

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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*The peace of the two worlds depends upon these two words—Be kind to your friends, and be merciful to your enemies.—SADI.*

## The Passing of Christianity.

FOR some weeks the religious journals of this country have been crowded with articles and letters concerning the recent census of church and chapel attendance at Liverpool. Most of the writers maintain that the immense falling off reported must not be taken as evidence that the people generally are, at bottom, any less religious than they used to be. Not one of them concurs with Dr. C. R. Niven, the well-known Freethinker, in the contention that the decrease in church attendance is due to the fact that the modern man is making the discovery that however necessary religion may have been to his remote ancestors in times of ignorance and inexperience, yet for him, in this age of scientific knowledge, it is quite unnecessary. Dr. Niven is convinced that it is this discovery that really explains "the avalanche that is overwhelming the churches and chapels of these islands, and for that matter the world over." The *Christian World* for January 2 frankly admits that "in Liverpool, at all events, there is no escaping Dr. Niven's conclusion that where 100 people formerly attended worship (*i.e.*, twenty years ago) only 73 do so now." Our contemporary refers to Dr. Niven's article, presumably in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, as "a searching examination" of the results of the census, and characterises the following extract as "brutally frank":—

"The net result of the last ten years' work of the Protestant churches and chapels in Liverpool is to show a decrease of 16,000 worshippers every Sunday, with an increase of over 8,000 seats for the 16,000 people who do not come to worship. In other words, the net gain of ten years' preaching in the Protestant churches is the production of 24,000 empty seats."

It seems to us that Dr. Niven's interpretation of the facts disclosed by the Liverpool census is unquestionably true. The steady decrease of church and chapel-going is only one of the symptoms of the passing of the Christian superstition. But the official defenders of the faith assert dogmatically that it is nothing of the sort. Dr. Clifford, in his review of 1912, which appears in the *Christian World Pulpit* for January 1, admits the facts, but rejects the Freethinker's interpretation of them. He says:

"Just now, alas, the air is filled with lamentation and mourning over decaying Churches and Sunday-schools, declining attendances at public worship, and a general neglect of institutional religion. There are deep searchings of heart amongst the Churches. The Liverpool census is most discouraging, and everybody is apprehensive of a similar or worse state of facts being discovered by the statistics to be given us about London. The outlook is dark and threatening for organised religion."

Those are the facts; but no sooner are they stated than the Christian sophisticator begins to manipulate them to his own advantage. Dr. Clifford proceeds:—

"But we must not forget that Churches may cease growing, without that meaning that religion is losing

its hold of us, or that we are losing our grip of it. We may have to cease 'building temples' in order to 'worship God,' and dissociate ourselves from organisations that claim the Christian name in order that we may be faithful to Christ himself and his claims."

This fallacious reasoning is altogether too transparent, and is rooted in dishonesty as well. Dr. Clifford knows quite well that, as Dr. Niven observes, temple building is still indulged in as vigorously as ever; it is a Christian hobby of the hour; but the all-significant fact is that the temples built lack worshippers. What the Churches have to complain of is not merely the dearth of new recruits, but a vast plethora of deserters; not only that they have ceased to grow bigger with the population, but that, in spite of themselves, they have taken to growing alarmingly smaller. It is idle sophistry to say that the Churches, while retrograding *quantitatively*, may, in reality, be gradually advancing *qualitatively*. And yet we find even Principal Adeney, as Chairman of the Congregational Union, declaring that "we have had enough of statistics, the question being not the size of the church, but its quality, its tone, spirit, efficiency," forgetting that the Church, according to its New Testament ideal, is to prove its quality, tone, spirit, efficiency by conquering the world; or that the Church, if true to its Lord, exists, not for its own sake, but for that of the world outside. We read in the Book of the Acts that the Apostolic Church evinced its efficiency in the fact that there were being "added to it day by day such as should be saved." In other words, an efficient Church must be a victorious Church.

Dr. Clifford is a magnificent rhetorician. He has not "the sweet, silent rhetoric of persuading eyes," but the boisterous rampageous, and irresponsible rhetoric of the modern pulpiteer, who flees for refuge to subterfuge and evasion. Here is a sample:—

"We may have been losing only to find; losing limited prejudices to acquire emancipating ideas, leaving behind us the crippling and obsolete machinery that we might breathe the fuller life, forsaking the broken and splintered cisterns of human manufacture in order to drink from the exhaustless fountain of the soul of the world. The tree of religion may be bursting and breaking the pot in which its roots have been bound, in order that it may be replanted in a purer and richer soil, and thereafter produce a more nourishing fruit."

If that passage has any meaning at all, the idea it conveys is that Christianity is securing a divorce from the Church, because of her manifold infidelities, or in order to contract a fresh marriage with the State. Nay, more, Christianity is sick and tired of monogamy and has resolved to make experiments in polygamy. The State is already almost a Church. District and City Councils, Parliament, and the movements of the modern mind, all these are becoming quite churchy; and thus is religion, "slowly but surely, ascending to its throne in the experience of men." But this is unutterable, intolerable twaddle. By the State, Dr. Clifford understands the democracy as against the aristocracy; by Parliament, the radical wing of the Liberal Party; by the County Council, its Progressive members; and by the movements of the modern mind, the New Theology and Socialism. In other words, Jesus Christ, in his theory of government, is a Democrat; in his politics a Radical; and in his political economy a Socialist; and, naturally, only Democrats, Radicals,

and Socialists can be Christians. Aristocrats, Tories, and Individualists are enemies of the Cross of Christ, and shall be excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

The truth is, however, that the Churches are declining because Christianity is dying, and that Christianity is dying because humanity is slowly but surely coming into its own. Dr. Clifford is professionally blind to this truth, and attributes whatever natural good emerges in the world to the influence of Christianity, forgetting that throughout the ages Christianity was bitterly opposed to most of the reforms which he regards as its fruit. The Church not only tolerated but advocated slavery, and winked at feudalism. The Church carried favor with the high and mighty, and perpetuated poverty by her very charities. The Church hobnobbed with the landlord and the squire, and kept the working classes under her iron heel. Dr. Clifford may tell us that it was not Christianity but a corrupt Church that did all these dreadful things; but, we ask, where then was Christianity? Where was the omnipotent Christ, the head of the Church? Where was the Holy Ghost, the comforter, sanctifier, and protector of the Church? Does not Dr. Clifford realise that to admit that the Church was at any time corrupt and guilty of wicked deeds is tantamount to acknowledging that the Church has never been what it always claims to be? In any case, Christianity is whatever the Church chooses it to be, and she has chosen to make different representations of it at different periods, and even at one and the same period. Everybody knows that Dr. Clifford's version of Christianity differs widely from that championed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, or even from that so zealously promulgated by his own brother of the Metropolitan Tabernacle; and has he the hardihood to believe that he is more competent to interpret it than either of the other two? No, there never has been and there never can be any Christianity apart from the Churches; and even the Churches of to-day harbor extremely divergent views of it. "But," someone may object, "it is the spirit of Christ that ought to decide every question"; and yet the spirit of Christ is the vaguest and most variable thing in the world. It impels Dr. Clifford to fight with tooth and nail for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Episcopal Church in Wales, and the Archbishop of Canterbury to resist both with all his might. It sets all the Churches at sixes and sevens on the subject of national education, and keeps them endlessly quarreling about doctrine and ritual. In reality, the spirit of Christ is as great a myth as Christ himself, and as variously interpreted. There never has been, there never can be, any agreement as to either.

Naturally enough, the last thing Christian ministers are prepared to do is to admit that the religion on which they live is passing away; and quite as naturally, they will do everything within their power to prolong its life. Dr. Clifford asks us to "note the march of the Brotherhood movement in France, Canada, and England," and as a result of noting it we have come to the conclusion that the Brotherhood movement is a desperate device for catching recruits for the depleted Churches; and so is "the Men and Religion movement." And yet, in spite of all such devices, the Churches are getting to leak more and more every year. They are losing both adherents and members by the thousand. Nothing is easier than to assert in Christian pulpits that "moral salvation is not in politics nor in administration"; but nothing is more certain than that "moral salvation" has never been brought about through the instrumentality of the Churches. The fact that "moral salvation" is still to seek involves the absolute damnation of the Churches. When the divine tells the scientific moralist that he has not moralised society, the retort is irresistible, "Neither have you." One thing is certain: in whatever economic or moral reform that has recently been effected the Churches have not been even consulted; their very existence has been quietly ignored. "True, Dr. F. B. Meyer has

had something to say" in each case; "but then he has something to say about everything"; and so it is not of the least account.

J. T. LLOYD.

## One Out of Five.

ACCORDING to Sir Robertson Nicoll, of the *British Weekly*, out of every five children that pass through Nonconformist Sunday-schools, not more than one grows up to be a member of a Nonconformist church or chapel. Sir Robertson is naturally much perturbed at such a condition of affairs. He calls upon parents and preachers to be up and mend this condition of things—if they can. He asks them to form leagues of worshiping children, so that by-and-bye they will become worshiping adults. If they can do this all may yet be well. If they cannot, then we are witnessing the beginning of the end. Presently, not four out of five, but the whole five will escape the net of the clerical fishers. The Churches will try to subsist on an adult population, which could not last beyond a single generation. For it is a commonplace of observation that the only way to make anyone a Christian is to set to work on him before he is old enough to see what you are about. You must catch your believer young—the younger the better. If you catch him young enough, and train him hard enough, there is hope. He may never leave you, or, if he does, there is the possibility of recapturing him at a later period. For the religious virus bites deep. Once get it into the system and it is difficult to eradicate. Therefore, the maxim of all wide-awake Churchmen is "catch the kids." Every priest is a professional kidnapper. A church that leaves the children their freedom is doomed. Sir Robertson Nicoll says so, and every Freethinker will agree with him. To turn an adult Christian into a Freethinker is a good piece of work. To stop the child becoming a Christian is better work still. Therefore, I feel like congratulating the lucky four who—if they have not become real Freethinkers—have taken one step in the direction of freedom. And I sympathise heartily with the one who is left in captivity.

A complete philosophy of religion lies locked up in this struggle of the churches for the control of the children, and in the escape of so many despite all the precautions taken. Let us note, in the first place, how heavily the dice are loaded in favor of the Churches. The influence of the home is on their side. The parents clearly desire their children to grow up Christians or they would not send them to Sunday-school. They are sent for religious instruction during the most impressionable period of their lives. The value of religious belief is impressed upon them in a number of different ways. Religion becomes associated with early recollections of home, of parents, of teachers. Yet four out of every five break away. The Church that has fought so hard to keep them sees them depart. And all that the advisers of the clergy can say is "make the services brighter. Interest them, amuse them, give them pictures, singing and entertainments, then perhaps they will stay." And, strangely enough, many of the clergy seriously discuss the advisability of turning themselves into juvenile entertainers in the hope of securing a crop of adult supporters.

Next, let it be noted that this frantic struggle to get hold of children is a comparatively modern phenomenon. Where religious belief is a natural outcome of contemporary life the religious art of kidnapping is unknown. Indeed, among primitive peoples, the religious instruction of children is quite ignored. When they are just emerging from childhood some care is bestowed on their initiation into the mysteries of religion, but religion remains an affair of adult life. Even at a much later stage of social culture there is no special call for the religious education of children. With mediæval Christianity, for example, there was no demand for a religious

"atmosphere" to be created around children. Religion did not have to be recommended to the child by the agency of tea meetings, singing, entertainments, or kindergarten games. The religious atmosphere was provided by the life of the time. There was no difficulty in keeping people—young or old—religious, the difficulty would have been to have kept them from becoming so. Between religious belief and the social environment, there existed, at least, no direct and obvious disharmony.

It is a change in the character of the social environment that produces the need for capturing children. Growing knowledge of the world, with the development of social life, sets up an unconscious antagonism to religious beliefs. The power of the priesthood, the welfare of all that a priesthood stands for, is threatened. A line of cleavage is established between inherited religion and contemporary life, with the result that a struggle for the direction of life becomes one of the marked features of all religious organisations. In place of social life confirming religious teaching, an antagonism is created between the Church and the world. And this, not because one is pure and the other impure, but simply because the stages of culture are in conflict. The theory that religious organisations have stood, or now stand, for a purer morality than that expressed in everyday life, is undiluted nonsense. The impulse to a healthier morality has always originated outside the Churches, and it needs little study to prove that, defective as it may be, the ethic of ordinary social intercourse is much higher than the ethic of the pulpit. The real cause of division, of the separation of things into sacred and secular, of the marking off the Church from the world, is that if religious beliefs are exposed to the free play of current life and knowledge, they inevitably decay. And in sheer self-defence religious organisations protect themselves by the maintenance of a special language, clothing, manner, and general "atmosphere"—all so many attempts to insulate the religious life and protect it from healthy criticism.

Proofs of this are numerous and unmistakable. It is a common complaint of all Churches that when their members move into new districts, or into a new country, they frequently cease attending a place of worship and drop religion altogether. In other ages, when religious belief had a real and independent vitality, people took their gods or their religion with them. It was a part of their mental life, and could not be shaken off with a change of habitat. To-day, the religionist is often like a ticket-of-leave man. He will report himself only so long as he feels he may be discovered. Not so long ago, Dr. Horton was complaining that Sunday cycling had done much to break down the habit of worship. The same complaint is constantly made concerning the week-end habit, picture shows, and a hundred and one other things. They are all illustrations of the truth that the maintenance of religion in modern society involves the operation of a host of artificial safeguards, and that, if these were withdrawn, religion is doomed. A belief that is not proof against a picture palace, a bicycle, or a Sunday on the river, is almost outside the bounds of respectful discussion.

The consequence of all this is that the Churches have been driven to concentrate more and more on securing control of the family, and of the children in particular. Everything else can wait for a more or less mature individuality. There is no frantic haste to cram a child with other subjects. The scientist, the teacher of art, of literature, of mechanics, waits until the child is old enough to appreciate what is being taught to it. To follow this policy in religion would be suicidal. Is there any instance known of an educated, intelligent person of, say, twenty years of age, brought up without religious belief, and then becoming religious? I have never heard of such a case, although I have been looking for one for many years. Religion must perforce commence with the child. It must breed clients for church and chapel if either is to possess them. That is the plain economic side of the

problem. Every child represents a potential customer of the Church. The fight of the Churches for the control of children, under whatever form it may be, is a fight for clients and for revenue. Cut them off here and their supply is destroyed. They simply cannot wait to submit their creeds to an unbiassed mature intelligence. It is the children or nothing.

Of course, this is putting the matter very plainly, even brutally. And it is quite probable that many of the clergy, in resenting this charge, would do so with all sincerity. The majority of people develop a certain dexterity in disguising from themselves the operations of self-interest, and when one happens to be working with a sect or a party its workings become still more successfully cloaked. To openly admit, or even to recognise, its workings would be fatal to its success. An unselfish reason must be discovered for a selfish action; and it must not only impose upon those to whom it is given, but it must also, at least in the majority of cases, impose upon those who use it. So it happens that the workings of this particular piece of corporate self-interest is disguised under a concern for morality, for the development of character, for the creation of a healthy sense of citizenship. And all the time there is the plain, and now generally admitted, fact that good character, sound morality, and healthy citizenship may be cultivated, and actually exists, apart from all religious belief whatsoever.

The child has no pressing need for instruction in speculative doctrines, whether they refer to this world or the next. Such subjects can at least wait until each child is old enough to understand what it is being taught, and to exercise complete liberty of acceptance or rejection. Self-respecting men with sensible teaching ask for nothing more than this, and they should be satisfied with nothing less than this. What the child really needs is a measure of protection against the crowd of priests seeking to capture it in the interests of this or that religious organisation. Sadder still is the fact that the child should so often need protection against its own parents. A Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children already exists, but it is concerned only with the infliction of material injuries. We need another organisation, or at least a lively sense of the need for protecting children against having forced upon them teachings that are wholly unfitted to their years, against their innocently accepting as true doctrines that many afterwards discover to be false, and which are actually known to be of a dubious character by those who teach them. It is not the least of the offences of the priesthood that it converts into an instrument of oppression parental care and affection, which under proper conditions should form the child's principal defences against aggression.

The burden of Sir Robertson Nicoll's lament is cheerful news to all lovers of genuine progress. That four-fifths of the children who are dosed in Nonconformist Sunday-schools should escape the Nonconformist churches is so much to the good. It is an indication that the pull of life is more powerful than the teachings of religion. True, the liberated four-fifths may not all become avowed Freethinkers, but their not becoming avowed Christians is something to the good. If this condition of things can be maintained it is, as Sir Robertson Nicoll sees, the beginning of the end. The secularisation of the schools bids fair to become soon an article of practical politics. The secularisation of the home must follow. And that means that religion must depend upon an appeal to the educated adult intelligence for support. And its chances of success in that direction are not likely to fill any Freethinker with grave misgivings.

C. COHEN.

It is for the good of people in this world—to increase happiness on this side of the tomb.—*Ingersoll.*

## Francis Thompson.

"That same gentle spirit from whose pen  
Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow."

—SPENSER.

AMID thousands of unloved and obscure graves at Kensal Green Cemetery is one with the touching inscription, "Look for me in the nurseries of heaven." This is the last resting place of Francis Thompson, who was buried there about five years ago. He was then almost unknown, and during his lifetime he had suffered the hardships of lonely poverty to a degree not surpassed by any of the most unfortunate poets of the world. He had slept many nights upon the Thames Embankment, and under carts in Covent Garden Market. He sold matches in the Strand, and was a bookseller's porter staggering through London streets with a heavy sack upon his back. When he was carried to his grave only a few intimate friends, who had looked after him for the last few months of his life, were present to mourn. Now he is placed by all good judges in the ranks of poets of genius, and the garland of laurel decorates his tomb which was denied to the living man.

It is quite possible both to overrate and to underestimate Thompson's merits; but no one, we suppose, would contend that he was other than a genuine and unmistakable poet. He was a very unequal writer, sometimes soaring to the pure ether of the great singers, and sometimes falling to the lower slopes of Parnassus. He had, indeed, his faults; but against them must be placed his unbalanced, imaginative, reckless nature. There can hardly be a sadder story than his in the whole history of literature, though Chatterton, Villon, Poe, James Thomson, and Verlaine are among them. To be at once a genius and a drudge, to live in direst poverty and to die of a lingering disease, is as melancholy a lot as can be imagined. Nor would he deserve less pity if we denied his genius. His faults, whatever they may have been, injured himself alone; but genius he most certainly had.

Thompson is a poet's poet—like Blake, Rossetti, and Shelley. His kinship with these singers is far nearer than to Crashaw and the ecclesiastical mystics. He assuredly calls for a meed of praise equal to that accorded to Maeterlinck, D'Annunzio, Rostand, and others for whom so many British altars have flamed in worship. Thompson's genius was Oriental, exuberant in color, woven with strange textures. His poetry was mainly a splendid rhetoric, imaginative and passionate, as if the moods went by wrapped in imperial purple in a great procession. His masterpiece, "The Hound of Heaven," is molten white with passion. Listen to these lines, in which the alchemy of the poet's genius transmits the dross of theology into the fine gold of poetry:—

"I dimly guess what time in mists confounds;  
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds  
From the hid battlements of eternity.  
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then  
Round the half-glimpsed turrets slowly wash again;  
But not ere him who summoneth  
I first have seen, enwound  
With glooming robes purple, cypress crowned;  
His name I know, and what his trumpet saith."

Now hear the great valediction which concludes his "Anthem of Earth":—

"Now, mortal, son-like,  
I thou hast suckled, mother, I at last  
Shall sustentant be to thee. Here I untrammel,  
Here I pluck loose the body's cementing,  
And break the tomb of life; here I shake off  
The bur of o' the world, man's congregation shun,  
And to the antique order of the dead  
I take the tongueless vow: my cell is set  
Here in thy bosom; my little trouble is ended  
In a little peace."

How fine, too, is his vision of the woman sleeping in the child, like a dryad hiding among the leaves:—

"Those whose young sex is yet but in thy soul,  
As, hoarded in the vine,  
Hang the gold skins of undelirious wine,  
As air sleeps, till it toss its limbs in breeze."

The closing stanza of "Daisy" is dangerously near perfection:—

"She went her unremembering way;  
She went, and left in me  
The pang of all the partings gone,  
And partings yet to be."

This sensitive singer, who suffered much, undisciplined and undismayed, was also a magnificent prose writer. His essay on Shelley, posthumously published in the *Dublin Review*, is unmatched of its kind. The jewelled panoply of his diction bears ample witness to the princely opulence of his imagination. Writing of *Prometheus Unbound*, he says:

"The final scenes especially are such a Bacchic reel and rout and revelry of beauty as leaves one staggered and giddy; poetry is spilt like wine, music runs to drunken waste. The choruses sweep down the wind, tirelessly, flight after flight, till the breathless soul almost cries for respite from the unrolling splendors."

This is a superb tribute from the Catholic poet to the Atheist singer. Literature, like music, is wider than opinion, broader than dogma, as limitless as the humanity to which it appeals. When Gladstone passionately addressed his speech on the Oaths Bill to a hushed and expectant House of Commons, he quoted some perfect lines of the old Roman Free-thinker, Lucretius, as daring an iconoclast as Voltaire. The majesty of the quotation was its justification. Gladstone's brain and taste persisted in being independent of his heart, like the German soldier who fought through the Franco-German war, and who, when killed, was found to have in his pocket a well-thumbed copy of De Musset's poems. Catholic though he was, Francis Thompson deserves a few words of praise in a Freethought paper. He never did weak or puling work in prose or verse. Although he waged an unequal war against fate, he was at least a happy soldier. When his turn came, he yielded up his broken sword with a brave and a humble heart.

MIMNERMUS.

## The Leeds "Profanity" Case.

MY advice has been asked on this matter. It might have been better if it had been asked before. I heard absolutely nothing about it until the very morning Mr. Jackson's case was to be called in court, and shortly after that I was apprised by telegram of his sentence of "twenty shillings or a fortnight." Mr. Jackson chose the fortnight. His choice shows he does not lack courage. But that is not the only virtue in a public propagandist. An Andalusian bull has plenty of courage, but he is generally carted out of the arena at the finish. His adversaries are too cunning for his methods of warfare.

I repeat that my advice has been sought. To begin with, the seeking is too late for any useful action. In the second place, Mr. Jackson's case is not one that could be taken to the Court of Appeal. Mr. Horace Marshall—who, by the way, complimented Mr. Jackson on his able and temperate defence—refused to state a case. He did not see any case to state. Nor do I. All he had to decide was whether the defendant was guilty of "profanity" under the Police Act. That question turned upon the first sentence. Mr. Jackson had publicly declared in Victoria Square, Leeds, that

"The God of this anti-infidel crusade is a mean, contemptible, cowardly, bloodthirsty old monster."

Without disputing the truth of this, one must admit that if it is not "profanity" in the ordinary sense of the word, it is remarkably like it. Personally, of course, I want to see all references to "profanity" as well as to "blasphemy" banished from the laws of England. But I cannot close my eyes to the fact that they are there, and I cannot expect magistrates and judges (not even the best of them—and we all know what the worst are) to overlook the fact either. One may insist on one's right to use "profane language" in public places, and take the consequences as

cheerfully as possible. That is an intelligible policy, and no one could call it dishonorable. But the question of an appeal against one's sentence is simply one of law and utility. And in this case I see nothing that can be gained by such action. The Court of Appeal would be certain, in my opinion, to back up the magistrate. For there is nothing in dispute except the two points:—(1) Did the defendant use that language, and (2) Is it "profane language" within the meaning of the Act?

Some readers seem to have misunderstood what I have previously written on "appealing." What is the use of fighting over a hopeless case? Well, it may be asked, what is a favorable case? It is a case in which reasonable argument is possible. It is arguable, for instance, that the defendant ought never to have been prosecuted under the Police Clauses Act; that the words charged against him were part of a legitimate attack upon certain ideas which were defended by their own spokesmen; that they cannot fairly be regarded as "profanity" in the common meaning of the term; that the Act could never have been intended to apply to any language used in the course of a public address or a public discussion; that if the defendant is to be prosecuted at all he should be prosecuted under the Blasphemy Law, and indicted and tried in a superior court, and not dealt with in a court of summary jurisdiction, so that the invaluable right of free speech might be guarded against hasty assaults. I should like to argue such a case before the Court of Appeal, but I confess I should shun the task of arguing Mr. Jackson's present case. Moreover, the Freethought party has no money to throw away. Certainly the N. S. S. has not. I may add that Mr. Jackson was not speaking for the N. S. S. or the Secular Society, Ltd., when he used the "profane language" he is under sentence for.

I see that Mr. Jackson, in his address to the Magistrate, kept to the old Leeds plan of defence. Mr. Robert Blatchford was dragged in again. Certain warm words about Jehovah were quoted from his *God and My Neighbor*. But these words were not uttered in a public place; they were printed in a book, which was not given away, but had to be bought; they were thus not prosecutable under the Police Clauses Act; and Mr. Blatchford was discreet enough to say "Jehovah" instead of "God."

No one need go to prison under the Act in question. Mr. Jackson can easily refrain from language on which the police can base a prosecution. If he chooses to court prosecution, that is his affair, not mine. It is for him to decide whether the advertisement is worth the cost.

Perhaps we may all rejoice that the cost is limited. A fortnight's imprisonment is the utmost penalty for "profane language" under the Police Clauses Act. If the defendant preferred to pay a fine I should not be inclined to blame him. If he can spare his money better than his time, I think he has a right of choice; in either case he submits to *force majeure*. Giving an undertaking is quite another matter. That is a self-humiliation for the sake of safety.

G. W. FOOTE.

#### THE PREACHER'S PERQUISITE.

When the new minister, a handsome and unmarried man, made his first pastoral call at the Fosdicks, he took little Anna up in his arms and tried to kiss her. But the child refused to be kissed; she struggled loose and ran off into the next room where her mother was putting a few finishing touches to her adornment before going into the drawing room to greet the clergyman.

"Mamma," the little girl whispered, "the man in the drawing room wanted me to kiss him."

"Well," replied mamma, "why didn't you let him? I would if I were you."

Thereupon Anna ran back into the drawing room, and the minister asked:

"Well, little lady, won't you kiss me now?"

"No, I won't," replied Anna promptly, "but mamma says she will."

#### A Churchless Community.

A READER personally acquainted with the facts vouches for the truth of an article in the *Leader* of Davenport, Iowa, which states that the town of Walcott, thirteen miles west of that city, has no church, and yet that its people are not only contented and happy, peaceful and law-abiding, but also thrifty and prosperous. To dispose of the financial part at the outset, it may be said that Walcott is next to the richest city per capita in the world. The banks have a deposit of \$1,126,000, and the inhabitants number 416. The article in the *Leader* says:—

"One of the distinctive features of Walcott, aside from its heavily-laden banks, is the absence of a church or other place of worship. It has been twenty-seven years since the town has had a church. Like a flower by the wayside, it failed to thrive and finally withered for the lack of nourishment. The edifice was located on the old cemetery grounds. It was abandoned as a house of worship, moved farther into town, and converted into a dwelling.

"Fifteen years ago an itinerant Episcopal clergyman struck Walcott and endeavored to find a home there. But the community failed to receive him with open arms or to extend him any encouragement. So, after a brief tarry, he moved on in search of greener pastures.

"'No, no; we do not want a church in Walcott. We have no use for one,' declared Louis Hinz, one of the pioneers of the town. 'We are now one community, one people, one happy family, you might say. We have no differences about religion. We are all peaceful and law-abiding. If we had a church there would be a division of sentiment. It would create two parties. One would go to church, and the other would not. Then one side would attempt to convince the other. This would create agitation and a division of sentiment. It would destroy our pleasant, happy relations. So you see why we don't want a church in Walcott.'

"Walcott has three general stores, three implement stores, two banks, two blacksmith shops, two butcher shops, two barber shops, two garages, two grain elevators, three doctors, a lumber yard, a restaurant, two public halls, and one saloon."

The mayor of this churchless town is Dr. Carl Hinrichs, whose picture embellishes the newspaper account. He is serving his second term and is perfectly satisfied with Walcott as it is, so far as preaching is concerned. This village answers in the affirmative the question whether a community can thrive and its people enjoy all of the blessings of civilisation without supporting a church.—*Truth-seeker* (New York).

#### Mark Twain's "Confession."

[Written in the early eighties.]

I BELIEVE in God the Almighty.

I do not believe he has ever sent a message to man by anybody, or delivered one to him by word of mouth, or made himself visible to mortal eyes at any time in any place.

I believe that the Old and New Testaments were imagined and written by man, and that no line in them was authorised by God, much less inspired by him.

I think the goodness, the justice, and the mercy of God are manifested in his works: I perceive that they are manifested toward me in this life; the logical conclusion is that they will be manifested toward me in the life to come, if there should be one.

I do not believe in special providences. I believe that the universe is governed by strict and immutable laws. If one man's family is swept away by a pestilence and another man's spared, it is only the law working: God is not interfering in that small matter, either against the one man or in favor of the other.

I cannot see how eternal punishment hereafter could accomplish any good end, therefore I am not able to believe in it. To chasten a man in order to perfect him might be reasonable enough; to annihilate him when he shall have proved himself incapable of reaching perfection might be reasonable enough; but to roast him forever for the mere satisfaction of seeing him roast would not be reasonable—even the atrocious God imagined by the Jews would tire of the spectacle eventually.

There may be a hereafter and there may not be. I am wholly indifferent about it. If I am appointed to live again, I feel sure it will be for some more sane and useful purpose than to flounder about for ages in a lake of fire and brimstone for having violated a confusion of ill-defined and contradictory rules said (but not evidenced) to be of divine institution. If annihilation is to follow death, I shall not be aware of the annihilation, and therefore shall not care a straw about it.

I believe that the world's moral laws are the outcome of the world's experience. It needed no God to come down out of heaven to tell men that murder and theft and the other immoralities were bad, both for the individual who commits them and for society which suffers from them.

If I break all these moral laws, I cannot see how I injure God by it, for he is beyond the reach of injury from me—I could as easily injure a planet by throwing mud at it. It seems to me that my misconduct could only injure me and other men. I cannot benefit God by obeying these moral laws—I could as easily benefit the planet by withholding my mud. (Let these sentences be read in the light of the fact that I have received moral laws only from man—none whatever from God.) Consequently, I do not see why I should be either punished or rewarded hereafter for the deeds I do here.

### Tales of Our Times.

BY A CYNIC.

JOHNNY SMITH was a thoughtful little boy who not only took great pains with his copy-book, but who paid more attention to the excellent moral precepts contained in them than little boys generally do. That sage injunction, "Be virtuous and you will be happy," early arrested his attention, and as, with painful effort and inky fingers, he traced each line of this familiar formula he became impressed with a growing conviction that the attainment of happiness must surely be an easier achievement than the reproduction of the sweeping curves and graceful symmetries of those beautiful letters.

This conviction remained with Johnny as he grew through boyhood, and he often wondered why happiness was always supposed to be so difficult to gain when all one had to do in order to gain it was to "be virtuous." So he began to make the experiment of practising what he understood to be virtue as often as possible in order to become, as he confidently expected, the happiest boy in the world.

In his schoolboy days it seemed to him that robbing birds' nests, torturing frogs, or throwing stray cats into ponds scarcely came under the category of virtuous conduct, so he steadily refrained from these pastimes, thus earning for himself the contempt of all his schoolfellows and the opprobrious name of "Amelia"—this being supposed to convey implications of feminine tender-heartedness and susceptibility unutterably despicable to all manly schoolboys. He also felt that fighting was not virtuous, so he never fought except in sheer self-defence. Thus he became the victim of all the bullies in the school, and was universally regarded as a coward, but he was neither a coward nor a weakling, for he was proficient in many boyish sports, notably swimming. This was proved on one occasion when the boy who had been in the habit of bullying him most unmercifully fell into a river, and when Smith plunged in and saved the bully's life at the risk of his own. But the only reward he got for this was a severe chill, followed by an attack of pneumonia, which nearly killed him, while the bully suffered no harm whatever from the accident.

When Smith left school he became a clerk in a bank, and gradually rose to a position of trust as an accountant. A fellow-accountant once proposed to him that the two of them should carry out a dastardly scheme of embezzlement, which of course, remembering the old copy-book of his childhood's days, he indignantly refused to participate in. This made the other accountant his mortal enemy, and when the embezzlement was carried out and discovered the perpetrator of the crime escaped unscathed, but there were circumstances which threw grave suspicion on Smith. He was tried, and, though acquitted for want of evidence, he lost his situation and had to start earning a living again in a distant part of the country. But the man who had committed the fraud bought a country house with the proceeds, was honored and respected by all his neighbors, and read the Lessons in the Parish Church every Sunday.

After some years of toil and privation, Smith once more found himself in fairly prosperous circumstances. He was now married, and had several friends whom he esteemed and trusted; and one of these, happening to get into financial difficulties, applied to him for assistance. To help one's friends in distress is certainly a virtuous act, so Smith had no hesitation in lending his friend all his hard-earned savings. But the friend, who had not paid much attention to copy-book maxims, neglected to repay a single penny of the loan, and Smith was once again plunged in poverty. Whereupon his wife, disgusted at what she called his imbecile stupidity, eloped with another of his friends.

Smith now began seriously to doubt whether his old copy-book maxim, "Be virtuous and you will be happy," was altogether to be depended on as a guide through life; and

he had almost resolved to abandon it, and to seek for happiness on quite other lines, when he fortunately came across a volume of Essays by an anonymous writer. One of these essays seemed to fit his own case so admirably that it might almost have been written specially for his instruction. Here are some passages of it which impressed themselves most deeply on Smith's mind:—

"Some of our copy-book headings ought to be carefully revised. Take, for instance, that familiar one, 'Be virtuous and you will be happy.' If this were altered to 'Be virtuous and you will deserve to be happy' no exception could be taken to it; but the injunction as it stands in our copy-books would be valid only in a perfectly virtuous social State. A virtuous character is one which prompts conduct favorable to the welfare of the community; but if the community be not itself entirely virtuous—that is, if it contain a certain number of non-virtuous individuals—virtuous conduct may often be the direct cause, not of happiness, but of bitter unhappiness to the virtuous individuals practising it.

"Sages of all ages, from that rather over-rated person King Solomon down to modern times, have invited mankind to seek moral guidance from the habits of ants and bees; but no strict analogy exists between the communities of the social hymenoptera and human communities, because the former are perfectly organised societies and the latter are not. Was it not Marcus Aurelius who observed that 'What is bad for the beehive cannot be good for the bee'? This is true enough for beehives, but not for human societies. Every individual bee is so organised through ages of inherited instinct that it cannot act in any way but what is beneficial to the hive, and any attempt to act otherwise would probably involve a painful effort. Therefore what is 'good' for each individual bee must also be 'good' for the hive. But supposing bee communities were not thus perfectly organised, and that they contained a certain number of bees who were, let us imagine, addicted to stealing the stored honey or devouring the eggs. An indulgence in such nourishing diet might well be 'good' for the non-virtuous bees practising it, and they would doubtless be 'happier' than the virtuous bees who refrained from such wrong conduct, but it would certainly be 'bad for the beehive.'

"It must not, however, be supposed that this view justifies a negation of virtue and a dissolution of all ethical sanctions. Virtuous conduct is such as promotes the general welfare, and as the general welfare is always and indefeasibly right—it follows that virtuous conduct must be always and indefeasibly right. But it should not be pursued with any expectation of individual happiness—indeed, virtuous conduct practised with a view to one's individual happiness as a reward, whether in this world or an imaginary future one, ceases to be virtuous conduct at all. The sole and sufficient sanction for such conduct is the welfare of the community of which each individual is an integral and inseparable part. The sole reward of the virtuous man is a share in that social welfare along with his fellows. The final purpose of his virtue is the attainment of that far-off goal when the community shall be as perfectly organised as a hive of bees, when the social equilibrium shall be complete, and when the maxim, 'Be virtuous and you will be happy,' shall be really true."

The reading of this essay prevented Smith from abandoning his virtuous principles, but it also prevented him from expecting their practice to meet with much reward of a hedonic kind.

#### . ANSWER THE QUESTIONS!

Leave your holy parables,  
Leave your pious suppositions;  
Try to give straightforward answers  
To the damnable old questions.

Why must Right, a bleeding outcast,  
Trail the burden of the Cross,  
While exultant as a victor  
Riding the high-horse goes Wrong?

Where, then, lies the fault? Perchance  
The Lord is not quite Almighty?  
Or himself he works the mischief?  
Ah, but this were too degrading.

Thus we ask, and ask for ever,  
Till at length our mouths are stopped  
With a handful of mere earth;—  
But can this be called an answer?

—Heine (translated by James Thomson "B. V.")

If I had been helping the Almighty when he created man, I would have had him begin at the other end, and start human beings with old age. How much better it would have been to start old and have all the bitterness and blindness of age in the beginning. One would not mind then if he were looking forward to a joyful youth. Think of the joyous prospect of growing young instead of old! Think of looking forward to eighteen instead of eighty! Yes, the Almighty made a poor job of it. I wish he had invited my assistance—Mark Twain.

**Acid Drops.**

The wisdom of trusting to "names" and "authorities" is proved by two recent facts. Mr. Frederic Harrison has been writing up the German scare in the *English Review*. He does it in the Jeremiah style. He reminds us, indeed, of our old friend Jonah, with his "Yet forty Days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." Dr. Alfred Wallace, on the other hand, has just been laughing the German scare to scorn. These rival prophets are both old men, both highly intellectual, and both famous publicists. If age, and mental power, and moral sincerity, were enough to justify a public utterance, they would both be entitled to belief. But that is impossible, for they are at opposite poles to each other. The moral is that every man should do his own thinking. There are no real "authorities" in the realm of mind. The first of all gospels is the gospel of Freethought.

Mr. Plowden, the well-known London magistrate, had a Scotsman before him charged with being drunk on New Year's Day. Defendant couldn't see any harm in that. "Then it is part of your religion to get drunk on —," Mr. Plowden said. "Yes, it is," the defendant interrupted. The sentence was "ten shillings or seven days." Such is the respect paid to North British religion in London.

The Salvation Army has been making use of the parasitic daily press again to puff the "wonderful work" of its Suicide Bureau. The work itself is not wonderful; the wonder is that people swallow all the lies told about it,—they are so transparently silly. Every person in distress who consults the Bureau officials, and doesn't commit suicide afterwards, is apparently counted as a person saved from self-slaughter by the "power of religion." Common-garden journalists seem to take this quite for granted. But after all it is utter nonsense. The only way in which the Salvation Army can show that it saves anybody at all from suicide is by showing a decrease in the general statistics of that "crime" over the area of the Suicide Bureau's operations. The Blood-and-Fire Brigade, however, is very chary of figures since Mr. Manson's criticisms were pressed upon public attention. Mr. Manson has placed on record the extravagant statements made by the "Army" officials about the success of its crusade against suicide in the earliest days of that effort. The very first week's results were given as follows:—

Non-suicide cases .....	12
Doubtful cases .....	5
Lives saved .....	194

The Bureau had only just started its work, and its efforts must then have been confined to London. Therefore the Bureau officials "saved" 194 suicides in one week. Now the Registrar-General's returns just then showed that only 537 suicides took place in London during the whole of the year 1906—and the Bureau started on January 1, 1907. In seven days the Salvation Army "saved" more than one-third of a whole year's suicides! Of course it did nothing of the kind. The officials omitted to look up the public statistics before uttering their false boastings.

English newspapers are boasting of the suppression of murderous witchcraft, with its inhuman sacrifices, in Southern Nigeria. Several of the chief priests have been condemned to death. Shocking, no doubt. But how long is it since human sacrifices in the name of witchcraft were common in England and other Christian countries? Does not the Bible teach the reality of witchcraft? Was it not believed in as late as the days of John Wesley, who declared that to give up witchcraft was to give up the Bible? And that it is only 121 years since John Wesley died.

The Bishop of Carlisle's new year's pastoral letter to the clergy and laity of his diocese says that some of the clergy do good work, but—

"There are exceptions, and two or three of the clergy are approaching the brink of exposure for their habits. Others seem to be afflicted with incurable indolence. The less they have to do the worse they do it. Others are dull and listless, and their ministry of the Word and sacrament is not a ministry but a mechanism. Their churches are shut from Sunday to Sunday, and on Sundays they are empty. Fortunately, this class is very few."

Evidently the second coming of Christ is badly wanted in that part of the world.

The *Daily Telegraph* continues to publish lengthy accounts of the cruelties practised by the Balkan Christian Allies on the inhabitants of the conquered districts. In its issue for December 31 the paper publishes a full column account of

what it properly calls "the horrible cruelty" of the Servians on "unarmed, defenceless persons, old men, women, children, and infants at the breast" in Albania. Between Kumanovo and Uskub some 3,000 were put to death; near Pristina the number amounted to 5,000. Women were forced to watch their children being "literally carved to pieces with bayonets." We are told that "the deeds done exceed anything" which occurred under Turkish rule. Moreover, "the less the resistance of the Albanians to the invading armies the greater the massacre." Many of the details of the cruelties practised do not admit of being plainly recorded. The Turkish authorities have made representations to the Powers on the subject, but it is not likely that much will be done on behalf of Mohammedans and Jews when the ruffianly murderers are such pious Christians fighting an avowedly religious war of the Cross against the Crescent.

In the light of the *Telegraph* revelations, it is well to record the tribute paid the allied armies by Dr. Clifford in his New Year's address at Westbourne Park Chapel on January 1. Apparently it is enough for Dr. Clifford that Christians have won a much exaggerated series of victories against a Mohammedan enemy. Accordingly he bursts out as follows:—

"They have faced the situation and patiently prepared for the fight on behalf of civic liberty. Their drill was their development. Character emerged. Character is mastery, and has won in the heroic struggle against corruption and tyranny, and the world."

Not a word, it will be observed, about the outrages reported, not by the Turks, but by English newspaper correspondents. The Christian has been victorious, the Mohammedan has been defeated, and Dr. Clifford would not be Dr. Clifford if he did not find the reason for this to lie with the superior character of the conquerors due to their Christian faith. Character has won! And these people of character and Christian faith are those of whom the crimes indicated above are reported, and which are not seriously denied.

Another striking feature of the situation is the complete silence of the religious papers on the subject. We have not come across one—and we glance through a number each week—that has made any reference to it. The *Church Times*, which regretted the war coming to end without the recapture of Santa Sophia, has not said a word about the outrages, although it has dealt with the progress of the war week by week. Had the outrages been committed by Turks on Christians, pious England would have been ringing with the story, with all the embellishments that could be suggested by a Christian imagination. Under these circumstances we were more than pleased to see a letter in the press from Mr. H. B. Marriott Watson expressing his astonishment that no public notice has been taken of the matter. He pertinently asks:—

"Are these the people who boasted that they carried the liberating Cross against the Crescent? Are these the people who proclaimed a Holy War against the iniquities of Turkish rule? Are these the people who professed to extend the benefits of civilisation to the suffering inhabitants of Thrace, Macedonia, and Albania? Are these the people who claimed a few weeks back that they came as deliverers, they whose hands are now red with the blood of innocent victims?.....Away with all these mawkish and miserable sentimental lies which have bolstered up the legend that the Balkan peoples stand for enlightenment and justice and progress. Let us have done with cant, cant for which the pulpits are largely responsible, and recognise that the Balkan Allies are out to grab territory, and have waded to their goal through rapine, murder, and massacre."

Mr. Marriott Watson asks for the truth to be made public at any cost. But he little knows the pulpit of England if he expects the truth to be told there of the treatment of non-Christians by an ostentatiously professing Christian enemy.

The Rev. J. Stephen Roose says there was originally no demand for Sunday picture shows. The demand was created when their opening was permitted. Well, what more does the man want? People could not well demand a thing before they knew what it was. If they continue to demand it after they have once tried it, that is clear proof of a public demand, whatever may be said to the contrary. Mr. Roose also says that Christians have taken shares in cinematograph shows, and so do not oppose their opening because they do not wish to diminish the profits. We should not be surprised if this were true. The Christian conscience is usually susceptible to monetary pressure. It was Ruskin who said that if engineers could build a tunnel to hell Christians would invest their money in it, and they would willingly close the churches rather than lower the dividends.

Those poor picture palaces! And our poor addle-headed public officials! Three lads were recently charged at Wigan

with robbery. The Chief Constable said that the money was stolen in order to obtain admission to picture palaces. He said it was his experience that these places had a bad influence on boys. We wonder how many forms there are of this particular superstition? At one time it is through reading boys' papers; then boys do wrong as a consequence of listening to Socialist orators. Now it is because of picture palaces. Generally, these excuses are put in the mouths of offenders by the police, or by the magistrate, or by someone else. And none of them have the wit to realise that when a boy—or an adult, either, for that matter—does wrong, he is quite ready to fall in with the views of those who judge him as to the cause of his misconduct.

The Universal Week of Prayer, under the World's Evangelical Alliance, hasn't improved the weather. The week-end was marked by storms, wrecks, and floods. Neither has it improved the prospect of peace in the East of Europe. We should like to know what good it *has* done.

"General" Bramwell Booth and his wife are visiting Liverpool next Wednesday and holding meetings in Hope Hall. They call it "A Day with God." We were not aware that the Booths had "God" on a string like that. Suppose he won't go with them! Well, they could keep it dark, and do the business all the same.

Church reports for 1912 continue what is now the usual tale of Christian progress—that is, increased accommodation for worshipers, with fewer worshipers than ever to fill them. In Wales the four principal Nonconformist denominations report a decrease of 877 members, making over a 30,000 loss in five years. In England the Congregationalists report a decrease of 2,221 church members and 3,178 Sunday-school scholars. To accommodate these people who stay away they have provided four extra churches, while 269 additional teachers minister to the 3,178 absent scholars. The Baptists also report a decline in membership of 2,231, and nearly 5,000 Sunday-school attendants. The authorities have, therefore, thoughtfully provided 36 new churches, with 17 extra preachers. The steady decrease in membership is no less striking than the steady increase in buildings. Some attempt to explain the decline in membership is offered by way of change of population. But the population does not vanish into air, and when people move out of one district they move into another, and this should not affect the totals. The only genuine explanation is that year by year a larger number of people simply dispense with Christianity altogether. It should be added that the figures given also represent an absolute decrease. If we take it in relation to the increase of population the loss would be still more striking.

Rev. Donald B. Fraser, of Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool, tells the local *Post and Mercury* that the emptying of the Christian churches is a very bad thing for the community. He says it means that morality is disappearing. Every man of God knows that you can't have morality without *him*. Other people are not quite so sure about it nowadays.

Rev. Dr. Clifford delivered his New Year's address to a large gathering at Westbourne Park Chapel. "We are a year's march," he said, "further on in humanity's journey; has it been a march nearer to God's goal or the Devil's?" The question is a poor compliment to God. Dr. Clifford also suggested that declining churches may mean the reverse of declining religion. When the churches are *all* empty, we suppose, Christianity will have reached the height of prosperity. It must be admitted that the old gentleman (Dr. Clifford—not the Devil) has an original way of looking at things.

Of all ways of promoting the cause of woman suffrage its lady friends have hit upon the very worst. They have prayed for it—in Westminster Abbey. What pathetic confidence in the do-nothing Christian God!

The leaflet calling the suffragettes to Westminster Abbey was signed by Mrs. Henry Fawcett, Lady Frances Balfour, Mrs. H. Percy Boulnois, and Lady Bunting. The call was to "a day of silent prayer." Perhaps they thought a whole day's silence would do some of the sisterhood good. But that isn't as bad as the argument of the man who declared that there were no women in heaven, and proved it (as he thought) by quoting the text, "And there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour." We are bound to add, for our own part, that we have known some men who would have found half-an-hour's silence a trial.

The *Church Times* wonders "What would Bethlehem and Calvary be to people living A.D. 300,000?" This is a very long way ahead, and we have little hesitation in saying that long before that date arrives people will not be thinking of Bethlehem and Calvary at all. And if anyone happens to mention the names, we expect there will be resort to some dictionary of mythology to find out what the words really mean. The poor *Church Times* editor seems to imagine that he has got hold of a god that will live for ever. It is sheer delusion. An immortal god has never yet been discovered. Some of them live longer than others, and some of them undergo a kind of reincarnation; but sooner or later they all come to an end. Man does not possess immortality himself, and he cannot confer it upon any of his creations.

John D. Rockefeller junior has been holding forth strongly of late on the efficacy of prayer. Here is a passage from his discourse on that subject:—

"There came a time in my life when I met a grave crisis. My happiness and usefulness in this world depended on my decision. I prayed every night for four years. One morning, just before dawn broke, I awoke and felt just as sure which road to take as if there had been a big sign to guide me. I got up from my bed, lighted a lamp, and wrote a letter committing myself to that course."

That was one of the slowest answers to prayer that we ever heard of. But it was satisfactory when it arrived. We understand that young Rockefeller received a heavenly message that he was to do no work, but help spend the old man's money. The heavenly message arrived in time to prevent his being of any earthly use.

Rev. C. E. Lamb, of Gretton, Northamptonshire, left £8381. Rev. Francis Griffith Jones, of Bryncoarach, Conway, Carvarvon, left £16365. Venerable Brownlow Thomas Atlay, of Ealing, left £4505. These are little better than sprats. But here's a regular whale. Rev. John Filmer Anstey, of St. James's-terrace, Regent's Park, left £142,026. Blessed be ye poor!

The Bishop of Southwell has hit upon a good idea. He recommends what may be called "silent sermons." Preachers should give out a text and say "Dear people, we will sit perfectly still for a quarter of an hour and think about that text." The Bishop believes that many of them would feel that "they had drunk in a tremendous amount of knowledge." Perhaps the idea would catch on better if the reflection could take place in smoking pews, where a little something else could be "drunk in" at the same time.

Colonel Seely has informed the House of Commons that officiating army clergymen are paid according to the average strength of the garrison. We should have thought that the average strength of the congregation would be a better guide.

Our sympathy is sometimes with the parson. Here is a case in point. Rev. John Hosking, Congregational minister, Melbourne, found his Sunday evening service disturbed by a gang of roughs who had been called in for that purpose. The man of God felt the old Adam move in him. He descended from the pulpit, took off his uniform, and gave the ringleader "one on the jaw." Down he went, and his pals were easily ejected. We are glad to hear it. Every man is entitled to a fair hearing—even a clergyman.

The following are the last sentences in the criticism of a new theological book (no matter what one) in the January *British Review*:—

"Christianity is a religion for the man in the street. You have got to inform him (if you are a preacher) either that the four Gospels are true from end to end, or that they are untrustworthy from end to end. If you say to him that they are largely false but that patient study will elicit vital truth from them, he will laugh in your face and very properly tell you that jesuitry of that sort is not to his liking."

This would be rather mild, perhaps, in the *Freethinker*, but in the first number of a monthly, with which the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* is incorporated, it is rather striking.

Those who are agitating for a fixed Easter have a good deal to say for it from the point of view of public convenience, but their success would hide the mingled sun and moon worship of the present arrangement. Not that it would really settle the date of the death, etc., of Jesus Christ; for if Easter is arbitrarily fixed it will have no relation to any past event whatever, real or supposed, but merely to the time most suitable for a general spring holiday.



**Mr. Foote's Engagements**

Sunday, January 12, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, Regent-street, London, W., at 7.30, "The King and the Bible."

January 19 and 26, Queen's (Minor) Hall, London.

**To Correspondents.**

ALGERNON HERVEY-BATHURST.—In reproducing Mr. Mangasarian's eloquent lecture we do not undertake responsibility for all its opinions or statements. Besides, your letter on behalf of Christian Science is not a correction,—it is controversial; nor has Mother Eddy superseded Webster.

AMBROSE HURCOM, a Cardiff tobacconist, after reading our article on the Bishop of Chester's statement that Secularists are prone to be unkind to their children, puts in a similar (trade) word for the "divine weed," as Spenser called it. "I have noticed," he writes, "that non-smokers are generally quite brutal to their offspring." A justified joke!

F. A. DAVIES.—Sorry to learn you find it impossible to attend the Annual Dinner this time. Better luck next time. Thanks for the cutting.

E. B.—Thanks for cuttings.

H. MEREDITH.—They are "chestnuts." But we are glad to see that solemnity is losing ground at Calcutta

J. W. R.—Thanks for pleasant letter and wishes.

JOHN LATHAM (S. Africa).—Formal receipt follows this acknowledgment. Did you receive our registered letter of October 30? You have not alluded to it in any of your letters. Perhaps you think there is no need to, but we should like to have assurance at your end as well as the Post Office receipt at this end.

E. LETCBMERE.—Which fund is intended? Kindly let us know.

G. BERRISFORD.—Necessarily shortened, but "all there."

F. B. ZIRGENBEIN (Australia).—Order passed over to shop manager. Pleased you heard of us through Mr. W. H. Jackson, whose name is well known to us.

E. BURKE.—Glad you keep active in the Freethought "vineyard." We hope there will be no abatement of our own activity in 1913.

W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always welcome.

L. ALEXANDER (S. Africa).—Formal receipt in due course.

A. HARVEY.—Will be acknowledged later.

A. H. ERNST.—We cannot tell you whether there are other readers of the *Freethinker* in Milan or not. Most of our readers get the paper through newsagents.

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

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

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

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

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

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, £77 13s. 3d.

**Sugar Plums.**

London "saints" are earnestly desired to procure from Miss E. M. Vance, at 2 Newcastle-street, E.C., a supply of the neat little printed announcement of Mr. Foote's Sunday evening lectures at the Queen's (Minor) Hall. It is impossible to advertise these lectures in the ordinary way all over London. The area is too vast—the expense is too great. But much can be done by the "saints" themselves in the way suggested. Mr. Foote's opening lecture to-night (Jan. 12) on "The King and the Bible" should be entertaining as well as instructive.

This is the last time we can call attention to the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, which takes place at the Holborn Restaurant on Tuesday evening next, January 14. The function is timed to start at 7 o'clock and the chairman will take his seat as punctually as possible. It is to be hoped the guests will assist him in this matter. A good dinner, of course, is expected at the Holborn. No doubt, also, there will be some good in the music and some in the post-prandial speeches. Besides the chairman's (Mr. Foote's) address there are to be a few brief speeches to the usual toasts. With decent weather there should be a large gathering on this popular occasion.

There will be an innovation in the top of the table arrangements at this year's Dinner in order to make the Chairman more accessible, instead of being built in by the usual barriers.

Mr. Cohen opened the new (January) course of lectures at the Public Hall, Croydon, on Sunday evening, with a good lecture to a good audience. Mr. Lloyd occupies the platform this evening (Jan. 12) and we hope to hear of another good meeting. The local "saints" appear to be very pleased with this enterprise.

Ex-Rev. E. Morris Young opens the Birmingham Branch's new season's propaganda to-day (Jan. 12), lecturing at 7 p.m. at the King's Hall, Corporation-street, on "What is Truth?"—the question that Pilate asked and Jesus didn't answer.

The Sheffield Branch had an enjoyable social gathering on New Year's Eve. The President, Mr. T. Dennis, gave a spirited address on the Society's principles and objects, and on the favorable outlook upon 1913. A picture painted by Mr. B. A. Shipman was then unveiled. The speeches of several young members were full of enthusiasm. We wish the new Branch all success.

Mr. Foote's first article on *George Meredith's Letters* has to be postponed again for a week. Too many other matters have been occupying his attention. And he wants to do all the justice he can to this particular piece of work.

The *London Typographical Journal* for January—an extremely well-printed periodical—reproduces an appropriate passage, filling one of its columns, from our "Literary Gossip" with due acknowledgment to the *Freethinker*.

The new year's circular *re* the President's Honorarium Fund will be issued to subscribers before the end of January. A few subscriptions for 1913 have reached us already, and will be formally acknowledged in due course.

The duty of a philosopher is clear. His path lies straight before him. He must take every pains to ascertain the truth; and having arrived at a conclusion, he, instead of shrinking from it because it is unpalatable or because it seems dangerous, should, on that very account, cling the closer to it; should uphold it in bad repute more zealously than he would have done in good repute; should noise it abroad far and wide, utterly regardless of what opinions he shocks, of what interests he imperils; should, on its behalf, court hostility and despise contempt, being well assured that if it is not true it will die, but that if it is true it must produce ultimate benefit, albeit unsuited for practical adoption by the age or country in which it is first propounded.—*Suckle, "History of Civilisation."*

## A Triangular Duel.

BY THE LATE J. M. WHEELER,

*Sub-Editor of the "Freethinker" and Author of the "Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers," etc.*

IT was a lovely Sunday morning on board the steamship *Marmion*, bound from London to Leith. There were but few passengers, for it was the dull season. Among them was a Scotch minister, and the sailors were piped to morning service. All on deck, except myself, gathered round the minister, who proceeded to read from the Bible. Pacing up and down, I was soon accompanied by a gentleman, who before long told me he was a Deist. After a little chat we adjourned to the smoking cabin, where we were joined by the minister when he had concluded his short service. I cannot pretend to accurately reproduce the conversation that ensued, but what remains in my memory was something like this:—

CHRISTIAN.—I'm sorry you gentlemen did not put in an appearance, if only as an example to others.

ATHEIST.—I have no wish to act as an example to others in this particular.

DEIST.—The fact is, sir, we do not agree with your views and cannot countenance them.

C.—What is it you take exception to?

D.—Your doctrine of eternal torment, for instance. Who can credit a good God will so punish his children?

C.—You believe, then, in a good God?

D.—Certainly. Nature proclaims there is a divine power, and that he is good.

C.—I have just come from visiting a friend at a home for incurables. He is hopelessly paralysed, and cannot even move without pain. What do you say to that punishment, which, mind you, is from an accident, and not for his own misdeeds?

D.—I confess there is much in nature I cannot understand, but there is enough to show me there is an all-good God.

C.—To show *you*, perhaps—for you, I presume, have had a Christian education. But I have been out in Africa, where the only gods believed in are stone and wooden fetishes, and these are worshiped with bloody sacrifices and absurd ceremonies.

D.—Probably far less absurd to them than your creed is to me.

C.—You evade my case, which is that nature does not suffice to tell them about an all-good God. For this they need the light of revelation.

D.—But your revelation reveals nothing. The Jehovah of the Bible is certainly not an all-good God, but partial, savage, and bloodthirsty.

C.—My point, I must repeat, is that exactly the same difficulties confront us in nature that we find in the Bible. Jehovah declares he visits the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation. This is verified in my own experience. My grandfather was a three-bottle man, my father was over-fond of port, and I, though abstemious, suffer from the gout. Nature, too, seems savage and bloodthirsty. She kills her children day by day, and often agonisingly.

A.—It seems to me yours is an argument for Atheism.

D.—Just so. Two blacks cannot make a white. Your revelation should clear up the difficulties found in nature; instead of which it adds to them. Your arguments and those of Bishop Butler, whom you follow, would serve to defend all the atrocious and absurd superstitions of the savages you visited.

C.—Not at all. I hold that nature indicates the selfsame God more fully revealed in the Bible, and our duty is to learn his will and obey him.

D.—And I answer, the God of the Bible is not the God revealed by my heart and conscience, and I can-

not worship what I can neither reverence nor love. Jehovah is no more to me than Jupiter.

A.—And I answer that I find no all-good God revealed either in nature or in the Bible.

D.—But there must be a Supreme Power who designed everything.

A.—The mouse for the cat, and cats' skins for ladies' gloves?

C.—Nature does not suffice to tell us whether there be one or many superior powers. It cannot assure us that the designer is the creator. It does not reveal his omnipotence nor his infinite goodness. Its difficulties must be cleared up in another world. Nature, in short, is an enigma. We see through a glass darkly, but by the light of the Bible we may dimly discern, and yet firmly believe, that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

D.—I'm not sure that man should arrogate immortality to himself any more than for the animals. In nature we find that of a thousand seeds but one ripens. I think I can discern some good purpose beneath all sin and suffering, but cannot flatter myself that my own personality is immediately concerned therein. I do not know anyone so good as to deserve eternal felicity, or so utterly and impossibly wicked as to deserve eternal torments.

A.—The only harmony I discern is that which must exist between life and its environment, and this is effected by constant suffering and death. What is the one growing seed to the myriads crushed out? All of good that I observe is from the efforts of human kind. What is man in his natural state without the inheritance of ages of civilised human effort? Let our missionary friend answer. In the discords of nature I note but one harmony—the still, sad music of humanity.

C.—Man in his fallen state is truly a wicked and corrupt creature.

D.—No, he is not a fallen angel, but a risen ape, and some day may as far outsoar us as Shakespeare does the savage fetish worshiper.

C.—This world is too evidently corrupt; wrong too often triumphs. Believe me, your ideal state must be in another world.

A.—How can a state of injustice in this world prove a state of justice in any other, when you agree all the arguments for that other world must be drawn from this present one? The fact is, you first assume a God, and then a heaven to cover his handiwork. The one assumption impels you to the other, at which my friend, who is more modest if less logical, pauses.

C.—I hope he agrees with me that this world, with all its sin and wickedness, is in a state of probation. If so, all the discipline we undergo is surely to prepare us for a future state.

A.—For what sort of a future state does your friend's paralysis prepare him?

D.—I've spent much time in learning various languages, but certainly I do not expect to put them to use in some future existence.

C.—You do not know.

A.—A good reason for silence, none for affirmation.

C.—I admit philosophy can give us no positive assurance of a future state, still less of eternal rewards and punishments. This conviction must come from religion. Where philosophy is weak religion is strong.

A.—That is, it bolsters up poor arguments by fictions.

C.—It is no use arguing with you. We have no common ground, though I hope my friend, when he sees the only alternative is Christianity or Atheism, will decide for Christianity.

A.—And I hope he will follow his reason whithersoever it leads him. If we want sure standing ground we must, as Descartes said, be prepared to doubt of all that can be doubted.

## Bathos and Botticelli.

It is Christmas Eve. Borne on the breezes come the sounds of lusty singers, whose mournful tunes seem somewhat out of harmony with the season. They are singing carols in praise of the Founder of Christianity; they are also singing for a consideration. Thus we have at once a delightful combination of business and piety—characteristics which are never wanting in a profession which had its origin in Palestine.

At this time of year, any seasonable custom which yields a profit is trotted out; even the daily papers which minister to the intellectual needs of the public are not behind in these matters. We notice in the *Daily Telegraph*, under the heading of "Art Notes," two columns of intensely seasonable material. In these lines the devout reader may indulge his imagination, and find exactly what he wants—at this time of the year. We are treated to an elaborate discourse on the relative values of pictures of the Nativity. Botticelli, Mantegna, Duccio, Giotto, and many others have all essayed, with varying degrees of success, to portray this event of transcendent importance, yet we doubt whether their motives were any worthier than carol singers'. As works showing the progress of painting, they are excellent, but to seriously hold up these samples of barbarian art to an intelligent public is worthy of the daily press.

In a fine outburst, which can only be called intemperance of language, the writer of "Art Notes" eulogises the sublimity and grandeur of the stable "thick with the breath of the ox and the ass." This, we are obliged to admit, is not exactly a savory atmosphere, but religious rhapsody, real or simulated, takes no note of such trifling incongruities. Of course, no reference to the stable would be complete unless the stars were included, and our head swooned when we read of the long piercing rays of the stars shedding their light in this place, with which, according to the writer, Cæsar's palace could not compare. It is possible that the Bethlehem variety of stars differ from those we are accustomed to seeing in this unromantic country; we cannot but think that the stars on that particular night behaved in a most erratic manner.

With a pomposity of diction which nowadays passes for erudition, and a judicious placing of technical phrases peculiar to the art critic, he sets forth in glowing terms the wonderful genius of Botticelli, as revealed in the picture called "Nativity." And it is precisely at this juncture that we begin to realise what faith and imagination will produce. Although we cannot boast of having seen angels, our conception of such ethereal beings will not allow us to take for granted that they wear crowns made of leaves. To quote the writer, "leaf-crowned angels are seen embracing the shepherds, and above the roof—moved by, breathing forth, and sphere-music—other angels, higher in the hierarchy, their whirling robes shot with a golden light, circle in a solemn song and dance." The spiritual and the material embrace, the spiritual indulge in recreation essentially mundane, and last, but not least, they wear clothes. The sphere-music is beyond our comprehension, but we suppose it is easily understood by those whose faith will move mountains. We will not weary readers of this journal with any more extracts of this pious nonsense; it had to be seasonable even if the writer was obliged to fly fifteenth-century painters for material. Doubtless the Italian knew on which side his bread was buttered, and painted accordingly. A nation which had swallowed Dante two centuries previous could easily assimilate a thousand pictures of the Nativity, especially as it was dangerous to life to be unorthodox. Goldsmith, one of the most charming and delightfully human of writers, once expressed his opinion of Dante by saying that his works were written for barbarians, and we are inclined to think that this piece of drastic criticism also applies to old religious painters of

Italy. At the present time, they have their paid apologists in the press, to whom sincerity spells ruin. And this is the outcome of a religion which has run riot through centuries—to finish up with press, public, and pulpit saturated with hypocrisy.

We are gratified to see this recourse of religion to art; it is illustrative of the turns and twists it takes to prolong its existence. However, the Church of Rome must smile to see its countrymen requisitioned to impress the subtle beauty of the Nativity—it can easily afford to do so, and then have much left to spare. The writer of "Art Notes" has made the best of a bad job; as Religion and Art are antagonistic terms, he would have been well advised to leave Christmas Eve in the hands of tradespeople, carol singers, and professional preachers. If he should require a specimen of Christian art, he will be recommended to view the page opposite the one where his own contribution scintillates. There he will find an advertisement of crippled children, not even worthy of a seller of patent medicines. Ghastly faces, bandaged eyes, children on crutches, these are the sights, badly sketched, which are intended to touch the hearts of the generous. Along with this specimen of bad taste is an appeal couched in semi-religious language; we sincerely hope that there will be a generous response. There ought to be, as Christians inherit the earth. We hope, also, that they are proud of the Deity who looks on a crippled, helpless mass of humanity and cannot do anything to prevent such failures in life. Whichever view they take, they are spitted on the horns of a dilemma which is the inevitable outcome of a faith discredited and disbelieved by half its adherents.

Biblical teaching and theological imagination have invested the Nativity story with the garments of a farce. From Genesis, where the curse was uttered to Eve, to the supposed birth of Jesus, and on to the present day, Christians' coarse and ruffian hands have polluted the holy of holies. Woman a chattel, and childbirth something to be tolerated, but overlooked after the "churching" service—a rigmorle of words which would insult a Kaffir's intelligence. Blundering fools all when they touch any matters essentially human. With their eyes to heaven, they forget the earth, and at the present time the followers of Gentle Jesus have not even influenced the Christian public sufficiently to greet expectant motherhood with anything but a titter or a lascivious leer.

By their fruits shall we know them—and we are profoundly thankful for the two pages from the respectable press, which, by some Rabelaisian touch, were arranged to face each other.

CHRISTOPHER GAY.

## Nailed Down!

THE *Freethinker* is my oldest child, and I believe it has, first and last, cost me more than all my other children put together. I am naturally proud of its good character. It has fought hard against superstition and tyranny, and in doing so has offended some hyper-sensitive and timid people; but this is the only crime that has ever been alleged against it. In the matter of fair-play it has shown an example to all other journals in England. I have always acted, or tried to act, as I did in the famous "Atheist Shoemaker" case, when I printed all that Mr. Price Hughes and Mr. G. J. Holyoake had to say on the matter, without a word of mine being allowed to creep into the *Methodist Times*.

This is not boasting. It is a plain statement of an obvious truth. And there are times when the truth should be heard. This is one of them.

I referred last week to an editorial paragraph in the *Literary Guide* charging me with refusing to insert a Rationalist Press Association advertisement. I am going to break that paragraph to pieces and

grind it to dust. But I shall do it in the old *Freethinker* fashion of absolute fair-play.

Here then is the paragraph in its entirety, exactly as it appeared:—

"Most advanced journals have difficulty in obtaining advertisements for their columns. The *Freethinker*, however, would appear to be an exception to the rule. The other day the Secretary of the R. P. A. sent to this fortunate heterodox paper instructions to insert the advertisement of "Pamphlets for the Million" which is printed on the front cover of our present issue, and the following reply was received:—

November 25, 1912.

Dear Sir,—We beg to say there will be no room in the *Freethinker* for some months for outside advertisements of any length; we therefore return your advertisement herewith.—Yours faithfully,

THE PIONEER PRESS.

Were the *Freethinker* not a Freethought paper, it might be suspected that its proprietors wished to join in the boycott of R. P. A. publications to which we called attention in these columns last month."

Although the Rationalist Press Association itself must be held responsible for that paragraph, I may as well say that I cannot easily be mistaken as to the writer's identity. I recognise certain family characteristics: first of all, the clumsy composition, with its superfluities such as "for their columns" and "in these columns"—than which there can be nothing more detestable from a literary point of view; next, the heavy-handed attempt at jocosity; lastly, the want of good manners, running into insolence, where it is thought to be safe. The brief letter of the Pioneer Press is a model in comparison. It says exactly what had to be said, without a word too many or a word too little.

That letter was as honest as it was plain. The Pioneer Press does not take the Rationalist Press Association's "instructions" about anything. An advertisement for the *Freethinker* was sent in by the Association's secretary. It was not refused, but had to be declined. The difference consists in the fact that reasons were assigned.

Let me at this point place a few facts before my readers; facts well known to the writer of that libellous paragraph, but not disclosed to the readers of his paper. Some may ask why I do not send a correction to the *Literary Guide*. This is my answer. I once sent a letter to that journal, and it was refused admission. No one has an opportunity of playing off that sort of insult upon me twice.

But the facts! Much against my will I carry on a small printing and publishing business. The insecurity of the *Freethinker* is the reason of this. I cannot afford to place it at the mercy of outsiders. They would "rat" at the first sound of danger. The only person I am sure I can depend upon is myself. So I keep a small printing office to produce the *Freethinker* and I keep a shop to sell it in. This is necessitated—and I go no further. My real function in the world is not "running" a shop or a printing office.

Now with regard to advertisements. I tried desperately hard a few years ago to get some, but the attempt was a fiasco. I am reconciled to the fact that the *Freethinker* must subsist without them. They are not even solicited now. For a long while the advertisement scale has been omitted. A regular, if small, inflow of advertisements, could be provided for; a sporadic few, at incalculable intervals, cannot be. They are not worth the trouble they involve. And there is always the danger of delaying the publication of the paper. I refused an "inset" advertisement some time ago for that very reason. Yet I inserted one gratuitously for the Committee for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. There are things I love better than money. It may sound strange to some people, but it is a fact nevertheless, that I have never charged the N. S. S. or the Secular Society, Ltd., a single penny for all their advertisements in my paper.

The R. P. A. advertisement was to be nine inches long and packed with matter. I could not take it that week, nor for some weeks after. I was

daily expecting the fresh advertisements of the Annual Dinner, the new Queen's Hall lectures, the "Bible Handbook," and other things. These would bring me nothing, but I gave them their time-honored precedence.

The R. P. A. advertisement which it is represented that I did not insert in order to boycott its publications, had actually appeared in the *Freethinker* of July 21. "Pamphlets for the Million" will be found filling a column on page 464 of that issue. So much for the "boycott."

And now I have a harder thing to say. The Pioneer Press letter to the R. P. A. secretary is not printed as it was written. The original said that there would be "no room in the *Freethinker* for some weeks for outside advertisements of any length." The *Literary Guide* turned "weeks" into "months." Why? There is only one possible answer. It follows from the character of the "boycott" libel.

A man who does that sort of thing, in a public charge against a public man, is a scoundrel if he does it deliberately; if he does it unwittingly he is a careless contemptible fool.

G. W. FOOTE.

### A Verbal Bomb.

"THERE is only one thing," the lecturer was saying, "that can keep a man pure-hearted, and that thing is religion. Find me a man who has forsaken the faith of his fathers, and I will show you a man whose conscience has become atrophied, a man who, having nothing to grip, nothing to hope for, whose arms are not outstretched to God, whose eyes are full of this world, and whose soul is a puny vessel full of corruption, is a man from whom we can expect nothing. Having no conscience, he is liable to cheat, to thieve, to be depraved, immoral, and——"

"Liar!"

The lecturer was startled. His cheeks became white in the gaslight; and he involuntarily took two steps backwards to the small table. Several times he vainly endeavored to force words from his dry tongue and lips.

A sudden silence had swept upon the assembly. For a few seconds there was a dead stillness, and again came the sharp, but cold and cynical voice, cutting through the silence like the swish of a sword, "Liar!"

All eyes looked to the back of the hall. A young man had risen from his seat under the gallery, and was standing, with his hands in his pockets, looking with a quiet, pleasant smile at the discomfiture of the preacher.

The big, burly individual, who, to all appearances at least, occupied the position of chairman, rose patronisingly from his chair; but one look from the interrupter crumpled him up, and he subsided to his former attitude of imbecility.

Again there were some moments of chilling silence; and, obviously, the lecturer was becoming more and more intellectually benumbed. The congregation sat agape, their minds made utterly useless by the strangeness of the situation. Never before had their little Bethel been so desecrated. Never before had the Lord been so ungracious as to permit such a monstrous occurrence. Never before had their peaceful prayer and praise received such an awful shock. It was a new experience, and they were, seemingly, quite incapable of dealing with it. They sat, like so many human dolls, wonderstruck, awaiting, perhaps, the divine guidance that did not transpire.

Once again the cold, sharp voice broke the quietness, this time adorned with a studiedly polished sarcasm.

"I say you are a liar, a scheming, miserable, and foolish liar. Have you anything to reply in refutation of my deliberate accusation?"

The preacher at length found the power to rescue his voice from the clutches of the phenomenal, and

hissed, or rather spluttered, between his quivering lips, "Put him out."

But there was no movement on the part of his audience. They had not yet recovered from their vapid wonderment. They were still gazing in mute helplessness at the young man. With a bright smile he looked round, and bowing to the chairman, he replied, "It is quite unnecessary, I am going."

He lifted his cap from the seat, and quietly left the pew. Without a sound he reached the door, which he noiselessly opened and closed. He was gone: or rather, in religious language, materially he had disappeared, but spiritually he remained. His quiet smile, the fresh young face, the strong, cold, reprimanding voice, and the few words he had used, prolonged the silence after the door had closed behind him. He had left an antagonistic influence within the sacred tabernacle.

Something had happened. God did not seem to be so near now. The appealing, friendly presence of the Lord Jesus Christ had, in some unaccountable manner, taken a second seat to the young man of the modern world. The Holy Ghost had been diddled of he, she, or its pre-eminence; but the people were blissfully unconscious of a blank in their lives.

The text had been of the adulterated milk variety. Peculiarly enough, to those who could remember it, it seemed tame and stale beside the word "liar." The preacher's remarks, too, had become thin. Not that anyone in the tabernacle was able distinctly to recollect them in units; but they appeared, in their totality, like a blotch on a landscape, such as we sometimes see when we turn from facing the sun. Out of this confusion, or rather ending it, was the straight, clear, determinate idea, embodied in the word "liar."

The solemnity and hush and quietude generally associated with the house of prayer had changed its character. It was the difference between faith and doubt, between ignorance and the demand for knowledge, between weakness and strength. Minds that had been lulled to sleep seemed to be awakening. An electric thrill of life, a sense of vigor, as if charging the very atmosphere with an unaccustomed vitality, gave one the dim impression of the early convolutions in the growth of strength.

The idea of the building being the dwelling place of the Lord of Hosts had faded like a coward's courage before a man's unassuming assertion of his manliness. Holiness had vanished. The happiness of a cheery smile always evaporates holiness; which probably proves the unnaturalness of that wonderful condition which springs from the love of God. Amazement had overthrown worship. Mental genuflection, or mental somnolence, was resolving itself into uprightness. These people were worshipers no longer, for a word had played the hat trick with the God, Son, and Holy Ghost Co., Ltd. The young man had temporarily evicted them from the House of Prayer; which may prove to some disgracefully Pagan minds that permanency of residence is somewhat of an assumption in this respect.

Wonderment still deleted character from the faces of the congregation; but eyes were beginning to show new lights.

Thought, the great purifier, the broom that sweeps superstition from the present and future into the dust-heaps of the past, was beginning to realise itself. Questions were coming into the minds of these people. They moved restlessly in their seats. For the first time, maybe, there was a desire to get outside. The tabernacle had become too small for some of them. They wished for fresh air. Were they slaves? Did the young man speak truthfully? Were they accusing falsely? What if they were all liars?

A man's voice murmured something. But the preacher managed to control himself sufficiently to guard against an outbreak of the restlessness. "Let us pray," he said stridently. And he prayed. But his prayer was not a success. This was, of course, to be expected; for had not the very presence presumably of an Atheist turned off the supply of

divine wisdom at the fountain-head, and had, in truth, cut off the connection between the Heavenly Father and his sinful apostle? And so, after several shambling sentences relating to God's eternal presence amongst us, guiding, supporting, protecting us here upon earth, he abruptly brought the meeting to a close, and the congregation dispersed.

There is no moral. A word did it.

ROBERT MORELAND.

## National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON JAN. 2.

The President, Mr. G. W. Foote, occupied the chair. There were also present: Messrs. Barry, Bowman, Cohen, Cowell, Davey, Davidson, Greyton, Heaford, Leat, Lloyd, Lazarnick, Neate, Nichols, Quinton, Rosetti, Samuels, Silverstein, Schindle, Thurlow, Wood, Miss Kough, and Miss Stanley.

The Minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed. The monthly cash statement was presented and adopted.

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

The Secretary reported receipt of a letter from Leeds, giving details of the hearing of the charge of profanity against Mr. Jackson on December 31.

The President pointed out that this was a fresh attack on Freethinkers, not under the Blasphemy Laws, but under the Police Clauses Act dealing with Profanity, which could not have been intended to apply to such cases at the time of passing the Act.

After further questions the following resolution was moved:—

"That this Executive protests against the continued use of the Police Clauses Act for the prosecution of Freethought lecturers for 'profanity' on account of arbitrarily selected sentences in public addresses, which never could have been contemplated when the said Act was passed, thus avoiding the odium of proceeding against such speakers in the proper and legitimate way under the 'Blasphemy' Law, and making the indulgence of Christian bigotry comparatively safe and easy by raising the minimum of sympathy with the victims of persecution."

It was further resolved that in the event of Mr. Jackson's family being in need during his imprisonment the Society would be prepared to render assistance.

The resolution proposed at the Annual Conference by the Wood Green Branch to call a half-yearly meeting of members of the Society in London was discussed, and the Secretary instructed to arrange for such a meeting to be held during the first week in March.

The President reported that the members of the deputation who waited upon the L.C.C. Committee had resolved to wait for the decision of the L.C.C. General Purposes Committee, until the meeting to be held by that body in the middle of January had taken place.

The Secretary reported that Mr. A. B. Moss had notified her of his retirement from outdoor work, he having spoken continuously for thirty-six years, but that he would be prepared to speak occasionally indoors, his enthusiasm for the cause being as great as ever.

The Secretary was instructed to forward to Mr. Moss the following resolution:—

"That this Executive, while regretting that Mr. A. B. Moss has decided to do no more open-air Freethought lecturing, desires to thank him in the name of the Freethought movement generally for his long and valuable service in the outdoor lecture field, and hopes his voice may still be heard for many years in other ways of propaganda."

Mr. Quinton suggested that a further invitation to members to avail themselves of the Scholarship Scheme should be given through the columns of the *Freethinker*.

The Secretary reported an innovation in the arrangements for the Annual Dinner. E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary*.

## Obituary.

We regret to report the death of Mr. John Francis Martin, of 30 Hunstmoor-road, Wandsworth, which took place on Tuesday, December 31, 1912. Mr. Martin was a convinced Freethinker, and for about thirty years rendered valuable service as a member of the Battersea Branch of the N. S. S. It is comforting to think that he died in the faith to the service of which he had devoted his life. On Saturday, January 4, he was buried in the Wandsworth Cemetery, when a Secular Service was conducted at the graveside. We tender his sorrowing family our sincere sympathy.—J. T. L.

**SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.**

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

**LONDON.**  
INDOOR.

QUEEN'S (MINOR) HALL (Langham-place, Regent-street, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The King and the Bible."

KINGSTON-ON-THAMES HUMANITARIAN SOCIETY (Fife Hall, Fife-road): 7.30, F. A. Davies, "The Churches and Labor."

CROYDON PUBLIC (SMALL) HALL (George-street): 7.15, J. T. Lloyd, "The Silence of God."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workmen's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford, E.): 7.30, E. Burke, "Bernard Shaw and his Mission."

**COUNTRY.**

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