service in the house of prayer has begun. Inside that ugly building of red sandstone, with its square tower and belfry, its arched windows and ponderous entrance, all suggesting a staid respectability, heavy with mammon's evidence, and unenlightened by a single trace of art, the congregation is singing a well-worn psalm. It tells of a God of war, a vile, bloodthirsty monster whose revenge approximated his omnipotency, and whose incarnadined lust was clotted thickly with the gore of innumerable victims. It tells of his victory; and the voices rise to a pitch of exultation resembling a barbarian carnival. It tells of his might; and the voices grow strong with the exuberance of admiration. It tells of his wonderful love for his chosen people whom he hath delivered from the hands of their oppressors, and it bids them rejoice exceedingly because the Lord of lords is upon their side. The congregation sing lustily, as if thoroughly in sympathy with the barbaric excitement the words and music portray. For the time being, all the achievements of civilisation are broken and scattered like dust flung into the teeth of a gale. All the hardly-won humanisation has been destroyed. Hate, fear, cowardly victory, bloodshed, riot, war, have usurped its place. The mind has become degraded to that of the savage; and the congregation enjoy it. Religion is supreme. Its influence affects every singer, perchance every silent member of the flock, standing, listening. And yet, we are told religion elevates. It is a lie. Religion degrades: it does not elevate. Compute the mental influence of these atrocious hymns, psalms, and bloodsteepled portions of the Christian's ignoble Holy Bible. Weigh it in the balance of good and evil with the good asserted to have been accumulated by religion, and remain, if you can, a religionist. If you cannot, then your proper place, the place that will give credit and honor to you, and satisfaction of

mind, and strength of will, and a nobler ambition than that which seeks to serve a time-stricken Christ, is with those who call themselves Atheists, those who fight that man may be free in mind as in body.

And now the minister is praying. There is holy awe within the house of prayer. Heads are bent, and minds are half asleep. Everything is acquiescent as the words of meek submission to the holy will, the phrases of humble thanksgiving, the sentences of God's great power and love and consideration and sympathy, ascend to the white throne of grace. Petitions for his bountiful gifts of consolation in times of affliction, requests for the continuance of his soothing presence during periods of trial, appeals for the embrace of his protecting, everlasting arms in times of trouble and sorrow arise to the risen Lord that he may pass them over to God for attention.

Whatever a priest may, in his sermon, yield to science, whatever he may concede to Biblical and religious criticism, he invariably denies, inferentially, the concession in his prayers. Not by a minister's sermon can one judge of his mental position; for what he says there he will contradict in his prayers. In these there is no attempt to equivocate. His religious beliefs are plainly shown forth in them. They contain orthodoxy rude and uncolored. A prayer is the plainest evidence of idol-worship, be the idol hewn in stone or moulded in the mind, be it material or mental. Well may the church be named the House of Prayer, for in the prayers offered up within it are to be found the surest characteristics of its nature.

ROBERT MORELAND.

Stephen Girard.

MADISON C. PETERS, a clergyman, originally Reformed but later a Baptist and then an independent, is now writing newspaper articles in a department entitled "Success Under Difficulty," the kind of pieces that appear daily with a picture of the author in the north-west corner. For one of his subjects Mr. Peters has selected the philanthropist, Stephen Girard, who founded the great college for orphans in Philadelphia and provided in his will that no minister of the gospel should ever darkey its doors. Of him the clergyman-writer says:—

"He was the meanest man alive. He lived in a dingy little house. He was childless. He was repulsive in person. He lived on less than any of his clerks. He seldom smiled. He was stony-hearted and worshiped the golden calf. He had no vices; vices are expensive, and he had few virtues. His only ambition was to die rich."

If Mr. Peters wanted that description of Girard to stand as true he should have stopped there; but he had the indiscretion to add:—

"He established the Second National Bank in Philadelphia, advanced several millions to the United States treasury during the war of 1812. In 1793, during the yellow fever in Philadelphia, the old miser had a temporary change of heart, when the citizens fled in dismay, houses were left empty, the streets deserted, when the sufferers were left to die and lay unburied for days where they had died, Stephen Girard, with Peter Helm, in that season of dread, offered themselves as managers of hospitals, and when nurses could not be had for any price, Stephen Girard turned nurse, and for the first time he opened his purse liberally, sparing no expense, managing, not only the interior of the hospital, but going through the city seeking the sick and bringing them to the hospital. The most universally despised man had now shown himself a hero—he carried the victims to their beds, from the hospital gate, nursed them, received their last messages, watched for their last breath, and then wrapped them in sheets on which they had died, and with camphored handkerchiefs pressed to his mouth, carried them out to the burial grounds and placed them in the trench. He did this noble work for sixty days, sustained by Peter Helm."

Perchance in calling Girard "the meanest man alive" and the one "most universally despised," Mr. Peters desired only to give his story a dramatic climax, but the end does not justify the means. The man who performed the heroic work of Girard could not have been a mean man or a despised one, save to those who regard all unbelievers as mean and despicable.—George Macdonald, "Truthseeker" (New York).

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.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, J. Rowney, a Lecture.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (The Green): 7.45, Miss K. B. Kough, a Lecture.

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Finsbury Park): 11.15, E. Burke, a Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Ridley-road, High-street): 11.30, C. Cohen, "Christian Stocktaking"; 7.30, Miss Pankhurst, "Women's Sphere of Activity."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields): 3.15, C. E. Ratcliffe, "Determinism and Freewill"; 5.15, Mrs. Watson, "The Salvation Army from Within."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, E.): 7, E. Burke, "Buddhism and Christian Claims."

WOOD GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Jolly Butchers Hill, opposite Public Library): 7, Mr. Davidson, "The God of 'Going To Do.'"

COUNTRY.

OUTDOOR.

LANCASHIRE AND YORKSHIRE: THOS. A. JACKSON—*Bolton* (Town Hall Square): September 15, at 11, "The Christ Myth"; at 3, "The Wonders of Life"; at 6.30, "The Salvation Army: An Exposure." *Bury* (front of Circus): 16, at 7.30, "The Devil and All His Works." *Leigh* (Market Place): 17, at 7.30, "The Faith of an Infidel." *Farnworth* (Town Centre): 18, at 7.30, "The Latest Thing in Gods." *Accrington* (Market Ground): 19, at 7.30, "Was Jesus a Failure?" *Colne* (Cumberland-street): 20, at 7.30, "Humanity's Debt to the Rebel." *Nelson* (Technical School Yard): 21, at 7.30, "When I Was in Prison."

BLACKBURN (Market Square): Joseph A. E. Bates—Sept. 17, at 8, "The Philosophic Necessity of Materialism"; 18, at 8, "Royal Parasites."

PRESTON (Market Square): Joseph A. E. Bates—Friday, September 13, at 8, "Professor Schafer on the Origin of Life"; 15, at 7, "The Vampires"; 16, at 8, "Sun-Myth and Star-Fire."

Bradlaugh Fellowship.

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WILL BE HELD AT THE

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The Committee are enabled to make this reduction by means of the bequest of the late James Dowling.

Chair taken at 7 p.m.

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Application for tickets must be made not later than Saturday, September 21, to the Hon. Sec.,

W. J. RAMSEY, 146 Lansdowne-road, Hackney, N.E.
Evening dress not desired, but quite optional.

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

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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.

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