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Those who are quite satisfied sit still and do nothing ; those who are not quite satisfied are the sole benefactors of the world.—LANDOR.

The Life of Religion.

ADAPTATION is a law of life. An organism that is ill-adapted to its surroundings disappears ; or, what is much the same thing, a gradual modification is effected that establishes the necessary equilibrium. There is no exception to this principle, and there is no escape from its operation. It is, moreover, as true of institutions and beliefs as it is of living beings. Institutions that are not suitable to the character or the mode of life of a people cannot originate. If they are introduced from without they are either transformed or gradually die out. In this respect there is no vital difference between the conditions that determine the life of a belief and those that determine the existence of an organism. If either live, a suitable environment must be present. And in the life of humanity the struggle of ideas and beliefs, the extinction of some and the survival of others, is the analogue of the process of selection that is seen in the animal world.

But while there is this fundamental resemblance between the two processes, there is also a very important difference. In the animal world the process is, so to speak, automatic. So far as we can see, it goes on quite independently of the conscious action of animals. But in human society mental activity itself becomes a formative power. Man's environment is mainly a social one, and this is formed by his own ideas of life and its meaning. In this way all the formative forces of human society—the home, the State, the Church, with hosts of other institutions—come into existence and are perpetuated. Their perpetuation creates the real continuity of human existence. Their preservation is at once a help and a hindrance to progress. It is a help because without them each generation would have to start afresh. It is a hindrance because the effort to preserve them blinds people to the need for improvement and the occasional necessity for destruction. Moreover, once we have established a belief in an institution, we have created something that will struggle hard for existence, and so resist to the uttermost every attempt at improvement. We have, so to say, mortgaged the liberty and the welfare of future generations. They have to fight hard what is, in order to realise what ought to be ; with the result that the whole story of reform resolves itself into a contest of the present against the restraining or arresting influence of the past.

Taken together, these considerations explain the origin of religious beliefs, and the means by which they are perpetuated. They will also explain the reason why, without any exception whatever, the weight of religious beliefs is always cast against the reformer.

If one were to ask an educated man of to-day to draw up a brief statement of his opinions about the universe, it would not be difficult to deduce from such a statement some idea of the nature of his social environment. We should have to conclude

that he was living in a society in which certain ideas as to the character of natural phenomena were current. Such a statement would make use of a whole host of terms that would show us a people acquainted with the nature of gravitation and electrical and chemical forces, and would indicate the presence of a certain kind of knowledge in other directions. If, instead of taking a man of to-day, we were to take a man of five hundred, a thousand, or two thousand years ago, a similar result would follow. In other words, given the best ideas of an age, we can draw a picture of the general character of the environment. Or, if, instead of taking the whole circle of knowledge as an indication of the nature of the environment, we were to take special ideas, it would be as easy to deduce therefrom the kind of environment in which those ideas were born, and to which they are adapted.

Using this as an instrument of investigation, there can be no reasonable doubt as to the character of the environment that gave birth to religious beliefs. The belief that natural phenomena were the result of the operation of supernatural or "spiritual" powers and personalities could never have originated in a civilised society. As a matter of fact and of actual observation, such communities do not originate their religious beliefs ; they simply inherit them. Religious ideas belong as surely to a savage state of society as does the doctrine of evolution to a society that possesses a considerable stock of scientific knowledge. One simply cannot think of a people who knew the causation of natural phenomena originating the belief in personal intelligence creating and controlling nature. And it is surely the height of absurdity to believe that, while uncivilised people were demonstrably in error as to their belief about the shape of the earth, the nature of sun, moon, and planets, of the nature of disease, and of a thousand and one other knowable things, they were correctly informed on subjects that baffle the skill of their descendants. In brief, if a skilled anatomist can reconstruct an entire animal from a handful of bones, it is as possible to reconstruct the natural environment of religion from an examination of religious ideas.

Religious ideas, then, presuppose the existence of an uncivilised state of society—of a community in which scientific knowledge is at a minimum. So long as this culture stage continues religion needs no artificial culture to perpetuate itself—it is perpetuated by the whole force of social life. There is no need for anything in the shape of a defence of religion, for the reason that there is nothing to attack. No one doubts that the tribal ghosts or spirits or gods are responsible for all that occurs, with the result that religious beliefs faithfully reflect life. At this stage the harmony between the religious idea and the environment is complete. Gradually, however, this harmony is broken up. A truer knowledge of natural processes, first in one direction, then in another, is gained. The power of the gods is circumscribed. Man discovers that he can satisfy his needs or work his will without being concerned about the pleasure of the gods. He makes the first move towards taking his destiny into his own hands.

But the growth of this mental attitude threatens the security of religion, not only by effecting a

change in the environment at the time, but by altering it for succeeding generations. Heretical ideas once established become as much environmental forces, moulding the lives of the next generation, as do changes of climate in relation to purely animal life. For its very life's sake, therefore, religion is bound to resist all change in the nature of the human environment. It must keep this intact at all costs. It strives to keep things as they were because its life properly belongs to the past. It resists the introduction of new ideas because these represent modifying influences that put the religious mind out of harmony with its surroundings. The long struggle of religion against progressive ideas has no other and no deeper significance than this. It is only working out on the conscious plane of a principle that is expressed throughout the animal world. And when religion can no longer control the whole of the social environment, it strives to create and maintain an environment suitable to itself. The maintenance of a religious atmosphere in the home, the cry for a religious atmosphere in schools, the boycotting of Freethought literature and speeches, the maintenance of a special language, dress, and mental attitude in church and chapel, even the division of things into sacred and secular, are all illustrations of the same principle. They all contain the admission that if people are subjected to the full and uncontrolled influence of modern life and knowledge, their religious beliefs inevitably decay. Religious belief, in a modern environment, represents an artificial culture. It only continues to the extent that it is possible to perpetuate an environment that properly belongs to the past.

Religion not only operates on the environment; it operates also on the organism itself. By a process of sheer selection, by a misinterpretation of human activities, and by controlling many of the avenues of social promotion, it manages to secure an amount of belief, or when belief is lacking, of conformity that would not otherwise be possible. It is not difficult to trace, in general outline, the work of religion in each of these directions. To commence with, all heresy represents a case of mental variation. In the animal world, whether a variation possesses survival value or not, is determined by the character of the environment. The same principle applies here, only in this case the survival value of heresy was determined by the power of religious organisation, and is still so determined to a very considerable extent. But in earlier times the heretical variation was eliminated, almost as soon as it appeared. From savage times onward all the deaths and punishment for heresy have in sum had one significance—the elimination of a progressive, critical, inquiring type of mind, and the perpetuation of a docile, credulous, and conforming religious type. If, on the one hand, religion has striven to create an environment to suit the religious animal, on the other hand, it has striven not less energetically to breed a type of human being suitable to a religious environment.

In modern times, at least in most civilised countries, religion is no longer strong enough to follow this direct method. But it can still in every country exert sufficient power over social forces, and sufficiently control the avenues of social advancement to secure a considerable degree of conformity. One can neither mistake nor deny the fact that there is not to-day a single avenue of public life in which a man may make a plain and open confession of Atheism without practically bringing his career to a close. In political and municipal affairs it means practical extinction. In the public services it means, at least, lack of promotion. In the journalistic world it counts as a serious handicap. And in social life it involves the most demoralising of all forms of punishment, boycotting. In a thousand and one ways, people are driven to silence, and the silence of some not only induces hypocrisy in others, it encourages a kind of religious belief that would not otherwise exist.

Left to the operation of purely natural conditions, with no other help or hindrance than those condi-

tions which aid or hinder all opinion, religious beliefs would by now be dead in all civilised countries. Its life is now purely artificial, maintained by a purely artificial culture. Religionists who prate of the ineradicability of religion forget, perhaps they are ignorant of, the means by which it has been perpetuated. Let it stand absolutely alone and unhelped, and then see what will happen. Let the next two or three generations be brought up—not with definite anti-religious teaching—but brought up subject to the full force of modern life and knowledge. Let the children be educated neither in religion nor anti-religion, let young men find their way in life unhindered by an absence of religious belief, let men in the public service and in public life find an absence of religion no bar to their career. Let all these things be, and what would be the result? Prophecy is a dangerous game, but if this were done I do not hesitate to say that at the end of a hundred years there would not be enough religion in any civilised country to make it worth fighting by any serious-minded man or woman.

C. COHEN.

Stock-Taking.

WE are passing through a most interesting time, at which most people pause and think, review the past and form resolutions for the future, repent of errors in judgment and conduct, and make a covenant with themselves to guard against them in the time to come. The end of a year is a splendid opportunity for intellectual and moral stock-taking, for ascertaining just exactly where we stand in relation to some of the great problems of existence, and, so far as Freethinkers are concerned, for considering anew the specific attitude of Freethought to such questions as "What is the object of existence?" "What is the purpose of human life?" These are subjects which are constantly occupying the minds of men, and concerning which it is possible to arrive at very definite conclusions. To the two questions just alluded to there are two different answers; and it is of vast importance which of the two we adopt. The first answer is Biblical, or theological, and is to be found in such passages as the following:—

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge" (Psalm xix. 12).

"What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever" (The Shorter Catechism).

This answer suggests innumerable questions which are absolutely unanswerable. Being an answer based upon the "carpenter theory of creation," it must be dismissed as being in reality no answer at all. To call the Universe God's Garment is to mystify it to no profit. A garment serves two purposes, those of concealment and adornment. If there be a God the Universe hides him so completely that it has no chance whatever of adorning him. Consequently, to tell a man that his chief end is to "glorify God and enjoy him for ever" is to mock him, because he has no means of knowing who or what God is, or what he requires of him.

We therefore turn to the scientific answer. Of course, from the scientific point of view, it is the very height of fatuity to ask what the object is either of existence in general or of human life in particular. Science knows nothing of any "far-off Divine event to which the whole creation moves." There is nothing whatever to show that the evolutionary process is following a pathway clearly mapped out from the beginning. Indeed, everything indicates the entire absence of plan or purpose. It is true that the process is orderly and continuous because it is carried on under laws that are immutable; but to imagine that there has been infinite intelligence within it, "working consciously towards a given end," is to do infinite intelligence a gross injustice. Professor Peake, of the Manchester

University, discussing the evolution of species, asks triumphantly, "How (on the assumption that the process is unconscious) are we to account for the favorable variations" which Natural Selection preserves? It never occurs to the learned Professor to ask the much more relevant question, "How, on the assumption that the process is intelligently conscious, are we to account for unfavorable variations which the sword of Natural Selection so ruthlessly cuts off?" Dr. Russel Wallace declares that he discerns in the world of life "a manifestation of creative power, directive mind, and ultimate purpose"; but the eminent naturalist, in his consuming zeal for his spiritualistic theory, conveniently ignores many indisputable facts which give it the lie direct. It seems to us perfectly absurd to hold that the structure of the feathers in a bird's wing is so marvellous and their beauty so great that we cannot account for them except by regarding them as having been designed by an intelligent and benevolent being to command the admiration and wonder of man. It strikes us as almost a silly performance to try to prove that the venomous mosquito contributes indirectly to human happiness through the fascinating plumage and sweet music of the birds which feed upon it. Can Dr. Wallace tell us what contribution the blood-parasite and tsetse fly of Africa make to the ultimate purpose of the Universe? The blood parasite inhabits the blood of big game without causing the slightest harm. The tsetse fly fastens on the big game, sucks out the blood parasite, and afterwards drops it into the blood of a domesticated animal or of a human being, where it invariably proves fatal. Now, it has been discovered that this blood parasite is the cause of the awful sleeping sickness of Uganda and British East Africa, of which, in about ten years, more than 300,000 persons have died. Then there are the Californian poison vine, which, however lightly touched, inflicts eczema upon the whole body, and the macuna bean of Zambesia, whose spines, when trodden on, "exude such a skin-maddening powder that the tortured natives will jump into a crocodile-haunted river to relieve the agony."

With such facts, and numerous others of the same import that might be cited, in mind we are obliged to conclude that existence has no end towards which it is consciously working, and is calculated to subserve no ultimate purpose. As Mr. Grant Allen so well puts it:—

"Life as a whole has no object, any more than the revolution of the planets has an object, or the double refraction of Iceland spar, or the particular flow of the back currents that swirl and eddy below the spray of Niagara. All these things are the necessary outcome of pre-existent conditions; their laws of sequence and causation can be investigated and proved; but the idea of an object as applied to them is philosophically inadmissible.....Life is merely one particular set of correlated movements occurring under the influence of solar radiation, in a certain peculiar group of material bodies on the surface of one small and unimportant planet, in a minor solar system, hidden away on the skirts of a galaxy in some lost corner of a boundless cosmos. Why on earth should it have a purpose to subserve any more than the bubbles that rise and fall on the wave, or the terrific commotions that roil and revolutionise the sun's photosphere?" (*The Hand of God*, p. 79).

The same remarks apply with equal truth to human life itself. It cannot be said of it that it subserves any ultimate purpose in the cosmic process. The life of a man is of no more value to the Universe than that of a chrysalis; and is as destitute of an object. To quote Mr. Grant Allen once more:

"This question of the object of life really descends to us from a time when men did not in the least realise their own absolute and utter smallness in the hierarchy of Nature. They thought the Universe was made for them, as implicitly as the London cockroach still believes that London was built in order to afford a convenient home, in its well-warmed kitchens, for myriads of sleek and well-fed cockroaches" (*The Hand of God*, p. 79).

Should the human species, for any reason, lose the capacity to adapt itself to the changed conditions of

the future, Natural Selection will eliminate it as unfit to survive just as readily as it eliminated the monkey, the mammoth, the woolly rhinoceros, the mastodon, and the Irish elk from Europe. We belong to the mammals, and we only differ from the rest of them in that we are more advanced. This is the estimate of ourselves to which acceptance of evolution inevitably leads us, and it is an estimate of which we have no reason whatever to be ashamed. Our distinction and our glory consist in our being on the highest rung of the evolutionary ladder. Above and beyond us, so far as we know, there is nothing. We represent Nature at her highest and best. Whether she is capable of still higher and more wonderful flights no one can tell; and if anyone asks why we are where we are, the only possible answer is, because we cannot be anywhere else. Nature produced us because she could not help herself. To people who believe the Bible this is naturally a most obnoxious teaching, but to those who have accepted the scientific theory of evolution no other is possible.

This is where we stand on the eve of a new year. This is the philosophy which we are proud to commend to our fellow-beings. Discarding as false and injurious all "the Fables of the Above," repudiating all the foolish superstitions about man's origin and destiny which once made the pulpit a dreadful power, but which to-day are seen to constitute its weakness, we glory in recognising ourselves as part and parcel of Nature, to whom no special privileges are granted, nor any partiality ever shown. Like all the animals below us, we are controlled by the two overmastering instincts of self-preservation and reproduction, and our only pre-eminence over them is due to our possession, through evolution, of a larger measure of intelligence by means of which we are slowly learning to exert a modifying and beneficial influence upon both heredity and environment; and we may well elevate the exertion of such influence into the chief object of life. Self-preservation is the primal law of life; but the higher we climb the clearer it becomes that self-preservation, to be of the most effective service, necessitates the preservation of others. No individual can truly prosper if the community is inimical to him. To secure safe footing for himself he must concede a more or less favorable footing to others. Thus self-service, of any worthy sort, implies vicarious service; and this two-fold service we can all render without any assistance from supernatural sources. Indeed, we are convinced that it has always been so rendered, despite all protestations to the contrary. The supernatural is a vanishing illusion. The object of life is to understand and utilise to the fullest the natural forces round about us; to understand and bravely obey the law of social life; to find individual happiness in cheerfully working for the welfare of the whole community.

Let us enter the new year resolutely determined to fight with greater energy and discretion than ever for the downfall of the Christian superstition, regarding it as the supreme obstacle to progress, and for the triumph of scientific knowledge which is the one hope of our redemption; and in so far as we prove loyal to this idea we shall find the coming year a bright and happy one. J. T. LLOYD.

Eugene Monseur: An Obituary with a Lesson.

I DEEPLY regret once again to strike a note of mourning, and to record the death of my friend Professor Eugène Monseur, the friend of many noble causes, and the indefatigable secretary and organiser of the Comité Ferrer at Brussels. His death deals a heavy blow to Belgian Rationalism and to international Freethought, and to all the generous and humanitarian enthusiasms for liberty associated with the world-wide rebellion against religion.

The English delegates who went to the International Freethought Congress in 1910 at Brussels

will not fail to remember the ubiquitous enthusiasm of Professor Monseur on that momentous Sunday when the Freethinkers of Belgium marched through the streets of Brussels to the Grand' Place, in order to take part at the unveiling of the memorial stone recording the martyrdom of Ferrer. It was a day of days: brilliant sunshine above, and everywhere in the gay Belgium capital the glowing fervor of enthusiasm for Ferrer and his cause. The brilliant success of that imposing ceremony was mainly due to the untiring energies of the scholar and thinker who has now passed away.

Professor Monseur was a worthy representative of a type of Freethinker rarely met with in the front ranks of popular Freethought in this country, where the snobbishness of class distinctions and the "superior personism" of middle and upper class heresy form an impassable barrier of antipathy between the man in the street and the "swell" at the university or in our chief centres of luxury and refinement. Like many other continental Freethinkers in the front ranks of the popular anti-religious and pro-Rationalist movement, Monseur was a man of great erudition, a leading light amongst the intellectuals, a man of learned leisure and abstruse science, leading a refined life instinct with culture amidst social conditions and economic surroundings which marked him off as one of that exceedingly fine type of humanity—the modern cultured middle-class man who has the courage to use his science, his leisure, and his economic advantages in order to uplift and glorify some generous ideal of humanity. The talents that Monseur might have employed for selfish aggrandisement, leaving to other and less capable hands the defence of principles vital to true social happiness, were nobly devoted to the cause of Freethought, and I know that he felt that any sacrifices of time, money, or social advantages made for that cause were more than compensated for by the supreme satisfaction of knowing that the common life of humanity, including his own, was enriched and made happier thereby.

Eugène Monseur, now prematurely taken from his friends by pneumonia at the age of fifty-two, was a native of Liège. He left this beautiful Belgian city when only twenty years old to take the Chair of Sanscrit at the Université Libre at Brussels, where he rapidly won the esteem and affection of all the teachers and students. He was a Freethinker at the outset of his career.

Monseur was a *savant* of high merit, endowed with an original and distinguished mind. His Sanscrit studies naturally led him to the study of religions and myths, and I know that his richly stored library dealing with religion and folk-lore, and his elaborate notes of readings, gleanings, and collations from an infinite variety of erudite sources in all the classic and modern languages, were big with the promise of many volumes of research and criticism in the department of comparative religions.

In addition to his Sanscrit course of lectures, Monseur devoted himself to the comparative grammar of the Aryan languages, the study of the ideas of pre-historic Europe, and the study of modern literature. This wide scope of his professional labors at the University did not dull his keen democratic instincts, which, in the Dreyfus case and in the defence and vindication of Ferrer, were so conspicuously shown. M. Georges Lorand, to whom I am indebted for most of these particulars, mentions the following erudite volumes which are among the fruit of his labors: *Histoire religieuse, L'Inde et l'Occident, Folklore Wallon, and Reforme de l'orthographe française*. He might have added his extremely curious and learned study, *Les Moines et les Saints de Gand* (pp. 180)—a most erudite account of the religious quarrels of two monastic houses at Ghent in the tenth and eleventh centuries; of their impudent falsifications of history in the sordid interests of the different rival establishments; of the fabrication of fictitious saints out of old bones for the honor and glory of one or other of the rival monasteries, and the naive concoction of miraculous and often indecent legends concerning

these invented saints. The latter work, which is full of quaint and hitherto inaccessible learning, was patiently built up by Monseur after unearthing the crabbed records by the rival chroniclers of these ancient monastic feuds and frauds. I have thought it useful to dwell on Monseur's qualities of learning and research, not only by way of homage to his memory and of deep sympathy with his widow and young daughter, and in token of gratitude for his many services to Freethought, but because I feel that we in England sadly need the comradeship of choice spirits of Monseur's rank and calibre in order that the heart of our intellectuals and proletariat may learn to beat more in unison for high social ideals in a common love of Freethought.

Monseur was the soul of self-sacrifice and unaffected modesty. Lorand, who knew him well, tells us that he strove against injustice with the inextinguishable ardor of the paladins of old. In the Dreyfus case, in the protests against the atrocities of Tsarism, or the massacres in Armenia, in the Ferrer case or in the case of Dr. Kotoku—in all which the Belgian democracy, so nobly led by Freethinkers, has taken deep interest—Monseur was always at hand to take the initiative, to draw up manifestoes and appeals, and make all the public or other arrangements; and after all the drudgery was over, and at the moment when the public were ready with their applause he was content to efface himself in silence behind the serried ranks of the orators. Monseur, in fact, was one of the chief instruments in creating the world-wide demonstrations in favor of Ferrer, which culminated in the erection of the monument in Brussels on November 9, 1911. It was Monseur, too, who founded the Belgian Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, and Lorand testifies that if that institution has done any good, has saved the lives of the innocent or attenuated injustice in any way, the result is due to the devotion and skill that Monseur displayed in the advocacy of justice and humanity.

Monseur was one of the most influential members of the Freethought International Bureau at Brussels, and one of his last public acts was the defence—and I believe the drafting—of the Peace Manifesto which was recently issued by the Bureau. I had the honor of translating that Manifesto for the *Freethinker* of November 24.

I have written thus at some length of our departed friend because I want the lesson of solidarity between Freethinkers of differing social grades and dissimilar cultural development—the ideal of union, in fact, between the well-bred intellectual and the blunt directness of the proletarian—to sink deeper and deeper into our English consciousness as we think of the splendid example of devotion to high principle exhibited by men of the scholarly type to which Professor Eugène Monseur belonged. I knew the lovable and devoted nature of the man, and I fear that the void created by his death will be difficult to fill.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

The Merry Birthday of the Man of Sorrows.

MANY years ago Thomas Carlyle made an entry in his diary on Christmas Day. It read: "On looking out of the window this morning I noticed that my neighbors were drunker than usual, and I remembered that it was the birthday of their Redeemer." This convivial feature of Christmas Day has frequently been noted to the discomfiture of theologians, who object to the naturalistic explanation of Christianity. It is one of the ironies of events that the birthday of the "Prince of Peace" was fixed in December from the urgent necessity of competing with Pagan rituals. Like all human institutions, the Christian Churches and their feast-days have had to contend in open warfare for survival. The festivals of Pagan Rome were numerous. The public holidays, indeed, at some epochs, were so frequent that the emperors, especially Marcus Antoninus,

found it expedient to curtail them. It was to counteract the attractions which these Pagan holidays exercised over the people that the leaders of the Christian Churches sanctioned and incorporated some of these feasts.

Christmas Day was not regularly kept until many generations after the alleged birth of Christ. When first observed it was held on varying dates. The precise time of Christ's birth, like that of James de la Pluche, was "wropt in myst'ry"; but it certainly was not in December. Why, then, do Christians observe Christmas Day on December 25? The answer plucks the heart out of the Christian superstition.

It was in competition with the feast of the Saturnalia, one of the principal Roman festivals, that Christmas Day came to be instituted by the early Christian leaders, and its date fixed as December 25. The anniversary of Saturn was held on December 17 and 18, and that of Ophalia, his wife, on the 19th and 20th. Later, Caligula added a fifth day of rejoicing, namely, "The Day of Youth." On these five festal days of old Rome the schools were closed, no punishment was inflicted, the toga was replaced by undress garment, distinctions of rank were laid aside, servants sat at table with their masters, and all classes exchanged gifts. The propensity of converts from Paganism to cling to custom proved invincible. If the apostates were to be retained in the folds of the new religion, it became imperative for Christianity to incorporate the essential features of the old under the mask of the new. The struggle for survival against rival institutions into which Christianity then entered has been maintained ever since. In the past the Church sought for adherents by increasing her festal days. In the twentieth century she is buying apostates all over the non-Christian world by means of medical missionaries and at home by instituting Pleasant Sunday Afternoons and by hypocritically identifying herself with social measures which appeal to the masses. Christianity has become an impotent thing. It has opened the floodgates of hypocrisy, but it is impotent to close them again. For nothing can be in more complete antagonism than the teachings of Christianity and the actions of its adherents. The Prophet of Galilee has not one thousandth part of the direct influence on his disciples that is possessed by Buddha or Mahomet. Christianity is professed by millions who are unaffected by its ethics. Take, for example, the majesty of the law. Side by side with the religion enjoined by the State there exists a legal code which violates every precept of Christianity, and resembles only the old Pagan laws which the Christian creed was supposed to have destroyed. Never in the whole course of its contest with Paganism has Christianity "turned the other cheek to be smitten." Not once in its history has it manifested "goodwill to men" when those men were opposed to its own creed. It has sunk until it has become a mere formula. The nations which worship "the Prince of Peace" keep millions in the grip of militarism, from the Elbe to the Spree, from the Seine to the Neva. Whether the nation be England, America, France, Russia, or Germany, the fact is practically the same. With the Gospels on their tables and the creeds on their lips, the nations have blessings on their warfare pronounced by priests, and implore "Gentle Jesus" for his sympathy before launching their battleships.

Slum landlords, the employers of sweated labor, dealers in adulterated foods, see no inconsistency in murmuring in their seats at worship, "Return good for evil," "Blessed be ye poor," and all the rest of the pious parrot's recitative of peace and forbearance. Were anyone to point out the inconsistency of such conduct, he would be regarded as an impracticable dreamer. Yet who can deny that the commands of Christ had any power, it would be viewed as a frightful crime to make weapons of destruction, or extort money from the poor. The old jest that "singing hymns never prevented a grocer from sanding his sugar," expresses in a

grotesque form what may be said in all seriousness of the powerlessness of Christ's religion to affect daily life.

Even the Christmas festival itself, with all its profession of goodwill, is largely pretence and make-believe. The giving of Christmas presents to the poor has degenerated into the undignified cadging of Christmas boxes on the one hand, and a profligate waste of stationery on the other. The Lady Bountifuls do not go into the slums on Christmas Day and relieve the destitution of the masses who have been robbed by their husbands during the previous twelve months. It is an orgy of carol-singing and gluttony. It is an organised hypocrisy, a fitting celebration of an event that never happened.

MIMNERMOS.

Biblical Humors.

IT is inevitable that there should have crept into a collection of writings of such magnitude as the Christian Bible many specimens of that most delicious of all humor—the unconscious. Little enough, in all truth, is there of intentional merriment in its pages. Indeed, some of the books which have been singled out for superlative praise on account of their literary grandeur are among the most lachrymose of documents, unrelieved by the barest suggestion of a sense of humor. On the other hand, so rich are some of the examples of unintentional humor that the eyes of even the dullest person will wrinkle as he reads.

The observation so frequently made by Rationalists that as the world advances in knowledge the reverence paid to religion diminishes, is supported by the fact that no book is so much joked about as the Bible. In religious matters reality excludes hilarity—the more religion a man has the less will he be inclined to joke about it. Imagine a savage making fun of the objects of his superstition! Or imagine a sound old Wesleyan Methodist of the countryside of half a century ago laughing about the fire of hell! But to-day all sorts of fun may be enjoyed at the expense of Christianity. The boys of a Sunday school class, right under the very noses of their instructors, will chuckle over the newest riddle concerning the sacred book itself; the large-browed veteran of science, deep in his mathematics, will unbend over the latest witticism at the expense of the national religion—and none but the austere and thorough going Christian will venture a reproof.

Sunday-school scholars, indeed, are not a little responsible for the circulation of Biblical riddles. Now that brimstone no longer figures as a reward for levity, the bairns are braver than of old, and they naturally tire of the Bible's precepts before they tire of its jokes. It was from the lips of a Sunday-school scholar that I first heard the two following questions concerning Joseph (who, by the way, seems to be a favorite butt for juvenile wit):—Question: "Who was the straightest man in the Bible?" Answer: "Joseph, because Pharaoh made a ruler of him." Question: "How do we know that Joseph attended the theatre?" Answer: "Because his brothers took him out of their circle and put him in the pit." In the bad old days when I used to work in a Sunday-school I knew of a teacher who was greeted with this sartorial poser one afternoon on seating himself among his boys: "I say, teacher, which of the prophets wore the biggest hat?" And on confessing his ignorance he was furnished with the quite natural answer: "The one with the largest head." There was, I believe, little religious instruction imparted during the rest of that afternoon!

Everybody is acquainted with the story of Peter's denial of Jesus, but perhaps it is not so well known that this very human disciple, after that sad lapse, continued to wander from the path of virtue. If his

greatest and most advertised misdemeanor was a part and parcel of the pre-ordained scheme of salvation, his subsequent descent to gambling is scarcely susceptible of that explanation. It is with a sense of sorrow and pity that one reads in Acts x. that poor Peter "lodged with one Simon a tanner"!

The hero of the Gospels himself has not been free from the pursuit of the witty, and a positive incitement to violence, carried out to some effect in the Temple on one occasion, is said to be traceable in the words—"It is I, be not afraid." But even this falls into insignificance before the wholesale destruction suggested by the words: "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Peculiarities of expression—some of them sufficiently whimsical to be appreciated even by those who have an indentation instead of a protuberance on that part of the head where the phrenologists would have us believe mirth lies—abound throughout the books of the Bible. Take, for instance, the following. It will be remembered that the cities of Succoth and Penuel refused to relieve the hunger of Gideon's army during its pursuit of the kings of Midian. For this inhospitality he promised to be revenged upon them, and he appears to have been as good as his word, for it is stated (Judges viii. 16) that on his return "he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth." For remarkably suggestive phrasing I have always regarded that as a gem.

An exquisite example of unalloyed redundancy, beside which the ambiguity of pronouns is scarcely worth mentioning, is to be found in the last two words of the following: "Then the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and four score and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold they were all *dead corpses*" (Isaiah xxxvii. 36).

The whole sense of a sentence, as many an orator has known to his cost, can be changed by transferring the emphasis from its proper position. I will content myself with three or four examples, leaving to the reader with a little leisure the amusing diversion of searching for others. In the second chapter of Mark's Gospel we read of a poor fellow who is said to have been "*sick of the palsy*," and the same writer, telling the story of the miraculous feeding of the multitude, states that after they had sat down "*they did eat, and were filled*." But by far the best illustration I have come across is to be found in 1 Kings xiii. 27, which reads: "And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass. And they saddled *him*." Curiously enough, and as if to invite the humorous interpretation, the last word of this verse is one of those actually printed in italics in the authorised version of the Bible. Furthermore, the incident refers to a certainly nameless "old prophet," and such, as all men know, are not infrequently asses.

Sportsmen must look a long way back for the beginning of what patriots like to consider the good old English game of cricket. Peter, and long before him Rachel, must have been acquainted with the sport, for the historian of the Acts of the Apostles assures us that Peter stood up with the eleven and was *bold*, and of Rachel it is recorded that she came out with a full pitcher.

Just one more, as the soaker said at closing time. The Freethinker will have heard the statement that the highest achievements of modern science are anticipated in the Bible. And a Freethinker inclined to merriment will perhaps have been disposed to regard it as a joke. Let him swallow his mirth, then, when he learns that the science of aeronautics (which hitherto he may have been pleased to regard as fairly new) was not unknown in the family of that old Hebrew patriarch Isaac. Esau, it is written, sold his heirship for a mess of pottage.

R. NORTH.

Teacher: How do you know the earth is round?

Pupil: Because it says in the Bible, "world without end."

Acid Drops.

Mr. George Macdonald, editor of our highly esteemed contemporary, the *New York Truthseeker*, writes a long article in his journal on "Crescent and Cross." It contains some shrewd observations. Mr. Macdonald remarks that all our accounts of the Turks came to us through the Christian enemies, including the Bulgars, Serbs, and Greeks, who are now fighting them, and (if we may be excused a joke on so serious a subject) demanding another slice of Turkey for their Christmas dinners. Another acute remark of Mr. Macdonald is this:—

"Mohammedanism undoubtedly inspired its followers to battle for their faith against the adherents of another faith attacking them. But though a fighting religion it has not been a persecuting one. Christianity, on the other hand, while at least equal to Mohammedanism as a militant religion, has stooped historically and habitually to that meanest of all propaganda methods—persecution. The Inquisition was a Christian, not a Mohammedan idea."

That really is one of the great distinctions between the Mohammedans and the Christians. The followers of the Prophet of Islam kill their religious enemies in hot blood, under provocation; while the followers of the Prophet of Nazareth kill their religious enemies in cold blood, without any provocation at all.

Mr. Macdonald does us the honor of quoting a long passage from one of our articles on Holy Wars. He agrees with us that the Holy Wars have nearly all been fought by the Christians. "Civilisation," he concludes, "is not going to gain anything by the Turks being conquered in the present fight and their domain turned over to the Christian brigands who are so numerous among their assailants."

The tid-bit of Mr. Macdonald's article is not his own. We should be sorry if it were. It is a poem (we suppose the author called it a poem—and we agree it is verse) by Bishop A. Cleveland, an "Episcopal prelate of this State" (New York), entitled "Forward the Cross," and bears marks of having been written during the Crimean war. Here it is:—

"Trump of the Lord! I hear it blow!
Forward the Cross; the world shall know
Jehovah's arm's against the foe!
Down shall the cursed Crescent go.
To arms! To arms!
God wills it so.

God help the Russ! God bless the Czar!
Shame on the swords that trade can mar!
Shame on the laggards, faint and far,
That rise not to the holy war.
To arms! To arms!
The Cross our Star.

How long, O Lord! for Thou art just;
Vengeance is Thine; in Thee we trust;
Wake! arm of God! and dash to dust
Those hordes of rapine and of lust.
To arms! To arms!
Wake, swords that rust!

Forward the Cross! Break, clouds of ire!
Break with the thunder and the fire.
To new Crusades let Faith inspire.
Down with the Crescent to the mire!
To arms! To arms!
To vengeance dire!

To high Stamboul that Cross restore.
Glitter its glories as of yore.
Down with the Turk! From Europe's shore
Drive back the Paynim, drunk with gore.
To arms—to arms—
To arms once more!"

How's that for a preacher of the Gospel of the Prince of Peace? The "cursed Crescent" reminds us of Wesley's description of Mohammed as "the Arab thief." Sixty years have passed since Bishop Cleveland sang in that sanguinary way, and the Cross is not yet "restored" to "high Stamboul."

The Albanians, who are mostly Mohammedans, object to being divided up amongst the Christian Balkan States. They demand their own autonomy, and their claim is voiced and supported by the Albanian Committee in London, which includes the Hon. Ameer Ali, Mr. Cunninghame Graham, Mr. Mark Judge, Dr. Thos. Baty, Mr. Duse Mohamed, and other well-known persons. The Committee's resolution at its first meeting ran as follows:—

"That this meeting cordially approves of the formation of the Albanian Committee (1912) to assist the establishment of Albanian Autonomy, to develop a wider knowledge of the Balkan problem, and to promote a good understanding between Christian and Mohammedan the world over."

The last is an excellent object. We are also glad to see the

Albanian Committee protesting "the readiness of so many of the British public to accept, without investigation, charges of wrong-doing made against the Turks, as unfair to them and likely to irritate and alienate our fellow subjects in India." Unfortunately, the Christians themselves are the greatest obstacle to a good understanding between Christians and Mohammedans.

"Religious persecution," says Canon Lilly, referring to Ireland, "naked and unashamed, is inconceivable in any modern self-governing community. All that is possible is an attempt to prevent a man from earning a living or parents from securing an education they approved for their children." Canon Lilly was not justifying this form of persecution, but he appeared to think it less objectionable than the more direct form. And in that we beg to differ. Open and direct persecution for opinion is more honorable to the party in power, and less dishonoring to the people persecuted. Where one man will stand out against the disguised persecution that expresses itself in social or business boycotting, a hundred will rise against a direct punishment for opinion. It really demands a higher and rarer order of courage to stand out against the former method. Threaten a man openly with imprisonment, or even death, for expressing an opinion, and you rouse all his fighting instincts. He sets his back to the wall and defies you. But attack him in another way—ignore him in society, boycott him in business, shut him and his out of social functions, all the time without saying a word about his opinions—and you are going the surest way to work to undermine his manhood. Therefore, if we are to have persecution, let it be "naked and unashamed." More people will stand out against it, and those who do not can submit without any sense of personal degradation. The absence of direct persecution is not always an indication of improvement. It may mean only cowardice at one end and hypocrisy at the other.

Rev. Dr. Monro Gibson having been fifty years in the Christian ministry is now retiring from his pastorate, and the occasion was thought suitable for a *Daily News* interview, which was very amusing reading to a Freethinker. Mr. Gibson admitted that the Bible was getting "crowded out by novels, and newspapers, and magazines." Family prayers are a thing of the past, and fewer and fewer people attend church on Sunday. These facts call for lamentation, but, as long as jobs remain and salaries don't fall off, Christian ministers can always find consolation. Mr. Gibson finds it in this way:—

"At any rate, of this I am certain, there has been a steady movement in my time right away from the old Materialism of Tyndall and Huxley to a spiritual view of the universe. There is still Haeckel to represent the old school, it is true, but he and his friends are a spent force."

Fancy finding consolation in statements of that kind! There is as much ignorance and insolence in that passage as could well be crammed into the same number of lines. It is simply a case of the wish being father to the thought. Mr. Gibson can hardly suppose that the late Presidential Address to the British Association is forgotten yet. Even if it were, what is the use of parading the names of Eucken and Bergson? Christian ministers need not defend Theism. It existed before their faith was heard of. What they have to defend is Christianity. And when they cease doing that—and which of them does it?—they confess they are beaten.

The Congregational Church, Bideford, is said to be the oldest Free Church in England. At a recent bazaar held there the pastor, the Rev. Mr. Roberts, said:—

"They were proud of their history, and of the fact that their founders were amongst the first who drew the sword to fight for liberty of conscience and liberty of worship according to the dictates of their conscience."

It is rather an odd thing for a Christian Church to be proud of drawing the sword for any purpose whatever. And the reverend gentleman is absolutely farcical in supposing that the Puritans of the seventeenth century fought for liberty of conscience. No such idea ever entered the heads of the bulk of them. They were as intolerant as their opponents, and sometimes more so. If they had gained the upper hand with King Charles I., as they tried to, he would never have lost his head, and the royal power would have been wielded against the Episcopal Church. They persecuted that Church when they obtained power under the Commonwealth. During the Restoration, under Charles II., they were the under-dog again, but better times awaited them in the accession to the throne of William. How much they really valued "liberty of conscience" may be inferred from the fact that they joined heartily with the Churchmen in passing the famous Blasphemy Statute of 1694, under which all known unbelievers were liable to the most frightful

pains and penalties. Even in more recent times it is a remarkable fact that very little Free Church help has been given to the movement for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, which has had the assistance of several Anglican Church clergymen. When it comes to dealing with "infidels" the average Nonconformist is rather more of a bigot than the average Churchman.

John Bull has been challenging the story that recently circulated in the newspapers about a Bishop who answered an Atheist—to the latter's confusion, of course; that goes without saying. The Bishop said that when he got to heaven he would ask Jonah as to the truth of the whale story. "But suppose you don't find him there?" queried the Atheist. "Why, then," replied the Bishop, "you can ask him yourself." The audience roared with laughter, and the Atheist "slunk away." Of course he did; that also goes without saying. *John Bull* asks for authentic particulars of that incident, and promises to give £5 for them. It is a safe offer.

That story has been floating about for a long while under different disguises. It is quite a battered "chestnut." Nobody seems to know that it can be traced back to Shakespeare. It occurs in the third Scene of the fourth Act of *Hamlet*. The Prince, having slain Polonius, is asked what he has done with the body. His answers being wild and satirical, his uncle-father, the King, comes and asks him plainly "Where is Polonius?" Hamlet replies: "In heaven; send thither to see; if your messenger find him not there, seek him i' the other place yourself."

Sabbatarianism has been triumphant in Birmingham—which was once a stronghold of Radical ideas. The new Corporation Bill contained a clause allowing boating and bands in Cannon Hill and Small Heath Parks on Sundays. Some of the bigots were up in arms, and a Town's Meeting was held in the Town Hall. The clergy turned up in force, and the result of the meeting was a demand for a poll. All the churches and chapels appear to have worked with a will, and together, in the matter, with the result that when the poll was announced, the figures were: Against the Bill, 5,762; for, 4,696; giving a majority of 1,066. So that, in order that the feelings of 5,762 people may be gratified, 4,696 are not to be allowed to enjoy themselves in a perfectly harmless and even beneficial manner. The minority did not wish to force the majority to either row or listen to the band. They were left free to go to church or chapel, or amuse themselves in any way they pleased. What the minority really wanted was the same liberty for themselves. But your truly religious person is never happy unless he succeeds in making others miserable.

The Rev. J. Brigg evidently feels proud of this Birmingham triumph, and looks on it as proof of what the Churches can do when they pull together. And if they could only unite permanently the freedom of non-Christians would be worth very little. Fortunately for everybody, Christians hate each other almost as much as they hate outsiders, and in the perennial character of Christian ill-will and jealousy there is great hope. But, having said this, we may be permitted to improve the occasion. Here was a purely trade interest threatened, and the bigots got their way. But is there any other subject under the sun on which the Christians sects would or could unite? All of them talk much about Christian interest in social welfare, but whenever did they show any unity of action here? They could do a deal, there is no denying that. An army of clergy, such as we are burdened with, calling attention to any special social evil, would soon make its existence a practical impossibility. Instead of that, the evil remains, and the vague talk goes on. The distinction between the two cases is obvious. In the first case, professional interest is threatened; Sunday bands and Sunday boating mean a lessened church attendance—in other words, less trade; and before this possibility their ranks are closed. In the second case, if the clergy showed a real unity in demanding genuine improvements, they would stand to shake off their wealthiest supporters. So all we get is cant, more cant, and yet again cant.

The *British Weekly*, in discussing the figures of the Liverpool Church Census, to which we referred last week, admits the gravity of a decrease of over 20,000 church attendants in the brief period of ten years. And it concludes that the only hope is to induce habits of worship in children. With this we quite agree. If the Churches can get hold of the children, and give their minds a permanent bend towards Christianity, then they will become clients of church or chapel in later years. But this is only another way of

expressing the truth that unless people believe in Christianity before they are able to understand it, they will not believe in it at all. And it leaves out of sight another very important consideration, which is that adults are becoming more alive to the *rights* of children than was formerly the case. Those who are not hidebound by religious bigotry or prejudice are beginning to recognise that it is a serious invasion of a child's right to protection to force upon it teachings as beyond question that are admittedly open to doubt. The very people who would admit the questionable nature of religious beliefs to adults, insist upon their unquestionable truth to children. A growing number of people are realising the evil of this procedure, and this fact, among many others, threatens the success of the attempt to breed people for a creed that is tolerably certain of rejection when offered to an educated adult.

Dealing with these Liverpool figures, the *Methodist Recorder* hopelessly remarks that the phenomenon is not local. The same thing "has been taking place all over the country. We are in the midst of a widespread decline of religion." The candor of the confession is quite refreshing. But candor is not a thriving plant in the religious garden; and on turning to another portion of the same paper we are surprised to find that the Churches are capturing the people wholesale—on paper. The page devoted to mission intelligence reports that a great many have been captured at Newmarket. At Harwich they are trying to secure 500 new members, and are hopeful of success. At Bideford over twenty were converted; at Peckham, fifteen. Nothing could keep people away. "The harder it rained, the more people came." At Whitney, Gipsy Smith reports "a blessed time of ingathering." At Alton the district was roused "to a high state of religious concern." At Sutton-on-Sea there was "a great increase of faith," and "many found their way to the cross." So, too, with other places. Christianity is really in a flourishing condition—save that "we are in the midst of a widespread decline of religion." That seems to want a lot of explaining away.

England is the classic home of hypocrisy. It has been common knowledge that Christmas Day morning and evening newspapers are published at a loss. The proprietors have now arrived at a common agreement not to publish on "God's Birthday." But you never catch pious Englishmen admitting that they do anything simply for their own interests. It is pretended, therefore, that this Christmas suspension of newspapers is for the honor of God and the benefit of all engaged in the newspaper trade. Those who are "in the know" will laugh at the sudden generosity of the employers. But all sorts of men of God send in their blessings on the new arrangement.

The Bishop of Bristol, speaking at the local Newspaper Press Fund dinner, told a "pathetic" story of his having visited and confirmed a poor working girl, nearing her death from consumption, that very afternoon. He seems to have almost wept over his own touching generosity,—not remembering that Catholic priests do the same sort of visiting every day of the week, and every week of the month, for a good deal less than £3,000 a year. Nor did his lordship stop to consider why the working girls should be dying of consumption in a city like Bristol surrounded by such beautiful country and splendid air. That sort of calamity is taken for granted. "The poor ye have always with you" and the social diseases which mark their enforced methods of existence. His lordship made it the introduction to a more exciting problem. He rejoiced that four Bishops had voted for flogging the scoundrels caught in the white slave traffic. He felt he would like to take a turn at flogging some of them himself. Well, why not? Why should not the elegant performance be handed over to the Bench of Bishops? We cheerfully admit it is worthy of them. And when they are tired of flogging—that is, when they have exhausted its sensual stimulus—they might be allowed to practise with racks, and thumbscrews, and other instruments of torture, such as ecclesiastics used under the Inquisition. If torture is a deterrent, let us have enough of it; half measures are sheer silliness. What a fine time the Bishops will have under this Christian regime. Not only will they enjoy themselves, as the Bishop of Bristol suggests, but they will save many honest prison warders from what they—not being Bishops worth £3,000 or more a year—regard as an odious and disgusting task.

Prebendary Webb-Peploe hastens to stomach-exercise in acknowledging "the gracious action of his Majesty King George" in announcing that he reads a portion of the Bible daily, and for "so graciously permitting his habits to be known." We do not know that it matters very much

whether King George reads the Bible every day or once a month, or doesn't read it at all. Many other people in the country say they read a portion of the Bible daily, without anybody being seriously affected. But it is characteristic of some people to go into raptures of thankfulness on discovering that a king or a nobleman is much as other human beings are. This kind of thing was well hit off by Douglas Jerrold many years ago in the following passage:—

"A Duke runs into a farmhouse from a pelting shower; warming his toes at the hearth, he—yes—he talks familiarly with his rural host! At this the historian flourishes a pen in a convulsion of delight. Was ever such condescension, such startling affability? Of course, it was expected that the distinguished visitor would command the baby at the breast to be carefully washed, and straightway served up to him in outlets."

Prebendary Webb-Peploe (we wish he had some other name) appears to take this remarkable action of King George as fresh proof of the inspiration of the Bible. Not in a loose and general sense, though. That was quite good enough before the epoch-making intelligence about the King was published. Now, he discovers that the nation's need is a belief in the Bible as "the inspired word of 'God' from cover to cover." If a king can read a chapter daily, Prebendary Webb-Peploe, like a good subject, is prepared to swallow the whole volume at one sitting.

"A man who murderously assaulted his woman companion in a Chicago hotel last month had marked the following passages in a Gideon Bible found in the room:—

'And thine eye shall not pity, but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.'

'Now, therefore, kill every male among the little ones and kill every woman that hath known man.'

The assassin knew his Bible. If the passages had not been in it he might not have committed the crime."—*Truthseeker* (New York).

The *Daily Citizen's* "own correspondent" at Madrid sends an account of the closure of a Calanas rationalist school, after a visit from a Government inspector, who seized some terrible documents, one of them being a pupil's exercise written at the dictation of the master. The following is the "own correspondent's" translation of the wicked production:—

"Consider all other children as brothers and sisters, for they are thy equals, whatever their race or nationality, whatever be the religion or social class to which they belong. Also, within the bounds of morality and courtesy, make no difference of age or sex in thy intercourse with thy fellow-beings. Always remember that everybody else is, like thyself, a rational being and, therefore, a member of the great human family."

"Learn, child, to know Reason, to love and serve her in all her manifestations. Let her rule thy intelligence and thy will. Seek and cultivate truth, beauty, and goodness in all the circumstances of thy existence. Let truth inspire thy words; strive after beauty in thy work and let all thy doings and thy relations with thy fellow-beings be inspired by virtue and justice."

One understands now the frightful task of the Spanish Government, and of the Catholic Church behind it, in maintaining the purity of public education. The abominable ideas expressed in that "rationalist" document are enough to corrupt the minds of the best of children. There is something like it in the famous book of the great Marcus Aurelius, but he was only a Pagan moralist, who committed the unpardonable sin of despising the early Christians.

CHLOROFORM.

The gratitude of the Professor [Dr. George Wilson] to the Almighty [for permitting the discovery of anæsthetic] was not shared by a clergyman who wrote to a medical friend; and his letter is quoted by Simpson, in which he says that, "Chloroform is a decoy of Satan, apparently offering itself to bless women, but in the end it will harden society and rob God of the deep, earnest, cries which arise in time of trouble for help." Sir James reports a conversation with a very worthy clergyman who stopped to say he was just returning from absolving a patient's conscience on the subject, for she had taken chloroform during labor, and so avoided suffering; but she had felt unhappy ever since, under the idea that she had done something very wrong, and very sinful. Some theologians based their protests on the old familiar ground that these new practices had not received divine sanction by being specially mentioned in holy writ, forgetful of the fact mentioned in Genesis that God put Adam into a deep sleep before performing the operation of extracting a rib and constructing Eve.—*Chambers's Journal* (December, 1912), p. 802.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

(Suspended during Christmas Holidays.)

To Correspondents.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1912.—Previously acknowledged, £267 6s. 1d. Received since:—George Lunn, 10s.; C. Shepherd, 2s. 6d.; A. W. Hatty, 2s. 6d.; J. O. Restall, 5s.

A. R. (Jersey).—Next week. We go to press too early this week.

E. B.—Thanks, though we can't use much in this number.

GEORGE LUNN.—Glad you find the *Freethinker* "delightful to read." What you say of the Rev. Dr. Warschauer is true enough, but he won't recognise it. If you kill a man in a physical fight he (as the Irishman said) knows it, but if you kill him intellectually he often thinks he is more alive than ever.

Most correspondence stands over till next week.

THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

WHEN the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.

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LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

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.

FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

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. This Fund is being raised by the Editor of the *Freethinker* by request of the N. S. S. Executive. Subscriptions should therefore be sent direct to G. W. Foote, 2 Newcastle-street, London, E.C. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to him.]

Previously acknowledged, £76 10s 9d.

Sugar Plums.

Two *Freethinkers* have had to be got out in the same week, owing to the Christmas holidays necessitating the publication of the December 29 number on the previous Monday. The editor has therefore had enough to do without writing a special article.

The London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive takes place at the Holborn Restaurant on Tuesday evening, January 14. Mr. Foote will preside, and will be supported by most of the leading Freethought lecturers in London, including Mr. Cohen, Mr. Lloyd, Mr. Moss, and Mr. Heaford. There is sure to be a good dinner, some good music, and some good (brief) speeches. We hope to see a big rally of "saints" at the festive board, as a kind of send-off to a vigorous new year's work.

The Queen's Hall Sunday evening lectures will be resumed early in the new year. A definite announcement will appear in our next issue. London "saints" are requested to look out for it then. They might also write to Miss Vance for small printed pocket-cards advertising these lectures, and circulate them amongst their friends and acquaintances.

The London County Council Parks Committee has not yet made up its mind on the question as to collections at permitted public meetings, but we understand it is expected

to do so at its meeting in the middle of January. Until then we must ask our readers' further patience. They may rest assured, however, that the matter will not be indefinitely delayed.

The Sheffield N. S. S. Branch holds a Discussion Class on Sunday afternoons at 126 Barker's Pool at 3 o'clock. The Branch's rooms at that address are open every evening from 6 till 11, with opportunities for study and recreation. Non-members are invited.

An unsigned, and therefore presumably editorial, article in last week's *Inquirer* (the Unitarian organ) was headed "The Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws." The following passage is worth quoting in our own columns:—

"The fact is that it is impossible to give to the word blasphemy any definite meaning at all, which will command the assent or respect of the ordinary citizen. The late Lord Coleridge evaporated its theological terrors into an offence against 'the decencies of controversy.' But what is 'decent' in controversy depends upon our standard of education and our social surroundings, even upon the degree of provocation which we have received from an opponent. Who is to be the judge of these things? Is it tolerable that the scholar who dissolves Christianity into mythology should speak with impunity to admiring crowds, while the self-taught lecturer in the secular hall is fined for his indiscretions? Rudeness and indecency in public are always reprehensible, and indignation against them waxes hot when they outrage our feelings of reverence for the most sacred things in life; but the common law is able to deal with these things without invoking obsolete and oppressive statutes, which are justly regarded as a menace to our hard-won liberties of thought and speech."

This shows a great advance by Unitarians since the middle "eighties," when they accepted Dr. Blake Odger's advice that, as they themselves were safe under the Blasphemy Laws, they should leave well alone. We are glad to see and welcome the change. At the same time we must point out that our contemporary falls into a serious confusion at the close of the paragraph we have just quoted. The reference to the "common law" as sufficient to deal with outrages on sacred feelings could easily be interpreted by a clever counsel as justifying prosecutions for blasphemy. As a matter of fact, it has always been under the common law that such prosecutions have been conducted. There has never been a single prosecution under the "obsolete statutes." We advise our contemporary to clear its mind on this point. Meanwhile, we welcome its adherence to the general policy of "Repeal."

On a later page of the *Inquirer* the Rev. W. Copeland Bowie deals with the same subject from a "total repeal" point of view. "It is saddening," he concludes, "and may we not say humiliating to the Churches, Established and Free, to observe that the only people who have so far come forward publicly to assist in securing the repeal of the absurd Blasphemy Laws are classed as Ethical Culturists, Positivists, Secularists, and Unitarians."

While we have the *Inquirer* before us we may make a certain observation. The intolerant and persecuting spirit takes many forms; it is not at all confined to prosecutions for blasphemy; and our contemporary furnishes an instance in point. It prints the Humanitarian League's new memorial to Mr. Asquith against the flogging clauses of the Criminal Law Amendment (White Slave Traffic) Bill. This memorial is admirably drawn up, and the Humanitarian League took special care to have it signed by representative men and women in reforming movements all over the country. After the name of Mr. G. W. Foote the words "President, National Secular Society," were honorably added. Now the *Inquirer* prints a selection of some fifty names on this list, including several Unitarians; but by not including Mr. Foote's name it deliberately lends itself to the common Christian conspiracy to conceal the fact that Secularists do any work in the world except what is ridiculously called "Bible Banging." Secularists help advanced movements when they most want help. They don't seek notoriety but the success of good causes. And the leaders of the Humanitarian League would probably be prepared to endorse our statement in the case of their own organisation.

Whatever religion may be, theology is a thing of unreason altogether, an edifice of assumptions and dreams, a superstructure without a substructure. Theology is to religion what law is to justice, what etiquette is to courtesy, astrology to astronomy, alchemy to chemistry, and medicine to hygiene. The theologian cannot reason, for persons who can reason do not go into theology. Its name refutes it. Theology means knowledge of God, concerning whom some say he has no existence, and all others that he cannot be known.—*Ambrose Bierce.*

The Turning Point.

FREETHOUGHT criticism has sent so many keenly pointed and deadly arrows into the dyspeptic breasts of Religion that one is quite astonished to discover, often, how easily the Religionist yields the position to us. He is eager to agree with us—up to a certain point. Our arguments are logical, and the conclusions complete; but—. The attitude we take up is by far the most reasonable; still—. What we say solves many so-called problems in a most satisfactory manner; yet it may be that—

It is greatly to the credit of Freethought education that there are so many people of this type to-day. And it is greatly to the discredit of religious instruction that there are so many minds constitutionally, it would seem, unable to grapple with conclusions realised but not honored. Comparatively, it is easy to recognise a conclusion; it is a difficult thing to own allegiance to it. By surrounding the mind with vague uncertainties, Religion, more than anything else, has developed a mental weakness in every respect deplorable. This wavering attitude Religion may claim as its child. There is plenty of ability nowadays to understand; but there is also an immense amount of disinclination to champion truth, to support the logical inferences from established conclusions.

Under the sway of religious emotionalism, the mind's power straightforwardly to admit the inevitable has become a curse to the progressive nature of humanity. In the hesitancy to strengthen advanced ideas by support we can see Religion's evil influence; and so long as this influence remains active, just so long will the average mind retain its cowardly state of uncertainty. Mental uncertainty is the main street to the square of conservatism; for the weak mind, frightened by the possibilities, naturally finds consolation from the substance of the what-is, and hies back to it with a longing from which springs mental stagnancy.

The Rationalistic Religionist belongs to this category. He is a peculiar, and yet, to-day, a common man. To a certain extent he is broad-minded, the result of after-school education. He is not averse to recognise the absurdity of the "religious instinct"; he does not possess that spirituous luxury; nor does he feel inclined to countenance the idea of a "first cause"; it is too much like an unventilated *cul de sac*; not does he see *very* much use for a heaven: it has too great a resemblance to a gratuitous sample handed in at the door. Nevertheless, he cannot detach from his mental life the dim idea of a "something," above, beyond, and outside natural phenomena, a something that, if it rules nothing in Nature, guides nothing, influences nothing, still exists somewhere. It is not a superrefined God; it is farther on in the thought vision; in fact, it is "something."

He cannot be satisfied with any psychological explanation of thousands of years of similar mental moulding. He does feel secure that the early installation of religious ideas to a brain perhaps organically adapted to receive them may be semi-responsible for the tenacity of his "feeling," as he calls it.

He admits that the impossibility of actualising perfection in this life has sent man's mind across the death silence to find it. He admits that religious dogmatism has consequently forced a close relationship between man's idea of perfection and Religion's assertion of a *post mortem* perfection. He is apt to scoff at the suggestion that his feeling is simply the result of this association. And yet the only elaboration of the "something" he can give is that embodied in the words "spiritual perfection"; a perfection not of the body but of the spirit; which, however, cannot be unlinked from the ethical significance. Notwithstanding the mental gymnastics of professors of every kind of spiritualism, from Calvinism to Theosophy, they all, without exception, rap their brains hard against

Naturalism whenever they attempt to overlook Nature. It is the penalty for omitting Nature. Our ethical ideas are so closely related to Nature, being, in fact, built upon our understanding of her laws or forces, that the Spiritualist, in his grand endeavor to recognise and hob-nob with non-natural powers, appears to be standing on his head.

This awe-inspiring "something," so much beloved by the Rationalistic Religionist, is simply human aspiration spelled backwards. It is the inspiration arising from the accumulated best of man's moral nature, half-liberated from entrammelling religious preconceptions.

Outside Nature, we are told, is a spiritual power. This power is a farce unless man can enjoy it. It takes no interest in his present welfare or ill-fare. It is waiting until the time when man's mind shall be evolved to such an extent, out of proportion to his body, that it can disunite the two, and so escape to the spiritual pleasurelands. When the Rationalistic-Religionist is cornered on the ethical significance of his spiritual perfection idea, he flings it away, and gives vent to the further mystification of his position by making the phrase "spiritual power."

Although he admits, in argument, that there are many, very many, obvious defects in the idea of "spiritual power," his clinging mental tendency to hold to the idea of some supernatural force outside human life, and outside Nature, and having no influence upon them, is simply a belief in that "spiritual power." We have won up from the amoeba to man, and, as Oliver Lodge says, why stop there? Is there not something more in the evolution of life? Why can we not think of higher stages remote from this material body of ours? And here the wonderful entity, or nonentity, named "the spirit," has its opportunity. Imagination does the rest. Most of us could speak by the hour about this spirit; but we are beaten when we endeavor to describe it; when we try to realise it we are baffled. It becomes a spook every time we draw near to it, so to speak. It takes wings to itself, departing to the cloud-realms; and on a mere speculation the Rationalist-cum-Religionist founds his "spiritual power" idea.

Then, if this dim and distant something, existing outside Nature, and waiting for the liberation of the spirit of man from the material flesh, is powerless over Nature, it, even assuming its reality, is useless to man. It cannot even be said to exercise a beneficent influence on his moral life. The useless thing, be it mental or material, is an encumbrance, like the stones the enthusiast carries up a mountain so that he may heighten the cairn on the summit.

The Rationalist-cum-Religionist, however, does not admit the inutility of the idea of a spiritual something concerning which man's mind, as yet, knows nothing. He believes in evolution; and he uses the theory of evolution to hide away his ignorance. When the mind is sufficiently evolved we will discover the utility of the spirit. At present the knowledge is useless. Some day it will be useful. In time we will all enjoy spiritual perception. Let us continue to ponder on the possibility of the spirit. By doing so we will "gently and deliberately force" its evolution, as Mrs. Besant says. If we fill a pocket with rusty old nails, and always carry them about with us, perhaps some day we will find them useful. Consequently, they *are* useful.

On pressure, the R.-cum-R. will admit that his conception of an esoteric something is but an idea. He chortles with gruesome pleasure at my idealisation of a modern Dreadnought ploughing through the moon. His laugh becomes louder when I say my image is based upon the fact of the warship and the fact of the moon. But when I retort that his spiritual power idea is not a very bad parallel to my mental picture, he calls me a twister.

Still, if it were at all possible to disconnect from his mental make-up the fact of man's strivings towards moral perfection, which give him the idea of the possibility of perfection, and also to cut away from his mind the fact of religious environment,

with its interminable emphasis upon a non-material existence; would it be possible for him to imagine an esoteric, spiritual "something"? We have these two facts: the idea of the possibility of moral perfection, and the religious idea of the existence of spirit; and the former goes ploughing through the latter. Delete from my mind the knowledge of warship and moon; would it then be possible for me to idealise the moon-cleaving Dreadnought?

But this does not prove the absurdity of the spiritual home-coming conception. Of course not. You cannot prove the existence of something of which the only clue will be found some time in the future when mental evolution has reached a stage that we cannot yet mark upon our mental diagrams.

On the other hand, if we can comprehend the nature and growth of religious environment and of the human strivings—just as we know the constituents of ironclad and moon, and are familiar with the laws of Nature—then we logically conclude that the idealisation of the religious spirit sailing through the human desires is just as ridiculous as the idealisation of a modern naval instrument for the preservation of peace sailing through the moon.

Action, or experimental fact, speaks more strongly than argument. What the Atheist would like is a spiritual fact. It would be the turning point to his mind. But he is not likely to get it.

ROBERT MORELAND.

Lyman Abbott on Immortality.

A Lecture delivered before the Independent Religious Society (Rationalist), Chicago.

BY M. M. MANGASARIAN.

SPEAKING before the Sunday evening Club, Dr. Lyman Abbott, who is one of the leading "progressive theologians in America to-day, and who, as the editor of a church periodical, exerts a wide influence in this country, presented the arguments which, in his opinion, prove human immortality. You will remember that only the Sunday before, Bishop McDowell, of the Methodist Church, addressing the same audience from the same platform, admitted his inability to prove immortality. His exact words were: "I cannot prove Eternal life, yet I cannot doubt it." Though he cannot doubt it, he says he is equally unable to prove it. But Lyman Abbott does not appear to be in the same divided state of mind. He cannot doubt immortality because he can prove it.

Yet the arguments which Dr. Abbott marshals forth in defence of a future life could not have been unknown to the Methodist Bishop. There is not a text or an incident quoted by Lyman Abbott from the Bible, or a single metaphysical proof he advances, which could have escaped the Bishop's notice. We might, therefore, answer Dr. Abbott by saying, "Why should your proofs of immortality convince us when they are not strong enough to convince a Methodist Bishop?" But we are not going to cut the discussion short in that fashion. It is our purpose, rather, to take up Dr. Abbott's arguments one by one and test their bearing on the subject of immortality.

My first comment is that the Doctor does not define his terms. In every discussion it is not only essential to define our terms, but we must also be sure to stick to our definitions. Does the Doctor mean by immortality another life, or an endless life? Is immortality an indefinite succession of births and deaths, that is to say, a series of reincarnations, or is it one uninterrupted continuous existence, with no more pauses or breaks in it? This point the speaker fails to make clear. Another very important consideration the good Doctor has left in the dark is the nature of the future existence he predicts for us. Will it be something like our present life, or something totally different? The only life we are familiar with or can appreciate is a bodily existence. What life would be without the body, without nerves or

cells or a brain, we are not in a position to speculate about, much less to describe with any assurance, or even to desire.

Again, Dr. Abbott is trying to prove the immortality of something without first proving the present existence of that something. It is not the body, but the spirit in the body that is immortal, argues the doctor. Very well, but to predict immortality for what Dr. Abbott calls the spirit in the body is progressing a little too rapidly. It would have been more to the point had the Doctor tried to show that it is the body which is going to live for ever, because the body already exists, and, therefore, it is quite proper to ask: Will it live again? But it is not proper to talk of the immortality of the spirit, whatever that may be, until it has been proved that what is called the spirit exists at all. First establish the present existence of what you term spirit before you discuss its future existence. Does not that commend itself to your judgment? Of course, if you are going to assume that something called spirit exists now, you might just as well assume, also, instead of trying to prove it, that it will exist for ever, or that it has existed from all eternity. When it comes to assuming things, you have a free field before you. But if you are going to dignify your effort by calling it a demonstration, please begin by proving the existence of the spirit. Will man have his sixth sense with him in the next world? Well, you have first to show that he has a sixth sense now.

The failure of Dr. Abbott to prove first the existence of something independent of the body, which he calls spirit or soul, before trying to establish its existence in the future, greatly weakens his argument. As a matter of economy alone, if for nothing else, if I were in his place, I would begin by proving that there is in man, somewhere in his system, lodged in his blood or brain, and quite independent of his bodily organs, a wonderful essence or entity called spirit. That point made good, the battle is more than won. For if the spirit exists now and is independent of the body, you do not have to make an elaborate argument to establish an immortality. That follows your premises. Being independent of the body, why should the existence of the spirit be interrupted by the dissolution of the body? A great deal of labor would be saved if the theologians made a note of that point.

Lyman Abbott makes his next mistake when he quotes the Bible to prove immortality. If he is going to use the Bible as an authority on that subject, why raise the question of a future life at all? The Bible is the Word of God, and God has said that man is immortal. Is not that enough? Is there any room for further discussion on that subject? Dr. Abbott recited to his hearers how Jesus on one occasion had raised a child from the dead by a touch of his hand, or by breathing into its face; and on another occasion he raised a man who had been dead for four days, and once more he tells them that Jesus resurrected himself from the grave. Now after such direct and conclusive proofs, furnished by the Word of God, why should one clergyman say, "I cannot prove immortality," and another clergyman look around for arguments to prove immortality?

But all this shows how faulty is the theological method. Lyman Abbott, in his readings, comes across a statement made, nobody knows by whom, that Jesus raised the dead, and, without offering one argument to prove that such a statement is verifiable, or that it is anything more than mere gossip or idle talk such as one finds in all ancient religions, he makes it one of the corner-stones, one of the main pillars; yes, the foundation, almost, of his faith in immortality. Could you think of a better example of the intellectual and moral laxity which characterises the reasoning of the theologian? What has happened to the intellect of Europe and America? Alas! a blight, the Asiatic blight, has fallen upon it.

Let us now take up the so-called philosophical or scientific arguments which the Doctor advances to establish his thesis. I regret to say that the Doctor begins his task by a play on words—by a paradox. To

prove immortality he denies death. "There is no death," he says. We do not die at all, according to Dr. Abbott, for if we did he is sure there would be no resurrection. "If a man dies shall he live again?" asks the Bible. "I should think not," replies Dr. Abbott. "What I believe is that man does not die," exclaims the Doctor, and he proceeds to tell us that we do not *become* immortal, we *are* immortal; and hence, death is not real. This mode of reasoning looks dangerously like intellectual shuffling. It reminds one of Mrs. Eddy's quibbles. If we do not like a thing, or if it is in our way, all we have to do is to deny its existence. There is no pain or evil or matter, according to Mrs. Eddy. And why? Because Mrs. Eddy does not *think* they ought to exist. But one moment; if a mere denial on your part is enough to prove the non-existence of matter, for example, the denial of what you call spirit by another ought to be enough to prove the non-existence of spirit. Why is not one man's denial as good as another's? These metaphysicians appear to be laboring under the impression that things cannot exist without our consent. Lyman Abbott and Mrs. Eddy say there is no death; how can people have the temerity to die after that? But if people do not die, why do we bury them? If there is no death, where are the passengers of the *Titanic* who did not land at New York when the *Carpathia* arrived? Where are the children who were burned to death in the Iroquois fire? To answer these questions by saying that what we call death is only a change does not do away with death; it only does away with its *name*. You call death a change; I am content; death is a change—a very great change; but the question still remains: What happens to man after that *change*?

Dr. Abbott says that he is now about seventy years old, and that during these many years his body has undergone a number of changes. He had, for example, one kind of body when he was a child, and another when he was a youth, and still another when he arrived at manhood, and so on; and at death he will have to go through another change, that is all. Quite true, Doctor; but you have still to prove that *that* change is going to make you immortal. If anything, the series of changes the body has gone through points to the conclusion that death is not the final change, but that the body keeps on changing. This is also the teaching of science; the body at death returns gradually to its original elements, then it starts forth to form new combinations and to go through another series of evolutions, only to return to its atomic or elemental stage and start out again to repeat the circular movement. That is, for example, what the seed does; it grows into a tree only to become a seed again, and then it starts anew to repeat the operation. I have had occasion to explain to you before the wonderful significance of this circular movement. The world is round, and everything partakes of that roundness. The movements of life have a certain swing about them which gives them a decided curve, bringing them back to the starting point. In a round world everything is round, so to speak. The currents of life do not run along straight lines. They sweep about a circle. People say: Where did the world begin, or where does it end? Why, the world is round, and therefore it has no more a beginning or an end than a circle has. The rains which fall from the clouds return to the clouds. It is this circular course that makes the supply of rain inexhaustible. The rivers flow into the ocean, rise to the clouds, and return again to the rivers. They describe a circle. It is so with human life; we come from the earth and we return to the earth. If we did not return to the earth, the earth would cease to produce and life would become extinct. It is the circular movement, the return to the starting-point, that enables life to repeat itself. Immortality, such as the theologians preach, contradicts this universal law of reciprocity, the give-and-take of nature, which is the commerce that makes life possible. Immortality, if true, would destroy all life. To withhold the rivers from empty-

ing into the sea, or the living from returning to the earth to make her pregnant again, would result in the drying up of the rivers and the sterilisation of the earth. Life is a law of nature; immortality is a miracle. Life is a circle; immortality is like a detached line or branch running away from the earth, its base of supply, and therefore bound to amount to nothing.

But the Doctor shifts his position at the critical point. As the body decays, he says, the spirit waxes strong. This would show that it is not the body after all that is immortal, but the spirit. Then what have the changes of the body, to which the Doctor refers so often in his sermon, to do with the question of immortality? But is it true that, as the body decays, the faculties become brighter and keener? I do not think so. Is a man a century old, for example, stronger in memory, in swiftness of thought, and in the interest he takes in life and its problems? Is he more inventive, more creative, more active intellectually at the age of one hundred than when he was only half a century old? And when he reaches the one hundred and ten, or the hundred and twenty mark, does his mentality become more pronounced than when he was only a hundred years old? Then why do we say that such and such a man is too old for the presidency, or that he is too old to teach, or too old to write another book, or that this or that will be his last book? The question is not one of theory, but of fact. All we have to do is to make a series of experiments and observations, and then table the results. It is true that Voltaire was still using his pen at the age of eighty-three, but his best work was done twenty or thirty years earlier. In his closing years Victor Hugo had lost the brilliance of his mind; his memory faded, as did also the lustre of his eyes. Thought is a flame. To keep it burning there must be a fresh supply of fuel. When the fuel is exhausted the flame dies.

But to show that Dr. Abbott himself believes he is on uncertain ground here, let me quote his answer to the question: When this body falls off, what kind of instrument will the spirit of man use as its medium of expression? "How should I know, or you know," answers the doctor, and he adds, "*We never can know what the life way beyond the horizon of our experience is.*" Precisely; what inspiration is there, then, in talking about an existence "we can never know." Some day we are going to live in the moon! But we know nothing definite about the moon, and nothing either about the nature of the existence possible up there; nor whether such a life is desirable or not. Under those circumstances, would it not be the act of prudence on our part to wait until we get there before we *enthus* over the prospect?

Another argument the Doctor uses is that, even as the music produced by a violin survives the destruction of the violin, or even as the truths contained by a book do not perish with the book, or, again, as the ideas of the Greeks still live while Greece is no more—so will life survive the dissolution of the body. But that is not the question, Dr. Abbott. Music survives the destruction of the violin, but *that* violin's music is gone. We are not talking about music in general, but the music of that particular violin. The ideas of the Greeks live, but Socrates or Plato can think no more. No more ideas come from them. We, who are alive, think their thoughts. When a man dies, it is not life that dies, it is *his* life. That is to say, his individual, conscious, personal local life. When a nightingale is shot in the heart, it is not the song that dies, but the songster. And the question is: Will that particular nightingale sing again? Will Socrates think again? Will the child that fell into the fire laugh and kiss again? Nobody questions that after you and I have passed away life will continue. Yes, and after the human race has ceased to breathe, life will continue. The sea will be alive, the soil will teem with life, and the air will be as replete as ever with life germs. Nature is alive, and nature is eternal. When this world dies, and like the moon it becomes a frozen sphere or mere

débris on the tracks of time, nature will bring forth other worlds from her great womb, fairer and younger than any which have yet danced in the sun. Life is immortal, as is also matter, but what we are discussing is *individual* immortality. Why confuse the issue?

The next argument of the Doctor is that the invisible is the real and that the visible is the immortal. "My sceptical friend asks," says Dr. Abbott, "why do you believe in God? You never saw him." "I say, 'Why do you believe in your mother?'" "Oh, I have seen her." "Oh, I beg your pardon, you never saw your mother—never." This is very naive as an argument for immortality. To begin with, the philosopher does not say that only what he can see with the eye exists. He does not see the law of gravitation, but he believes there is such a power. He does not see love, but he believes in love. And why does he believe in the law of gravitation, or in love, if he cannot see them? Because he can *reasonably* prove their existence. By dropping an object from the window, or by pressing one body against another, he proves reasonably the existence of the forces of attraction and resistance. In the same way, when he witnesses the caresses, or the tears, the devotion and the attachment of a mother for her child, or of man for woman, or of woman for man, he proves reasonably the existence of the passion which is called love, and which is also a kind of gravitation or attraction. But if he questions the existence of Jehova or Allah, it is not because he cannot see, but because he cannot reasonably prove their existence. Is not that plain?

But what does Dr. Abbott mean when he says that man has never, never seen his own mother?

"You have seen her brow and her eyes and her face—that is not mother. If that was mother then why, when brow and eyes and face lie in the coffin, all there, do you throw yourself before it and cry out in anguish, Mother, mother! Because the love, the hope, the courage, made mother, and these you never saw."

And is it by such reasoning that a future existence is to be proved? My dear doctor! love, courage, and hope make other mothers as well as our own; how, then, are we going to tell our mothers from other mothers except by the brow, the eyes, and the face? Whose mother is it in that casket covered with flowers? A look at the body will tell. But if that is your mother there why do you cry? The eyes, the brow, the face are still there. But are they there? And where is her voice? Observe that Dr. Abbott does not say that the voice is also there in the coffin. And yet the voice is more personal even than the brow or the face. Where is the voice? It is not in the coffin, to be sure. And are the eyes there? Do they still sparkle with vision, or dance with joy? When we throw ourselves down in anguish and cry Mother, mother! it is because the eyes that looked upon us, the smile which brightened our day, are no longer there. It is because the touch that sent a thrill into our hearts is not there. It is because the face upon which came and went, like the waves of the sea, the moods of the mind, is no longer there. We cry for the voice that has vanished, and for the touch of the hand that is no more. To say that all these, which will soon turn into a handful of dust and ashes, are still there in the coffin, is not, I regret to say, quite honest.

Lyman Abbott seems to overlook the fact that the life of the mother is inseparable from her eyes, face, and brow. Life is the "total organic functional activity" of the body. Life is not an entity, a separate something which could be introduced into, or taken out of the body at pleasure, but a condition, a state, or a function of the organism. And the mind or soul of the mother is as inseparable from the brain and body as is her life. Let us explain this.

(To be concluded.)

I believe in the fireside. I believe in the democracy of the home—Ingersoll.

Gleanings and Memories.

Luz y Verdad, our Chilean contemporary (Antofagasta), is just to hand. It cites the following thought by Antonio Zozaya:—

"The Ascension has deprived Calvary of all its glory. There is no merit in dying for mankind when you know that you will rise again on the third day."

I have also received from Brazil (S. Paulo) our esteemed contemporary, *O Livre Pensador*, now in its ninth year of activity. It is a far cry and a long journey to Brazil, and I am, of course, not surprised to find that the two numbers sent to me are dated as far back as July. I am glad to find that San Paulo has been honored by a propagandist visit of Senora Bêlén Sárraga. I first met this wondrous orator, with the fiery Moorish temperament, at the International Congress of Geneva in September, 1903. Her great gifts of speech formed the principal personal feature of the Congress. After the dispersion of the delegates, I became an occasional contributor to her Freethought paper, published at Malaga: *La Conciencia Libre*. A few years afterwards she went to South America, and I lost sight of her until the great Congress of 1906 at Buenos Aires took place. She has since been active as a Freethought lecturer in all the Spanish Republics of South America. It was refreshing to me to read of her triumphant career as a speaker in the many cities and townships of Brazil. She must have proceeded further north on her campaign since July, as only a little while ago I read accounts of her lectures in various parts of Mexico. More power to her magic tongue and persuasive speech!

I learn from *O Livre Pensador* that a procession of 20,000 persons, organised by the local Escuela Moderna, and by the Freethought Societies, and Freemason lodges, wended through the streets of San Paulo on the second anniversary of Ferrer's murder. Speeches were delivered amongst others by Everardo Dias, the editor of our contemporary and official orator of the local Freemasons.

A word for history. My friend Cristóbal Litran, writing in *El Progreso* of November 8, records that Ferrer, on the night of July 29, 1909, said these words to him:—

"Undeceive yourself. Here in Spain everything is in a rotten state. In order to make the Revolution you will have to create by means of the School a new humanity."

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

No More Ghosts or Witches.

We have passed the days of ghosts and witches. No one dares tell any more of ghosts or witches as matters of fact. Why not bid farewell to devils, angels, gods, hells and heavens, miracles and impossibilities? Two and two have always been equal to four. The relation of numbers can never change. If a right angle be divided into a number of small angles, the sum of all the angles will be equal to one right angle. There never has been a period in the world's history when this was not true, and there never will be.

The laws of nature have always been just what they are to-day. Hence, what is impossible now has always been impossible; therefore a miracle has never been performed. A miracle is always the impossible. If a thing is possible, it is no miracle; if impossible, it cannot be performed.

There has been too much knee service and too much blowing about things of which no one knows anything. Man is the grandest being of which we have any knowledge, and the "chief end of man" is to better his condition here. Ministers claim to know all about God, when the lying pretenders know nothing at all. Any minister can draw a picture of a horse on a blackboard that will give a good idea of him. Let every minister be called upon to draw a picture of God. Unless he can do it, you have the right to call him a pretender and a deceiver. A man can never describe a thing that he knows nothing about. It is impossible to get a knowledge of something that does not exist.

—Truthseeker (New York)

JOHN PECK.

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OUTDOOR.

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Town Hall Square): Thos. A. Jackson—Dec. 29, at 11, "The Atheist in the Market Place"; at 7, "The Armies of God"; 30, at 7.30, "The Dead Hand"; 31, at 7.30, "The Bible and Beer"; Jan. 1, at 7.30, "What must we do to be saved?" 2. at 7.30, "Providence and the Police"; 3, at 7.30, "Who Made God?" 4, at 7.30, "The Faith of an Infidel."

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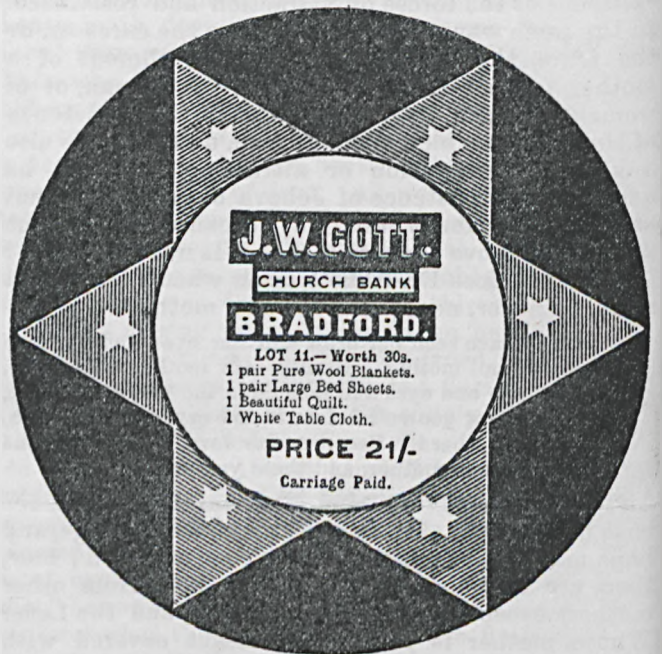
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