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To grow up in a narrow creed and to grow out of it is a tremendous trial of one's nature.

—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

Dodging Persecution.

It seems strange that anybody should be prosecuted for libelling a Ghost, and stranger still that the aggrieved Ghost should not be required to appear in court, or even to send a blood relation. But this is a strange world, and the unexpected is always happening. Things may be ordered differently in some other part of the universe; but this planet of ours is, and always has been, the home of as much folly and stupidity as could well be concentrated in so small a space. The fool-crop, as Heine said, is perennial; if you reap it down in one generation it springs up almost as lively as ever in the next.

Matters, however, were worse once, so we need not absolutely despair. Time was, that if you breathed a word against a Ghost, you were not even treated with the ceremony of a trial, but just had your brains knocked out on the spot. Now you are treated less summarily, and there is a chance of "the law's delay" mitigating the savagery of superstition. Yet the Ghost's friends are still so powerful and numerous that, if they once taste the pleasure of hunting down heretics, they are likely to continue the pastime until they are thoroughly satiated.

Now all hunted creatures, if not rapidly exterminated, perforce develop a capacity for evasion. Even philosophers, said Voltaire, should have plenty of holes to run to when the priests are on their track. And that supple and dexterous heretic certainly practised this doctrine to some purpose; for he doubled and shifted like any old fox, and led his persecutors a wild dance for more than fifty years; during the whole of which time he ravaged their territory without their ever once getting properly on his scent.

If you wish to visit a certain spot, and there are two ways of reaching it, one direct and the other circuitous; and if by taking the straight route you are sure to meet a large band of well-armed assassins; you naturally take the other route; for although it is a long way round, you do reach your object at last. And if the assassins got wind of your movements, and shifted accordingly, you would naturally find out, if possible, a third way to avoid them. Always providing that as soon as you have friends enough to meet the rascals on equal terms, you will walk boldly up the straight road, and blow them to Hades, or whatever place in the universe affords hospitality to the souls of murderous blackguards. This proviso saves your valor from being all discretion, and makes your prudence honorable.

It will not be amiss to take a brief historical survey of the strategy of sceptics, and to point out how one might carry on a covert war on the Christian superstition by opposing cunning to force.

If we go back to the Renaissance we shall find the soldiers of progress fighting against terrible odds with nothing but a pen. But how they plied that weapon! Not daring to assail God, they struck at his friends. Merry tales were circulated at the

expense of priests. The greatest fool, drunkard, glutton, and profligate of the story was sure to be a monk. These predatory vermin are satirised in scores of French *fabliaux* and Italian *novelle*, and even the gentle Boccaccio ridiculed them on page after page of his golden book, playing about them the soft summer-lightning of his wit.

His countryman, the fiery-souled Bruno, followed a somewhat different plan, as did many of his French contemporaries. He quizzed the gods of Paganism in such a way that the wise reader could apply the satire to the gods of a later faith. When, in *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* (*Spaccio de la Bestia Trionfante*) he wrote of deities who could "walk on the water and do other pretty tricks," his readers would naturally think of the natatory feat which Jesus Christ is alleged to have performed on the sea of Galilee. Bonaventure des Periers slants at the Christian deities in like fashion when he is making riotous fun of the Pagan gods and goddesses in his *Cymbalum Mundi*.

Poor Des Periers, however, was after all not astute enough to keep out of mischief. The keen-nosed priests scented his heresy and denounced him. Père Mersenne called him an "impious rogue"; M. De L'Estoille said he was "an Atheist, and unworthy the name of a man"; and Pasquier declared that he was "only fit to be thrown into the fire." This is how the beagles of persecution spoke of one of the finest writers of that epoch. His end is wrapped in some obscurity, but it seems that he fell on his own sword in prison to escape being roasted alive for the glory of God.

Rabelais was more fortunate. He dodged the enemy to the very last, and his Jovian laughter rang over the baffled pigmies. "After any particularly deep thrust," says Coleridge, "as if to break the blow, and to appear unconscious of what he has done, he writes a chapter or two of pure buffoonery." Rabelais had no taste for martyrdom and objected to dying out of bed. No doubt he expressed his own sentiment when he made Pantagruel quit the bigoted city of Toulouse, where they "stuck not to burn their regents alive like red herrings," saying: "Now God forbid that I should die this death, for I am by nature dry enough already without being heated any further." This grand thinker and humorist evaded many perils by his inexhaustible adroitness, and continued to a ripe age overwhelming the enemies of progress with a constant flood of irony.

We have already referred to Voltaire, who imitated Rabelais to some extent, three centuries later. Voltaire published many of his attacks on Christianity anonymously, and sometimes he attributed his pieces to other authors; as in the case of the *Épître à Uranie*, which was ascribed to Chaulieu, and the *Examen*, which was ascribed to Bolingbroke. Condorcet justifies Voltaire's conduct in this respect. He writes (*Vie de Voltaire*, p. 32):—

"The necessity of lying in order to disavow any work, is an extremity equally repugnant to conscience and nobleness of character; but the crime lies with those unjust men, who render such disavowal necessary to the safety of him whom they force to it. If you have made a crime of that which is not one; if, by absurd or by arbitrary laws, you have infringed the natural right which all men have, not only to form an opinion, but to render it public; then you deserve to lose the right which every man has of hearing the

truth from the mouth of another; a right, which is the sole basis of that obligation, not to lie. If it is not permitted to deceive, the reason is, that to deceive anyone, is to do him a wrong, or expose yourself to do him one; but a wrong supposes a right; and no one has the right of seeking to secure himself the means of committing an injustice."

Carlyle calls this Jesuitry in disguise, and sneers at Condorcet for putting forward such a plea. Yet we humbly opine that Carlyle's judgment in this matter is not worth very much. Both he and Mill kept back from the world a good deal of their convictions, although they had to face no greater foe than Bumble and Mrs. Grundy. Condorcet was an exceptionally honest man, and he was not likely to screen Voltaire or anyone else with a false plea. He knew the difficulties of the case, and could properly estimate the dangers in Voltaire's path. We agree with him that the persecutors' party have no right to complain. Their brutality is responsible for all the evasion. Voltaire's high courage was proved too often to be doubted. Who shall accuse the protector of Sirven and the vindicator of Calas of cowardice? Voltaire was assuredly no coward. But he had to fight single-handed an unscrupulous and powerful enemy. He matched his wit and finesse against all their strength—and won!

Mill somewhere (was it in a conversation with John Morley?) indulged in a cheap sneer at Gibbon's "insincere style." This is simply absurd. Gibbon's irony was necessitated by the Christian law, which sent Woolston to gaol for saying that the miracles of Christ were allegories, and Peter Annett for saying that the Pentateuch was not inspired. Everybody fit to read the *Decline and Fall* could understand exactly what Gibbon meant. He deceived nobody, but simply protected himself against a brutal law. When he wrote "it was not in this world that the Christians expected to be either happy or useful," his readers understood him as plainly as if he had said that "they were unsocial fanatics."

The same criticism applies to all the great eighteenth-century Deists; to Anthony Collins, to Lord Bolingbroke, and especially to David Hume, whose grave satire, in the *Essay on Miracles*, is simply inimitable. In plain language his last paragraph comes to this: that Christianity is a religion of miracle, and that no man can believe it without having a miracle worked inside him. Hume had an eye to the Blasphemy Laws. And there could be no doubt as to the danger; for when Thomas Paine put the scepticism of Bolingbroke, Gibbon, and Hume into direct and vigorous language for the common people, the cry of "Blasphemy" was raised by the Church and its dupes, as if Silenus and his ass had joined in a common bray.

Recurring to France, we may notice a delightful bit of strategy on the part of Diderot and D'Alembert. They once had a long chat on religion in a *café*, and in order to baffle a listening police-spy they agreed to call the Trinity by fictitious names. God the Father, if we remember rightly, figured as Monsieur Lepère, and Jesus Christ as Monsieur Lenfant. When the conversation ended the spy came up and politely asked who were the Messieurs Lepère and Lenfant that had been described as such dreadful characters. "Oh," said Diderot, with an innocent look, "they were two police spies."

Might we not, if the worst came to the worst, go in for something of that kind? We might even dispense with names altogether, and use algebraic symbols. (x) would do capitally for God, the great unknown. The minus sign ($-$) would do for our old friend Jahveh, as signifying that he is worse than no God at all. The plus sign ($+$) would serve for Jesus Christ, as signifying the cross on which he had his last cold spread. And if we were put to it we should probably succeed in working out appropriate signs for all the heavenly host.

Richard Carlile, whose untameable heroism is alone enough to inspire men with courage, tricked his persecutors in a way which we have no doubt sent a laugh through Hades, and even made old Monsieur

Lepère smile upon his throne. The much prosecuted publisher, after he and his family and a dozen shopmen had gone to prison, devised a dial with a revolving hand and a list of his publications. The customer turned the hand to the name of the work he wanted, and it was passed through an aperture. No vendor was seen, and therefore sale could not be proved. Mrs. Carlile did a roaring trade, and all over the country the reformers toasted "Carlile's invisible shopman."

If one were only prosecuted and punished under the Act of William the Third, what a splendid comedy might be performed! The last clause of that Act provides that any offender may obtain a discharge from all penalties and disabilities by going to the court within four months after conviction, and making acknowledgment and renunciation. Suppose one took advantage of this proviso; what a howl would go up from the bigots all over the country, like a pack of hounds who have lost the game!

G. W. FOOTE.

When They Find Out.

ONE of the speakers at a religious conference held in Islington the other day said that the Rev. Dr. Forsyth had told him that in his opinion there were troublesome times in store for the Churches. The congregations, said Dr. Forsyth, had not as yet begun to realise the full bearings of modern criticism, and that before the ultimate adjustment took place there would be a very trying time in the Churches. It was not reported what this ultimate adjustment would be like. Apparently it was assumed that when people did understand the meaning of modern critical attacks on religion there would be a passing "shindy," and then there would emerge that much-talked-of "purified" faith, with the clergy re-established in full possession, and unbelief surviving as a mere intellectual curiosity.

The confession was, however, interesting. It was an admission of the truth, so often pointed out in these columns, that the great mass of religionists have really no conception either of the nature of modern critical attacks on religion, or of the way in which these have completely shattered the orthodox Christian structure. They know, in a hazy sort of way, that Christian doctrines are called in question, but they do not fully realise why, and the clergy—Dr. Forsyth among them—take care that their ignorance shall be as complete and as long sustained as possible. One need only study those sermons in which attacks on religion are dealt with to see how this ignorance is maintained. Anti-religious criticisms are presented by the preacher in the crudest possible manner—generally he retails a form of attack that was current a century or so ago, and the congregation depart in the full belief that they have heard the worst that can be said against their creed. In reality they have been told just enough to keep them from inquiring further, and that is generally what the preacher is aiming at.

The confession was also interesting because it, quite unconsciously, displayed the clergy in their true colors. Dr. Forsyth was not referring to the general public, but to "our congregations"—to the people, that is, who had been under the direct influence of the clergy, and had looked to them for light and leading in matters of religion. It was they who were in the dark, and it was from them that trouble was expected when they began to appreciate the position. But suppose the clergy had dealt honestly and faithfully with their congregations; suppose they had kept them informed of the results of modern scholarship and the trend of modern criticism; what cause would there be to fear trouble? Obviously, none. They would not only be aware that their beliefs were questioned; they would know why—on what grounds; and their remaining in the Church would be an evidence that they considered these attacks ineffective. At present their remaining

Church-worshippers is proof only that they do not know. And their not knowing is indisputable evidence that the clergy have been hiding the truth from them—not always telling them direct lies, but always suppressing part of the truth.

For here is the essence, and the evil, of the situation. To "our congregations" the clergy are the recognised authorities on religion. When a newspaper refers to an "authority on religion" it has not in mind a man like Frazer, or Tylor, or Spencer—any one of whom knows more about religion than any number of parsons; it is thinking of some well-known theologian whose knowledge consists of dogmas and doctrines, of church ceremonies or ecclesiastical frills. Of course, this is sheer superstition. It is a survival from the time when priests were believed to be, in a very peculiar sense, the representatives of Deity. They could then give information about religion because they were the only ones "in the know." To-day conditions have changed. The people who know all about religion are those who do not believe in it. Those who believe in it do not know. Our knowledge about religion has been derived, in the main, from outsiders—or, rather, they became outsiders because of the knowledge they acquired. And these authorities use Christianity and its clergy exactly as they use savage cults and their priests. The one illustrates and illuminates the other. We know the meaning of Christianity only when we appreciate the workings of the savage mind. We understand the savage mind only when we note its survival in current Christianity. That is why there is likely to be trouble when "our congregations" grasp the full meaning of modern criticism.

But Dr. Forsyth and his kind are here; and their business is to delay the coming of that knowledge as long as may be. Between the congregation and the expert on religion stands the parson. He is, consciously or unconsciously, all the time engaged in a conspiracy that aims at keeping his people in ignorance. Consider for how long the very alphabet of Biblical criticism was kept away from the congregation by the pulpit. And even when the truth, or some of it, is reluctantly admitted, the game of mystification is still pursued. In sermon after sermon preachers refer to what our Lord said, or what Moses said, or what someone else said, and the scenes and circumstances are described direct from the Bible as though their genuineness had never been questioned. And the net result of this procedure is that the ordinary listener leaves the Church with his mind practically undisturbed as to the accuracy of the Biblical account. It is true he knows that criticisms are offered, but the constant use of the Bible in the old way, its habitual treatment in church and chapel as a trustworthy historical narrative, prevents him seeing the bearings of this criticism on his belief.

Anyone who understands the present position of the study of religion knows that the essential issue rests with the anthropologist. If his account of the subject is correct, nothing else matters. If the belief in a God owes its origin to a personification of natural forces, or to the savage fear of the ghost; if the belief in a soul has a similar origin, what is the use of all this discussion about man's consciousness of God and the like? The forms of religion, the various beliefs about God and the soul, are still interesting subjects of study, but their value is precisely the value of a classification and study of folk tales and fairy legends. It is instructive to know how they originated and what influence they exerted, but that is all. They remain delusions, no matter how fervently they may have been believed, no matter how refined or rationalised. You cannot rationalise a lie into truth, or a delusion into a reality. At most you can only befool yourself as a preliminary to befooling others. How long will it be before "our congregations" realise this? And what will happen to the Churches when they do?

A century ago a vital question at issue was "Is the Bible true?" To-day, the question to an in-

formed mind is largely without meaning. That it is not true, as a sober record of historic fact, is obvious. The utmost that one can grant is that it is psychologically true—that is, it faithfully reflects the ideas and beliefs and the knowledge of those who wrote it. Well, we need not question it. It is hardly worth discussing. Suppose someone called Jesus—to whom was given the title of "Christ"—actually lived. Suppose that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, actually lived at the same time, and wrote the Four Gospels that we possess. Suppose they believed all the miracles recorded, and faithfully recorded their convictions. Suppose all this, and more, what does it matter? It does not in the least prove these stories to be true. The belief of a present day Salvation Army convert proves as much as St. Paul proves, and his testimony is quite as convincing. Both of them believed these things. That is really all there is in it. And no one disputes the belief. The only question at issue is why these things are believed. It is not a question of historical verification of fact, but of the prevalence of certain psychological conditions. And these may be understood more surely by studying primitive Christian history in the light of a Salvation Army meeting, than by explaining a revival meeting in terms of some assumed supernatural happenings of two thousand years ago.

Modern criticism does not attack by mere denial, but by explanation. Mere denial was the first crude revolt of the intellect against an absurd proposition. Faced with the demand to believe in the reality of events that were contradicted by everyday experience, the bolder minds simply denied their truth. Later came a more sustained examination and the cultivation of a more scientific frame of mind. It was seen that the question of questions was not whether certain things really happened, but why people believed they happened? It is not a vital question now whether witches travelled through the air on broomsticks a couple of centuries ago, but how people came to believe in this method of locomotion? It is not a question of whether the "Holy Ghost" spoke to the disciples, but how they came to believe it? We need not trouble whether it is a supernatural influence that is responsible for the conversions at a revival meeting, but how people came to entertain such a ridiculous notion? Once these questions are answered, nothing of any vital consequence remains.

Now, suppose that by some miracle all the church congregations of the world realised that this was really the essence of modern criticism, how much of Christianity would there be left in the course of a generation or so? They would realise that it was not a question of religious facts versus scientific fancies and theories, but the other way about. It is the scientist who has all the facts, the religionist who wallows in mere fancy. It is a fact that, given certain psychological conditions, the result is the prevalence of certain beliefs. We see it in the superstitious customs and beliefs of savages, the beliefs of childhood, and the superstitions of adult life. The facts that constitute the raw material of religion are not denied, it is the interpretation of these facts that creates an issue. To listen to the average parson, one would imagine that the modern critic proposed taking everything out of the religious man, and leave him a mere bag of emptiness. He aims at doing nothing of the kind. He takes him just as he is, only furnished with a new and more satisfactory understanding of himself.

Suppose, further, that "our congregations" realise that the great obstacle between them and the understanding of modern criticism is the parson. Suppose they awaken to the important truth that the policy of the pulpit is not to educate, but to confuse. That it first denies, then hides, then minimises; and, lastly, confuses the truth. What then? The ordinary layman has, obviously, no direct interest in believing a lie. The parson has an obvious interest in teaching one when its acceptance is the condition of his supremacy. Or, if that

expression is considered too harsh, his interest lies in preventing his congregation knowing the whole truth about the religion he preaches. He may disguise this, even from himself, by vague talk concerning the duties of the pulpit, or the pulpit not being the place for the discussion of such questions, but the bald fact remains. But for the clergy the truth about religion would now be as common as the truth about geology or astronomy. It is they who stand between large numbers of people and its acquisition. And Dr. Forysth may well feel that when Church and Chapel congregations realise the truth, there will be trouble. All the religions of the past have died of being found out, and there are signs that the Christian religion is seriously attacked with the same complaint.

C. COHEN.

Religion a Superfluity.

IF we consult any modern Dictionary we shall find that "religion" is a word the central meaning of which cannot be mistaken. In Nuttal's *Standard Dictionary* it is defined as "a habitual, all-pervading sense of dependence on, reverence for, and responsibility to, a higher power; or a mode of thinking, feeling, and acting, which respects, trusts in, strives after, the Divine, or God; any system of faith and worship." Webster's definition is practically identical, though more fully expanded and illustrated. *The New Standard Dictionary*, issued last year, is in substantial agreement with both Nuttal's and Webster's, but puts greater emphasis than either upon the supernatural character of religion. In theological books we read of two special kinds of religion, namely *natural* and *revealed*; but in both kinds man's dealings are with the supernatural. It is to be borne in mind, however, that attempts are being made, at present, by Positivists and Ethicists, to strip the term of its supernatural connotations. Whether such efforts are likely, or deserve, to be crowned with success or not, is a point with which this article is not in the least concerned. Our present purpose is to call attention to, with a view to condemning, a wholly illegitimate and vicious use of the word "religion" by professional exponents of its conventional signification. In the *British Congregationalist* for January 15, there was a notable article under the title of "Compulsory Moralities," from the pen of the Rev. A. C. Hill, of Tollington Park Congregational Church. Mr. Hill is an ingenious and resourceful thinker as well as a master in the art of expression. With two-thirds of the article under consideration we are happy to confess that we are in entire agreement. It is perfectly true that if a man is to live comfortably in society he must be loyal to the fundamental principles of social life. There are certain rules which require to be carefully observed, no matter what position one may occupy in society. Mr. Hill supplies a short list of situations in which sobriety, honesty, fidelity, and truth are indispensable virtues, and then adds: "Until one recognises the moralities, one can confer no benefit upon society." At this point, however, we are forced to part company with the reverend gentleman, and set ourselves in direct opposition to him.

Clever and, in some respects, far-seeing as he is, Mr. Hill is laboring under the commonest and most deplorable of religious delusions. We suspected this at an early stage in the progress of the article, when he referred to "a commissionaire connected with some big bank receiving £70 or £100 a year—probably less, certainly not much more." We asked ourselves, "Why this allusion to the smallness of the man's salary?" Though in receipt of such meagre pay, a commissionaire, when entrusted with perhaps a thousand pounds in Bank of England gold, is expected to watch over that amount with as much fidelity as if it were his own, to protect it from a thief, perhaps, even with his life. There is also a reference to a policeman who played the hero under most

unfavorable conditions. He was in middle life and by no means strong. He was in charge of a certain factory. One night, at about one o'clock, a noted burglar entered, and at once the two men came into a conflict which lasted until half-past five. The result was that the burglar was ultimately taken to the police-station and the policeman permanently invalidated. Having related that incident, Mr. Hill observes: "Now, that is an example of fidelity purchased at about thirty shillings a week." Again, we ask, why thus harp on the smallness of the pay? Here is the explanation:—

"I wish that men would think about these things. For to think about them will lead inevitably to conclusions which are implicit in them, but do not appear on the surface. How can a man be a moral man and yet not believe in God, who is the foundation of all morality? How can a man talk about being loyal when he does not believe in a Divine Being, who rules the world, and has the first claim upon our loyalty? What right has an employer to say to me that I must respect the money in his till unless he and I believe in something that is infinitely more important than the cash?.....If the shopkeeper or business man understood he would know that the claim he makes upon the lowest office-boy in his employ is really an argument for religion."

Here is the delusion in all its shamelessness, and the mystery is how any sensible person could ever have become its victim. To see it in its native ghastliness we need only reverse some of Mr. Hill's questions; for example: How can a believer in God be an immoral man? How can a believer in a Divine Being, who rules the world, and has the first claim upon our loyalty, be yet continually guilty of disloyalty, not only to God, but to the essential principles of social life? Surely, Mr. Hill must be going about with his eyes closed if he is not aware that the majority, the overwhelming majority, of immoral, vile, and criminal people in Christendom are firm believers in God and a future life. The truth is that religion and morality are two entirely different things, and ought to be kept distinct. This is how Professor Peake treats the subject:—

"I have sought to vindicate the radical distinction between religion and morality. They spring from wholly different instincts in our nature, and are often found acting in antagonism, or viewing each other with mutual distrust and disdain.....Religion and morality have each their due places in human life.....There are the people who have genuine religious feelings and desires, but combine with them a low moral standard. Partly this is due to the fact that they are much more developed on the religious than on the ethical side. To some extent it is due to sheer blindness of perception. There were many holy people not long ago who thought that it was quite right to keep slaves. And I have heard of a director who was so religious that he would not read a newspaper on Monday because it had been printed on Sunday, who yet was responsible, with his colleagues, for a colossal financial disaster which plunged thousands into ruin. But we must fall back on our principle of the radical distinction between religion and morality and the frequent antagonism between them in the lower stages of their development" (*Christianity: its Nature and its Truth*, pp. 13, 14, 17, 18).

We go much further, and affirm that, on innumerable occasions during its long history, the belief in God has been the direct cause of many of the darkest and most dishonorable crimes ever committed. Has Mr. Hill the courage to read the history of the Christian Church and deny the truth of this? On the other hand, multitudes of completely non-religious people, as we have again and again pointed out, are great luminaries in the moral firmament. Mr. Hill admits this:—

"They take the rules of their profession and obey them. They accept the government of the principles that rule in their own particular business. They would consider themselves permanently disgraced if they gave you thirty-five inches for a yard or fifteen and a half ounces to the pound."

The reverend gentleman declines to acknowledge that such good people are quite honest in their non-

profession of religion, which is exceedingly polite of him. Read this:—

"There is a famous person in French literature who made a discovery. One of his friends explained to him the difference between poetry and prose. 'Why, then,' said this man, 'I have been speaking prose all my life, and did not know it until now.' That was a discovery for the Frenchman. But there is an even more remarkable discovery that some of our modern men may make—the discovery that they are really religious without knowing it."

That is the most cowardly and dishonest way out of a difficulty imaginable. Put in a nutshell, the argument is this: "These eminently good people imagine that they have no religion, that they do not believe in a Divine Being who rules the world, but I know them much better than they do themselves, and I unhesitatingly declare that they do have a religion, and do believe in God, though as yet they do not know it." Well, all we can say is that the argument is utterly fallacious, a black lie and a studied insult, and that Mr. Hill ought to be above identifying himself with it.

Our conclusion is, not only that there is a radical distinction between religion and morality, but that religion is an imaginary something beyond morality, and without any vital bearing upon it. In its Christian form it is an alleged reality which infinitely transcends morality. The claim is that we have a spiritual nature to which religion alone can minister. But we maintain that that claim is false. We are convinced that there is a sufficient number of well-attested facts to completely disprove it. In civilised countries no one ever becomes religious naturally, or without training. It is an incontestable fact that those who are unaffected by religious influences in their childhood and youth scarcely ever pick up a religion in later life. It is not true that religion meets and satisfies a need in our nature which nothing can do. Some of the greatest and noblest people in this country are conscious of no need which only religion can supply. George Meredith was as happy a man as any that the nineteenth century produced, but he had no religion. It is wondrous kind of Mr. Campbell to look down upon and compare him to "a small boy in the dark, whistling to keep his courage up"; but, then, the oracle of the City Temple pretends that he has had supernatural assistance to show him the value of religion. From the giddy height of spirituality he condescendingly admits that the philosophy of life contained in Meredith's poems "is about the best that can be furnished by the mind of our age apart from religious faith." As for us, we are quite content to go through life seeking to live up to the best that human wisdom can tell us, while regarding religion as a complete superfluity, and on the whole much more harmful than beneficial. We wish to calmly bend

"To read the lines dear Earth designs
Shall speak her life on ours."

And what is her speech to us? This:—

"Accept, she says; it is not hard
In woods; but she in towns
Repeats, accept; and have we wept,
And have we quailed with fears,
Or shrunk with horrors, sure reward
We have whom knowledge crowns;
Who see in mould the rose unfold;
The soul through blood and tears."

—*Poems*, vol. ii., p. 138.

J. T. LLOYD.

Pioneers and Persecution.

"Rough work, Iconoclasm, but the only way to get at Truth."—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

POETS and apostles are ever prophets. Swinburne saw and sang "A Vision of Spring in Midwinter," and before that Shelley asked the question, "If winter comes can spring be far behind?" Happy are the pioneers who can ignore the mistakes of the past and the present and fix their gaze on the

promise of the future. For them the darkest night is jewelled with the brightest of stars. For them there is a budding to-morrow in every midnight. For them there is nothing irrevocable, for their eyes are ever looking forward.

The other day Mr. Lloyd George, turning aside from the pettiness of party politics, related to an astonished audience the drawbacks of a political career. He spoke of the calumnies to which the politician was exposed, and in a characteristic passage explained the seamy side of politics:—

"Some people talk enviously about a Minister's lot, as if he was basking eternally in a comforting sunshine. I can assure you that there is not much basking, but a good many burdens. Sunshine, indeed! They forget the heat, and they forget the midges and the mosquitoes. We cannot, for they swarm and buzz around the head of every Minister, stinging when they can.

"Do you know what a Minister's life is like? Tradesmen have their worries and anxieties; but suppose that in addition to their ordinary troubles they found a constant mob of detractors standing outside their doors, some doing it for hate and some for hire, yelling into every customer's ears as he entered their shop: 'Don't go there, whatever you do. You will be robbed and cheated at every turn if you do business with those fellows. They are all thieves, rogues, and liars.'

"Every time they get a glimpse of you behind the counter they shriek at you opprobrious epithets. When they see you weigh a pound of sugar they call out that three-fourths of it is sand. When you measure cloth they swear that it is rotten shoddy. You have, moreover, the whole time while you are attending to your customers to dodge bricks, clods, and worse hurled at your head.

"Most of you, I think, would rather give up business than endure all this, even if you had to break stones for a livelihood."

Undoubtedly there is much truth in this frank avowal, but if there is sacrifice in the case of the politician, what is to be said in the case of a leader of a really unpopular movement, to whom sacrifice is a science and denial an art. Freethought is a far wider and nobler creed than a merely political one. It has its roots in intellectual necessity, and, deeper still, in ethical right. It is based on the psychological law of human development, only apprehended by a few choice spirits for ages, but latterly taking on a new significance and a fresh urgency. Perpetually reaffirmed from generation to generation by unnumbered examples of unselfish martyrdom, from the days of Hypatia to those of Ferrer, it is to-day changing the direction and character of the ideas of the civilised world.

The Freethought leaders are the most potent forces of progress. No other men are discussed so widely as these apostles of freedom; but magnificent as is their life-work, the men are greater. Hissed at by the superior people, stoned by the vulgar, they have many trials to submit to. Perhaps the hardest which can be mentioned is that of seeing charlatans ride by in their carriages, or, in other words, to mark the success of humbug, whilst they find that intellectual honesty is not a paying career. Yet good and true men and women have had to submit to this treatment. Bradlaugh, prematurely aged by his fight for liberty, saw honors showered on men not fit to black his boots; Ferrer, fronting the rifles of the soldiers, had to find his triumph in his own heart. Mr. Foote had to listen to the mocking voice of the judge telling him he had devoted his talents to the service of the Devil. Yet in their hours of apparent failure these men had triumphed. They were martyrs who missed the palm but not the pains of martyrdom, heroes without the laurels, and conquerors without the jubilation of victory. Laboring not for themselves, but for the universe and for the coming generations, for them shall be influence as far-reaching at the utmost reach of the great wave whose crest they sometimes were.

When Mr. Lloyd George carries on a campaign against the landed privileges of the nobility, he necessarily encounters the resistance of only a small portion of the people, whereas Mr. Foote, directing

his force against entrenched ecclesiasticism and the hundreds of thousands of dupes of superstition, has to bear the brunt of an enormously greater opposition. No enmity is more relentless, or more venomous, than religious hatred. The abuse directed against Mr. Lloyd George and his colleagues is politeness itself compared with the assault and battery made upon Mr. Foote's reputation. The politician has at least the support of half the press of the country; but the Freethought leader is boycotted by Liberal and Tory and Socialist papers alike. Accused of almost every crime in the calendar, this well-nigh intolerable animosity is in reality a tribute to his influence. The man, against whom a hundred thousand pulpits and platforms constantly fulminate abuse, will have his reward in the coming time. Thanks to his courage and devotion, heterodoxy is no longer the disgrace it once was to the citizen, and open speech has nearly lost its danger in our land. He has given seriousness to Freethought advocacy, placed its exponents on a strong platform, organised its forces, justified its rights to equality of citizenship. Through the religious prejudices of our time he has knocked a hole large enough for the heretic to pass through in future, and in many other directions our lives will be easier because of his life-work.

For our part we must not be content with idle New Year wishes in this connection. There is an object to be achieved towards which all may contribute. The Freethought movement has been attacked, and is threatened with a monstrous recrudescence of persecution. There was never a time when it was more clearly the duty and the interest of the party to resist the "mailed fist" of the Churches. Mr. Foote has told us that it is for the Freethinkers to stop this plunge into mediævalism, and it is certainly time that the party took a definite and final stand against the flouts and gibes at its deepest convictions. Persecution will offer no insuperable obstacle if we face the enemy with a full war-chest and up-to-date equipment. Our leader begins the New Year with high hopes, and it is our task to see that he is supported adequately, so that his wishes are fulfilled.

The keynote of the movement might well be, "Close up your ranks and stand shoulder to shoulder." Forgetting trivial distinctions in the face of the common enemy, let us secure the movement from attack. To-day the situation is critical. Let to-morrow and all to-morrows find it becoming less so, and those who have given their mites will be judged worthy.

MIMNERMUS.

A Rebel.

I HAVE ever been a Rebel from the time
 When conscious first of Right and Wrong I grew,
 And looking on the world around me knew
 That I was born into an alien clime:
 I saw men tolerant of bitter wrong,
 Too timid to assert their rights as men;
 Willing for gold to barter tongue or pen,
 The weak betraying, flattering the strong:
 And thus I saw that Force rules over all,
 And Right and Faith are little more than names;
 That most men steer their course towards mean aims,
 Though much of truth and honor they may bawl:
 Rebel against these things I must be still
 While in me lives a conscience and a will.

LIFE'S HUMILIATIONS.

How many sad necessities must we
 Submit to merely for existence' sake,
 From which mankind no more itself can free
 Than can the ape, the tiger, or the snake!
 Slaves of imperious appetites, are all
 Who would preserve what oft is worthless—life;
 And none may disregard that humbling call
 That is with all aspiring thoughts at strife.
 Half-Deity a man perchance may be,
 Yet he must be half-Caliban as well;
 Nor can he live the life of flower or tree
 In whose clean course there is nothing to repel:
 Ah! why must Man, Life's masterpiece and crown,
 Be with so many grievous ills pressed down?—B. D.

Acid Drops.

We have to criticise ourselves in this paragraph. We allowed Robert Buchanan's name to pass as George Buchanan in an article in last week's *Freethinker*. How we managed to let it pass we can hardly understand, except that the article had been standing in proof for some time, and was hurriedly fitted into the make-up at a late hour, thus escaping our usually close attention. We take all the blame for the "howler." Mr. Repton, the writer, had no reason for knowing Robert Buchanan as well as we did.

"When every allowance has been made," says the *Free Church Year Book*, "it is evident that the Free Churches are not keeping pace with the growing population, or even replacing the annual loss by death." And yet we are always being told of the great revivals of faith all over the country, and of the powerlessness of modern thought to kill religion in the hearts of men. The truth is that under anything like fair conditions of competition religion would become a negligible factor in our social life.

In Bethnal Green six Churches have united to hold a week of prayer. So as not to enter into competition, services were held in one church at a time. The result was that never less than 200 people were present. We are not told what was the maximum number, but a congregation of 200 as a result of six Churches "pooling" their prayers doesn't seem a wonderful result.

The Salvation Army has opened a café at New Jersey. It is on the American bar system, with free lunches with the drinks, which are all "temperance." "We use the Devil's ideas," the major says, "to perform God's work." Then why not throw in a little whisky?

Dr. C. Bullard, a noted New York Presbyterian minister, in a farewell sermon, described his congregation as "whited sepulchres, ingrates, and hypocrites." Well, he knows them, and they no doubt know him, better than we do.

The Salvation Army International Congress meets in London on June 11. Delegates will speak in thirty-four different languages, and presumably the Holy Ghost will understand them all, but how on earth will they understand each other? Two native gods will be brought from Java and will be carried about at the head of the Congress processions—a blasphemous proceeding which ought to be put a stop to in a country with stringent Blasphemy Laws. What would be said if Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were carried about in a Freethought procession?

The *Daily Chronicle* says that the various parties in the Church of England were "aptly" summed up in the House of Commons a few years ago as "the low and lazy, the broad and hazy, and the high and crazy." Aptly!

Aged 100, Miss Jane Bird, a pious old lady, who had only once seen a train and had never travelled in one, has died at Little Laver, Essex. Not a bird of passage; but now a bird of Paradise—if the Bible be true.

"Record January Heat" is an editor's headline for the modest record of 54 degrees in a religious paper. He might have given more exciting figures concerning the place so often mentioned in sermons.

Rev. Dr. Len Broughton is not what one would call a profound thinker; but, religiously, that must be counted to his credit. It prevents him seeing the absurdity of his faith, and so does away with the need for elaborate and half-insincere apologies. Accordingly he will have nothing to do with the theory that Jesus was a natural product, winning men by his goodness. "The mere naturalness of Jesus," he says, "exemplified in his beauty and goodness, was not enough." What the world needed was the supernaturalism of Jesus, "for he had come to establish a supernatural religion." Now that is the right note—that is, the honest note. It was Jesus the supernatural magic-worker, not Jesus the benevolent social reformer, that the early Christians, and all Christians until recently, worshiped. Good teaching and good men were common enough; but no one ever built a religion out of these, and no one ever will. They are very good as extras for a sophisticated community, but they are

no use as essentials. A religion to thrive must have a core of supernaturalism—and supernaturalism is doomed.

Another sentence from the same sermon is worth recording. It is only noticeable because of the dishonesty of Christians of the water-drinking variety. "I am often asked," says Dr. Broughton, referring to the wine used in the communion during apostolic days, "if that was unfermented or fermented grape juice. If you read the account of its use you will not have to ask. It was fermented wine they used in the days of the apostles. It was so fermented that the people got drunk on it." Quite so; exactly what we have always said. But if Dr. Broughton keeps on blurting out the truth in this fashion, he will lose caste with his fellow-preachers. They are quite ready to prove that among the other things originated by the primitive Christians was a Blue Ribbon Army.

"George Washington to-day" is the bright idea of a Yellow Press newspaper-man concerning the arrival of a boat of that name at Plymouth. The real George is, if the Yankee preachers are right, giving the glad eye to the angels.

"Greenland is covered with ice to a depth estimated at 5,000 feet." Just the place for a "hell-fire" campaign.

"Kings rarely get on well with their eldest sons," is a sage observation of Mr. A. G. Gardiner, of the *Daily News*. Some of the Biblical monarchs get on remarkably well with other people's daughters.

Hereditary monarchy is a superstition. This truth is amply proved in Professor Frazer's great work the *Golden Bough*. It is also proved in practice by royal families—especially in countries where monarchy is a reality. Look, for instance, at the Crown Prince of Germany. What a wonderful combination he is of wisdom and dignity. His divine patron should be proud of him.

A Mrs. P. Gaskell, the *Suffragette* informs us, has circulated the clergy in her district with copies of Miss Pankhurst's book, *The Great Scourge*, and it is hoped that this example will be followed in other districts. For example, Brixton.

According to a recent issue of the *Suffragette*, no less than £519,676 has been raised on behalf of the militant women. If this sum of money were raised for Freethought, the doom of the Churches would be at hand.

A man named Joshua Maden, of Bacup, who died recently, arranged the details of his own funeral. Some Christians really believe that Moses wrote the account of his own interment, and other pious people pretend to believe it.

Mrs. Albert Midlane, of the Isle of Wight, who died last week, was the widow of the author of the popular hymn, "There's a Friend for little children." We once saw this hymn referred to as "A Fiend for little children" through the carelessness of a compositor. Yet one expression was as true as the other.

"Dagonet" (Mr. George R. Sims) has a ghost story in last week's *Referee*. There are sufficient ghost stories in the Bible to raise the human hair quicker than Tatcho.

Wireless telegraphy has scored again. The lost Royal Mail liner *Cobequid* was located after all by the rescue ships and all on board were saved. It was another triumph of science and humanity. Praying for help from "above" will soon be forgotten.

Flaming headlines advertised the "Heroism of the Women" on board the *Cobequid*. What does the reader think they did? They went down below and prayed! That's all. Prodigious!

Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner's controversy with Mr. Philip Gibbs on the question of the Portuguese political prisoners is not very convincing on either side. What we wish is that the friends of the present Government of Portugal would recognise that the sins of a Monarchy are worse when imitated by a Republic. What is the use of change if it brings no improvement and no relief? We should like to see the situation investigated by some independent person, who is not a partisan of Freethought or the Catholic Church, nor of the Republic or the Monarchy. There must be some-

thing wrong somewhere when a Government, which came into power by revolutionary means, has not settled down enough in three years to abolish military tribunals and bring prisoners up for trial within ten or twelve months of their arrest.

The Bishop of Yukon has arrived in England. His object is to "raise funds for his vast diocese." But what the vastness has to do with it we fail to see, unless his lordship wants to paint the landscape. Fortunately he will not suffer as much as some people would if he goes back rather empty-handed. He was once reduced to eating his moccasins. But the worst of that sort of meal is that it can't be repeated. Nor could it be very inspiring in the way of saving souls. In one of the Anti-Jacobin songs, if we remember rightly, a besieged officer had to boil his boots and eat them, but the diet was not exhilarating. He was bound to admit before he sampled the menu that:—

"Looking at that melancholy food,
It may be eaten but it is not good."

We hope the Bishop of Yukon will be able to take back some tinned stuff.

Religious freedom is a foreigner in Spain. Colonel Juan Labrador was lately sentenced to six months' imprisonment for refusing to attend Mass before presiding at a court-martial. Vain efforts are being made to obtain his release.

Elijah has been selected as the patron saint of Russian aviators. Not a bad choice, either. The hairy old prophet was the first Bible hero who sailed away to Kingdom-come, and his flying machine was something splendid—a chariot and horses of fire. Jesus Christ's voyage to heaven was poor in comparison. He went up in a cloud—a most rheumatic conveyance.

Mrs. Besant is appealing to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council against the order of the Supreme Court of Madras for the return of two boys transferred to her by their father Mr. Narazaniah, who wants them back because he is dissatisfied with their moral training under Mr. Leadbeater. It appears that the elder boy is to be trained for the spiritual leadership of the world of Theosophy. The next Messiah perhaps.

Mr. Bonar Law is one of your pious believers in miracles—if he is not a pretended believer. In his last pessimistic speech about the Home Rule Bill, he said: "We have given a pledge that if Ulster resists we will support her in her resistance. We intend, with the help of the Almighty, to keep the pledge." Yes, but suppose the Almighty doesn't help, what then? The pledge is off, we presume. Mr. Bonar Law really offers Ulster (or the three-fifths that he calls Ulster) a miracle. We hope the "Covenanters" will note what it is that they are relying upon.

More "Providence." Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tidal waves, are reported to have killed a hundred thousand people on a small area in Japan. "He doeth all things well."

Rev. Wm. Moore, of Appleton Rectory, Abingdon, Berks, left £8,696. Rev. Charles Henry Bowly, of the Rectory, Toppesfield, Essex, left £7,120. Not so big, as clerical fortunes go, but enough to make the cashier of the first Salvation Army stare.

"Troops of Sweated Women" was a headline in the *Daily News* lately. It was well-meant, of course, but mightn't it have been put a little more politely, not to say elegantly?

Some of the ladies, on the other hand, might try to curb their impatience a bit, especially in public,—as they would have to if they were not women, claiming all the privileges of their sex. At the Economic Circle dinner at the National Liberal Club lately it was announced that a letter had been received from a lady well known in literature on the ground that she could not take part in arguments on the subject of woman's work and wages; if she came at all she would have to bring a stone. At which there was much laughter, even from the women present, one of whom sensibly read a paper as the basis of discussion. "Pretty Fanny's way."

Three new Bishoprics are being launched—Sheffield, Chelmsford, and Ipswich. According to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners the necessary endowments and residences have been provided; that is, several thousands a year in each case, and a large handsome house to live in—fit to receive the Lord if he ever looked in at dinner time as he

did to old Abraham. Meanwhile, people perish by the thousand of sheer destitution in this Christian country. "Feed my sheep" is evidently a text that requires very careful interpretation.

When the Chinese Government invited—about a year ago—the Christians in China to join in a day of general prayer, we pointed out all that was meant by it. In the first place, the Government, not being Christian, was tolerant enough to place all religions on the same level. Secondly, it was a 'cute move to enlist the sympathies of missionary advocates all over the world on behalf of the newly established Government. Whether the missionaries and the leaders of the Christian Churches saw through the move or not is doubtful. At all events, they professed not to. And they interpreted the invitation in a peculiarly Christian manner. The invitation to pray to the Chinese Christians became an invitation to Christian Churches all over the world. And it was issued because the Chinese Government felt that the prayers of Christians were all-powerful. So ran the story, with all the Christian trappings and pious disregard for the truth.

Now for the sequel. The value of the Christian prayers was seen by the fact that things worsened in China as soon as the Christians started praying. If there is any efficacy in prayer, we must not forget to put that to the credit of the Christians all over the world. Next, the other day an Administrative Conference was called at Peking to consider a proposal that the President should worship Heaven in the Temple of Heaven, and wearing the old ceremonial robes. The Conference began to discuss the question. Discussion was more or less of a farce, and the Conference was told that it had simply been called together to register the Government's decision, which was the re-establishing of Confucianism and Heaven Worship. The decision was registered, and the much-talked-of golden opportunity for the wholesale conversion of China disappears. The *Daily Telegraph* correspondent says that this decision will estrange missions of all denominations, who are already disappointed by the progress of events. We do not doubt it. The idea that China would ever embrace Christianity was one that only a fool or a fanatic could have entertained. The pity of it is that neither is likely to learn anything from what has just occurred.

Mr. Balfour's fee for his present series of Gifford lectures is £500, which comes from what a daily newspaper calls "an old bequest." This is a somewhat ancient way of talking of the Gifford Trust, seeing it was established within the memory of people who can hardly be called more than middle-aged. But that is by the way. £500 is what Shylock would call "a good round sum." No wonder the Christians keep the monopoly of this lectureship. Lord Gifford enjoined perfect fairness upon the Trustees. They were not to have revealed religion dealt with at all, but only what is called "natural religion,"—and that was to be treated in a scientific way like any other subject, and even Atheism was to be no barrier to a competent man's appointment to the lectureship. We need not say that there has been no rush of Atheists. We don't recollect that one Atheist has been allowed to handle that £500.

What is commonly called English literature now is mainly in the hands of *farceurs*. Mr. G. K. Chesterton having left the *Daily News*, and the *Daily News* having pitched into the *Daily Chronicle's* sweet insurance scheme, the latter retaliates by working up a boom for Mr. Chesterton's drooping play *Magic* at the Little Theatre. This has been further promoted by means of a carefully arranged discussion at the same theatre on the question "Do Miracles Happen?" According to the preliminary announcement—

"It is understood that Mr. Chesterton has promised to be present and will take part in the discussion. The debate, however, will not be upon the play, but deal solely with the question it has raised regarding miracles—do they happen, or do they not?"

"Already Mr. Kenelm Foss is in communication with many well-known authorities, representing all shades of both lay and clerical opinion, and one of the most remarkable gatherings ever known in a theatre may be looked forward to."

Representing *all* shades, eh? Mr. Kenelm Foss (any relation to Sam Foss?) has not extended an invitation to the President of the National Secular Society or to the Editor of the *Freethinker*. Knowing too much about anything is worse than knowing too little—at least in a public debate. Moreover, it was easy to see that the discussion was to be a sham. The Bible was to be left out of it altogether. And as the Bible contains all the miracles of Christianity *per se*,

leaving the Bible out is leaving Christianity out. So *that's* all right. It is what the *Chronicle* calls "eliminating all possibilities of offence." Well, if that is what the debaters want they could secure it still more certainly by keeping their mouths shut altogether.

"Do Miracles Happen?" Everybody knows they *don't*—even if they *did*. Everybody, that is, but the most docile and orthodox Catholics. So it seemed likely beforehand that the debate may sink into a fine old shindy between Catholics and Protestants. If Atheists were let in they would have to say "A plague on both your houses." Theoretically, the whole thing was a farce; practically, it is an advertising dodge.

Monday's *Chronicle* made it appear as if the question about miracles happening or not was going to be put to the vote. It was observed that "the verdict" to be given at the Little Theatre would be one of "quite unprecedented significance." What nonsense is this! The question was long ago discussed, not in the Little Theatre, but in the Great Theatre of civilisation. It is nearly fifty years since Matthew Arnold was able to announce, in a book written for Christians, that miracles were doomed in educated and thoughtful society, and that all miracles were fairy tales, including those of the Bible. That has been taken for granted for the past half-century; yet here are a lot of jokers raising the question again, as though it still possessed actuality. What ought to be discussed now is not whether miracles happen, but whether there is a God? This question, however, is too strong for the *Chronicle* and its scratch debating forum. They prefer something that looks brave but involves no danger.

When the *Chronicle* announced that "practically every phase of opinion on the subject" was represented in its list of speakers it must have known that it was imposing on its readers,—unless its ignorance was as incredible as it was inexcusable. The only name worth printing in the whole list, in this special connection, was that of Mr. Maskelyne the conjurer. But that word is too vulgar for the *Chronicle*, which calls him an "illusionist."

Atheists were ruled out of this farcical debate to begin with. There were two rigorous conditions for all disputants; first, the inspired authority of the Bible was not to be challenged (which we have criticised already), and, secondly, an "equally reverent attitude towards the Divine will" was to be "taken for granted in every case." A very nice muzzle for the bulldog!

Our readers might like to see the definition of a miracle adopted (from the *New English Dictionary*) for this fantastic discussion:—

"A marvellous event occurring within human experience, which cannot have been brought about by human power or by the operation of any natural agency, and must therefore be ascribed to the special intervention of the Deity or of some supernatural being."

Not bad. But who ever knew Christian debaters stick to a definition? Even their own?

The debate (heaven save the mark!) took place on Monday. It was a perfect farce. The *Chronicle* reporter seemed ashamed of it himself.

If the *Chronicle* is ready to organise a real debate on Miracles, and will put forward Mr. G. K. Chesterton as the orthodox representative, a practical debater can easily be found to represent the other side. The President of the National Secular Society and Editor of the *Freethinker* is available.

"Eve's dress allowance" is a Transatlantic penman's description of a domestic dispute. The Bible heroine's pin-money would not have purchased a packet of Woodbines.

Japan is specially favored by "Providence" just now. Besides the victims of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, there are said to be 9,000,000 people starving in Hokkaido and the North-Eastern Prefectures.

"The Amir of Afghanistan has decreed the punishment of death for any Christian missionary who converts a native. We understand that the missionaries are continuing their good work—and drawing their salaries—with equanimity."
—*John Bull*.

To Correspondents.

BIRMINGHAM "SAINT."—We have not noticed anything from the pens of tip-top Socialists about Stewart's imprisonment for "blasphemy." Their heads seem too big for such trivial things. "G. B. S." himself has denounced the Blasphemy Laws vigorously enough, between prosecutions, but we hear very little from him when bigotry is on the rampage again. It is a strong point of the joke that those who have been prosecuted for "blasphemy" of late years, from Boulter to Stewart, have nearly (if not quite) all been Socialists.

W. P. BALL.—Much obliged for cuttings.
M. R. PEGG.—See paragraph. Manchester and district ought to give a man of Mr. Lloyd's ability and eloquence crowded audiences.

E. B.—Best thanks for weekly cuttings.
G. H. BARKER (New Zealand).—So you first heard us lecture at Norwich in 1871. We are honored by the recollection. No doubt the book you mention will arrive safely. We thank you in anticipation; also for your good wishes.

A. J. MARRIOTT.—We don't endorse your theory that the "blasphemy" prosecutions under Liberal Governments are instigated by their opponents. We rather think that the Liberals are glad to have it proved that there are worse than they; that they draw the line somewhere, as the saying is. Moreover, it is a safe thing to persecute Freethinkers when you are sure of the support of the Opposition in the House of Commons as well as your own side.

J. F. JACKSON.—Our shop manager will attend to your requests. Glad to hear of the good you have done by distributing back numbers of this journal, and hope for the same result in the future.

W. A.—We should be glad if Mr. Heaford would take your suggestion and straighten out this Portuguese tangle again.

A. MARTLAW.—We had corrected the blunder, as you will see. Pleased to find you read this journal so closely, and glad to hear you are "grateful for the brilliant articles which appear in it each week."

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

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

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

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

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Sugar Plums.

Freethinkers are so numerous that if they all spoke out there would be a very considerable abatement of Christian insolence. Unfortunately it is only here and there that persons of social or industrial distinction openly avow their Freethought. One of these is Sir Hiram Maxim, who has been giving orthodoxy a good shaking lately. We are pleased to say that he will attend the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner at Frascati's next Wednesday (Jan. 28), and will speak if called upon by the Chairman—which may be taken for granted.

We are sorry to learn that the change in the date of the Annual Dinner has prevented a few of the older "saints" from attending. It will be unpleasant to miss some welcome faces, but, alas, it is not possible to suit all conveniences. We wish it were.

Mr. Lloyd lectures, afternoon and evening, at the Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints, Manchester, to-day (Jan. 25). We hope the local "saints" will give his visit all the publicity they can. People can't go to hear him if they don't know he is lecturing, and ordinary advertising is so expensive that it can only be done in a very limited way.

We reproduce on another page an article on "The Blasphemy Case" from the *Daily Chronicle*. It is so important,

in its way, that we wish our readers to see the whole of it. We quite agree that it was no use petitioning the Home Secretary, and we said so at the time. In former years that was the only thing to be done if the "blasphemer's" friends desired to shake the verdict or mitigate the sentence. But there is a Court of Criminal Appeal now, and the real centre of the battle should have consisted in carrying the case thither. A correspondence between the Rationalist Press Association's secretary and Mr. McKenna may or may not be interesting, but it is certainly of no value; whereas there would have been very great value in the Law of Blasphemy being argued by competent counsel in the Court of Appeal, and followed by a responsible decision of the Judges who happened to be sitting. We pointed this out, and we believe we were the only person who did point it out. We did more than that. We offered to take the full responsibility, financial and otherwise, of taking the Stewart case to the Court of Appeal. And we would have spent any amount of time and trouble in giving the appeal the benefit of our own knowledge and experience. But it was not to be. "And fools rushed in," etc., etc.

The passage that the *Chronicle* quotes from Macaulay is very good in its way, but it is a wonder that our contemporary did not perceive its weak point. It is called a crime to give other people "pain and disgust." What other people? Christians, and Christians only. And who are to decide whether the culprit, who must necessarily be a Freethinker, shall be prosecuted? Christians. And who are to try him and find whether he is guilty or not guilty? Christians. And who is to pass upon him the proper sentence? A Christian. And who is to keep him in prison during his term of punishment? Christians. This "pain and disgust" is a very one-sided affair. When the Christians once set about him, the poor Freethinker stands about as much chance as a sheep before a tribunal of butchers.

We are glad to see the *Chronicle* urging the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. That is the one thing to be done now. But will the Liberal Party help to do it? We wish we could say Yes.

Mr. Asquith's answer to the second petition was exactly what might be expected. We see by the newspapers—for that is our only way of obtaining information on these matters—that Mr. Asquith "is unable to intervene in a matter which lies wholly within the competence of the Secretary for the Home Department."

We ask our readers' attention to a final point. Lord Coleridge and Mr. McKenna both say that Stewart is not suffering for his opinions. That is all nonsense, of course, for if he had advocated any other opinions the "violence" or "vulgarity" of his language would never have caused his imprisonment. But the anxiety of both the Judge and the Home Secretary to assure everybody that Stewart is not suffering for his opinions, shows that the judgment of Lord Chief Justice Coleridge in the course of the *Freethinker* trial in 1888 holds the field beyond any possible challenge. The result is, as we have declared any time the last fifteen years, that Freethought funds are perfectly safe under an Incorporation like the Secular Society, Ltd., but at the same time Freethinkers are still liable to prosecution on account of their want of proper respect for those undefined "decencies of controversy."

The following is from *John Bull*:—

"THE BLASPHEMY LAWS.

"We respectfully suggest to Mr. Asquith that he should give favorable consideration to the appeal now being made to him for the repeal of the stupid and antiquated Blasphemy Laws, as they are called. Matters of taste—and that is all that it comes to—should not be made the subject of legal enactment. Besides, there is just as much blasphemy talked by parsons nowadays as there is by street-corner orators. Mr. Foote sealed the doom of this relic of ecclesiastical domination twenty years ago."

Twenty years, Mr. Bottomley? No, thirty.

The following resolution has been passed by the Committee of the Humanitarian League:—"That inasmuch as a very large number of birching sentences are passed by magistrates upon working-class children, often for trivial offences, and as these police-court punishments are much severer and more degrading than the correction administered in schools to the children of the well-to-do, we strongly condemn the attempts now being made to secure an extension of the age of limitation from 14 to 16, and we would express the hope that the Labor Party and all democratic organisations will resist the proposal."

Goethe.

ONE of the most extraordinary men of genius our planet has ever produced was the mighty Humanist and Freethinker, Johann Wolfgang Goethe. The mental product of antiquity and of modern philosophical, literary, and scientific thought alike, the creator of *Faust* has exercised an enormous progressive influence throughout the civilised world. Much of the Freethought, and many of the other progressive ideals which distinguish modern Germany are vastly indebted to Goethe's life and work. Among his intellectual parents are to be numbered Lessing, Herder, Voltaire, and Rousseau, while his religious conceptions were more largely moulded by the teachings of the serene and patient pantheistic philosopher, Baruch Spinoza, than by those of any other mortal man.

Goethe first saw the light which he came to love so well at Frankfort-on-the-Main on August 28, 1749. His grandfather was a tailor who had risen from a working class family, whose second wife was a comely widow, who kept an inn. Husband and wife were happily mated, and were above the average in intellect and character. Three children blessed their union, of whom the father of the poet was the youngest. As the fortunes of the family improved, the parent of Goethe was sent to study law at Leipsic and Giessen and took the degree of Doctor of Jurisprudence. After practising in Wetzlar and journeying in Italy, he settled in Frankfort. His easy circumstances enabled him to secure a position of honor and dignity, and he became an imperial councillor in the city. Dr. Goethe was a man of strong character, was a sincere lover of art and letters, was well versed in Italian, and was an enthusiastic student of Tasso, the Tuscan poet. At the age of thirty-eight, he wedded the daughter of Textor, the chief magistrate of Frankfort. This lady, the mother of Goethe, was then a mere girl of seventeen. But she was bright and beautiful, a lover of music and poetry, and had a remarkable aptitude in inventing that kind of story which delights and captivates children. From such a stock as this, very fruitful issue might have been predicted, and the birth of Goethe as the first child of the marriage affords a striking instance of the importance of a sound and healthy pedigree.

Of the succeeding children, one only survived long enough to influence Goethe. This was his sister Cornelia, just fifteen months younger than himself, who loved him dearly, and influenced him for his good during his fiery youth. From his mother Goethe inherited his wealth of brown hair and dark lustrous eyes which, from childhood to old age, arrested by their brilliancy the attention of every beholder. As a little child he was deeply imaginative, and, as he tells us in his autobiography, he was happy when seated at the window of the Frankfort house, which commanded a fine view of a fertile valley stretching beyond the city walls. From this coign of vantage he could view storms and sunsets, and watch the children at their shouting play in the gardens near. Doubtless many of his nature pictures had their birth in his childish musings here. And when the house was rebuilt, as it was by Dr. Goethe, it was made both convenient and tasteful with maps and engravings, and the numerous objects of art he had collected in Italy. During the rebuilding Goethe and Cornelia were sent to a relative, and the boy now became acquainted with the sights of his native city.

"As the town in which the Emperors were elected and crowned, Frankfort held a position of high honor among the free imperial cities of Germany. Within its old walls and gates it still retained, in its architecture and customs, many traces of the troubled picturesque life of the Middle Ages."

The crowds in the market-places, the boats laden with merchandise, the gilt weathercock, and the famous Council Hall, all interested and stirred the impressionable boy, and probably helped to color the

first part of *Faust*, although the legend itself seems to have become known to him through the German folk-books he devoured as a child.

Goethe was about seven years old when the wars of Frederick broke out, and great were the diversities of view concerning the merits of the Prussian king and his antagonists. Bitter family differences arose in the Goethe family when the Seven Years' War began. Dr. Goethe was a stout supporter of Frederick the Great, and when some two years later Frankfort was basely betrayed into the hands of his French enemies, the doctor was compelled to receive Count Thorane, one of the French officers, into his dwelling. Thorane proved a polished gentleman, and he and young Goethe soon became excellent friends. The lad was enraptured by the whirl of excitement which the presence of the military occasioned. The artists who came to execute work for Thorane aroused a passion for draughtsmanship in Goethe, and he zealously practised drawing with marked success. He likewise learnt French, and listened to the reading of the French plays which were now being presented on the Frankfort stage. In this school he grew to like the Gallic people, and that liking did not desert him even at that later time when his fatherland was trodden under the iron heel of the great Napoleon.

The tutors who had been employed to teach him found their duties sadly hindered during the two years' residence of the French in Dr. Goethe's house. Irregular as the boy's schooling had been, he had gained a fair acquaintance with several languages, ancient and modern, and to these he now added English.

In accordance with the prevailing custom, Goethe was confirmed in his twelfth year. As a very little boy, he was puzzled by the problems of pain and evil. In 1755, the terrible Lisbon earthquake filled his mind with misgivings. Such a catastrophe appeared hard to reconcile with God's justice and mercy. Even at this early time the Pagan spirit asserted itself, and the child set up an altar to the orb of day in his sleeping room. In 1765, just after his sixteenth birthday, he was sent to Leipsic to study law, but the professors had nothing to offer which their new pupil was willing to accept. The whirling student days which followed were attended by the inevitable love episode, the second in Goethe's lengthy amorous career. He had many acquaintances, good, bad, and indifferent, but by far the ablest man with whom Goethe came into personal touch at Leipsic was Oeser, the director of the Academy of Drawing, Painting, and Architecture. Oeser was a disciple of the famous Winkelmann, who, although his own artistic work was of minor importance, was, nevertheless, a man gifted with the power of creating interest in all that appertained to art, and of stimulating all his pupils to do their very best. Goethe now became a passionate student of art, and he carefully studied every picture of moment in Leipsic. These exhausted, he spent a holiday at Dresden for the purpose of studying the treasures of its celebrated art gallery.

But this enthusiasm for art was soon eclipsed; the claims of literature gained the ascendancy. He had already read Wieland's rendering of Shakespeare, and he now eagerly devoured Dodd's *Beauties of Shakespeare*, although he was still far from realising the overwhelming greatness of the mighty English poet.

Wieland, having outgrown the piety of his uncritical youth, began to set forth his easy-going philosophy in prose and verse, and from him Goethe learnt much. But a deeper influence was exerted by the humane and freethinking Lessing, whose *Laocoon* and *Minna von Barnhelm* were regarded by Goethe as triumphant masterpieces of German literature. In 1768 Lessing spent a month in Leipsic, but the fates decreed that the two humanists were never to meet. About the same time, Goethe received the grievous tidings of Winkelmann's tragic death, and he sincerely mourned the loss of the master whose writings

had so materially contributed to his mental and artistic evolution.

During the whole of the Leipsic period, Goethe was an assiduous attendant at the play, sometimes as spectator, and occasionally as an actor, in private performances. The enthusiasm engendered by these experiences induced him to try his hand as a dramatist, and he wrote two small plays, *Die Laune des Verliebten* (The Lover's Humor) and *Die Mitschuldigen* (The Accomplices). Both plays are confessedly autobiographical, but are too closely imitative of conventional French models to rank as anything but promising failures.

At this period an affair of the heart wounded the poet deeply, and all his efforts to silence his sad emotions proved unavailing. In this instance distraction did not prove a panacea, and Goethe became seriously ill. His sickness was made bearable by the affectionate care of his male and female friends, but as he made but poor progress towards recovery, it was decided that he should return to his father's house. There he became convalescent, but soon succumbed to another dangerous ailment. But he slowly regained his health, and never again was he visited by any serious malady.

In his twenty-first year, Goethe went to Strasburg to take his degree, and while in that cathedral city he met the rationalistic philosopher, Herder. The latter was then twenty-six years of age, only five years the senior of Goethe. But Herder had been matured by hard discipline, and two volumes of essays had already appeared from his pen. A painful eye disease, coupled with a somewhat overbearing disposition, made Herder a harsh man to deal with. Goethe, however, discerned a fine nature beneath a rugged exterior, and made light of his occasional boorishness, and was ever willing to solace and assist him. Goethe's virtue was well rewarded, for from Herder he learnt to appreciate the good contained in the messages of Rousseau and Voltaire. He also grew to value Shakespeare at his proper worth, for in the creator of Hamlet, so said Herder, Nature had met her profoundest interpreter; and,—

"returning in earnest to the study of his dramas, Goethe was impressed, as he had never been impressed before, by their power and beauty, and felt more and more strongly that it would be impossible for him ever to exhaust their meaning."

Herder also made him realise the position of the true Freethinker. No set of doctrines, however sacred, was to be accepted as a complete and irrevocable canon of truth. Goethe now looked around him, and strove to free his mind from all preconceptions and to judge every phenomenon on its merits alone. Having once mastered this great lesson, he made strenuous efforts to hold fast to it through life.

This great formative epoch was constantly lit by the light of love. Goethe had been smitten by the beauty of Friederike Brion, an Alsatian pastor's daughter, and although he was parted from her, her affection and beauty inspired some of his loveliest lyrics. In after days she might have wedded joyously and well, but her unvarying answer to her adorers was: "The heart that Goethe has loved can never belong to another."

To gratify his father—for to Goethe law was dry and barren—he became a Frankfort advocate. In a few weeks he received his first brief, and judgment was recorded in the courts in favor of the youthful Goethe's client. But the attractions of Shakespeare proved more potent than those of jurisprudence. A Shakespeare festival took place in his father's house, and Goethe, with flashing eye and eloquent tongue, described the plays as masterpieces in which "the history of the world sweeps on before our eyes on the invisible thread of time."

In a literary sense, the period from 1771 to 1775 was the most productive of the poet's life. He penned *Goetz*, *Werther*, *Clavigo*, and other works in rapid succession. The reception accorded *Goetz von Berlichingen* was enough to turn the head of a weaker man. Goethe was hailed as a marvellous genius,

and the success of this, his first tragedy, confirmed his confidence in his own power, and he never doubted that his future creations would completely fulfil the most sanguine predictions of his most enthusiastic admirers.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be continued.)

Blasphemy.

ONE of the many libellous charges that Christians are continually bringing against Freethinkers is that of blasphemy. The wicked doubts of the Atheist may be ignored, but directly he speaks candidly upon the Christian religion, then the whole of Christendom is up in arms loudly protesting against a so-called "blasphemy." Accordingly, it would be well to discover whether Christians, in making this charge, are following out any consistent moral code.

The world in which we live contains a vast amount of evil. The Christian believes this, for he is constantly deploring the depravity of the world. The Freethinker also recognises that immorality is common to most parts of the globe, but, at the same time, he lays emphasis upon such remediable evils as slums, poverty, dirt, and ignorance. It is an established fact that a high degree of morality will not be attained until these material evils have disappeared. But there is one evil that, apparently, can never be removed; the evil referred to is that brought about by nature's law of "the survival of the fittest." Evolution is the cause of much pain, suffering, and waste.

Now, the Christian doctrine teaches that God is omnipotent, that is, he has complete control of the universe. Consequently, God is responsible for all the evil that exists in the world. He possesses power over the Devil, and if this is not so, then the term "Almighty God" is a misnomer and ought never to be used. The Christian believes, at one and the same time, that Almighty God is the loving Father of mankind, and that he not only allows evil to exist, but that he invented a system of evolution, which brings untold pain to all species of life. Surely, this is one of the most despicable and lying blasphemies ever uttered! It is an insult to an intelligent person's conception of a Deity. It is a paradox that is both ludicrous and immoral, and one which would hardly be perpetrated even by Mr. G. K. Chesterton. Is there one man in a hundred who would allow evil to exist if he possessed the power to prevent it? No. The position is untenable to the rational person. He must take one of three courses:—

- (1) He must acknowledge that God is not almighty, and that his power is limited (he would presumably share the control of the world with the Devil).
- (2) If he still holds the conviction that God is almighty, then he must acknowledge that he worships a Deity who, in his opinion, is an immoral being.
- (3) He must throw overboard the whole doctrine, and become an Agnostic.

One can easily speculate on the line of thought that will be taken by the majority of present-day Christians in the near future. They will discover that the idea of the Christian God was founded upon a blasphemy, and they will look back with astonishment upon the time when the truth was considered as being blasphemous.

THE MAN IN THE STREET.

There never has been a "Fall of Man" from which he could be saved by the suffering and death of God or man upon the Cross, and the preaching of such a mode of salvation constitutes a miserable mockery. It is an utterly misleading aside from the real work of the world that remains to be done; and the money spent in sustaining the great delusion at home and propagating it abroad might suffice for the extinction of poverty if preventively applied.—
Gerald Massey.

Literary Gossip.

How often a good reader is tempted to say to a critic "Physician heal thyself." And when a man makes a mistake himself in correcting the mistake of another, he is approaching, if he has not entered, the region of comedy. I have just been reading an interesting and suggestive little volume in the "Home University Library," by Wm. T. Brewster, A.M., Professor of English in Columbia University. Professor Brewster is one of the four editors of this excellent series of books. One would have expected from him greater care in composition and proof-reading than from most of his colleagues in this enterprise, for the title of his contribution is *The Writing of English*. Yet as early as p. 15 one finds the following lapse:—

"So precise a person as Matthew Arnold misquotes Keats's 'Pure ablation round Earth's human shores' as 'cold ablation' without a blush and under circumstances that called for great accuracy (Maurice de Guérin, in *Essays on Criticism*)."

Professor Brewster, in correcting Matthew Arnold, was himself called upon for great accuracy. But in calling attention to one blunder he perpetrates a worse one. Keats, of course, did not write "ablation" at all. What he wrote was "ablution." The passage occurs in probably the last of his sonnets, written on a blank page in Shakespeare's poems, facing *A Lover's Complaint*—and runs as follows:—

"The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores."

That is John Keats at his very best, as we might expect when a great poet is apostrophising the greatest of all poets. And it is over the two lines enshrining this superb image that two writers like Matthew Arnold and Professor Brewster both stumbled. * * *

I hesitated to believe that Matthew Arnold had turned that beautiful "pure" into that terrible "cold." But on turning to his fine essay on Maurice de Guérin I found that he had done so. When I read the essay before I must have taken the Keats quotation for granted as I knew the lines so well. It was really performing an act of memory instead of an act of perception. And the worst of it is that Matthew Arnold let that shocking misquotation stand for more than twenty years. My own copy of the book is a part of the collected edition of his works dated 1886.

* * *

Arnold's mistake was a perfect "howler." I hope his publishers may yet be able to set it right. Professor Brewster's may perhaps be called a slip in proof-reading. Yes, but an author should read his proofs more carefully, especially in such circumstances.

* * *

The *Positivist Review* for January opens the new year well. There are excellent articles by Professor E. S. Beesly, Mr. Frederic Harrison, and other well-known contributors to this ably conducted magazine. Mr. S. H. Swinny, the editor, writes a brief, eulogistic review of Professor Bury's *History of Freedom of Thought*, which has been noticed at considerable length in these columns. "The book," Mr. Swinny concludes, "contains a weighty protest against the recrudescence of prosecutions for blasphemy." I expected more reference than this to the agitation around the recent Stewart case. But the one fault I have to find with Mr. Swinny's monthly is that his staff of writers seem to live out of the present world. This comment does not apply to Mr. Swinny himself, whom I meet (with pleasure) on many committees.

* * *

Talking of "blasphemy," I notice a belated discovery on this subject. Professor Bury, in his admirable little book, remarks that passages of "blasphemy" he quoted from Swinburne's *Songs Before Sunrise* were surely open to prosecution if they had been expressed in prose, and in the prose of the common people. This remark is taken up by Mr. J. M. Robertson in a recent article on Toleration and patronised as no doubt true. I happen to know from personal observation that Mr. Robertson was alive in 1883, when I was prosecuted for "blasphemy," and made what the *Times* called "a remarkable speech in defence" before Lord Chief Justice Coleridge. I can hardly imagine, for special reasons, that Mr. Robertson can have forgotten the character of my address to the jury, which caused a good deal of excitement at the time. Now it happens that I read to the jury those very passages (with others) which Professor Bury quotes from Swinburne, and I asked them if these passages were not as "blasphemous" as anything in my indictment? Lord Coleridge answered that question

himself in the affirmative. Some of the passages I read were in his opinion free from such criticism, but with regard to others he said:—

"They do appear to me to be open to exactly the same charge and the same grounds of observation that Mr. Foote's publications are. He says—and I don't call upon him to prove it, I am quite willing to take his word—he says many of these things are written in expensive books, published by publishers of known eminence, and that they circulate in the drawing-rooms, studies, and libraries of persons of position."

Lord Coleridge went on to say that if the writers of such things, using language "not fairly distinguishable from that used by Mr. Foote," were ever brought before him, they "would find but one rule of law laid down in this court."

* * *

Professor Bury's suggestion, adopted by Mr. Robertson, is therefore some thirty years behind date. The point now raised was thoroughly discussed at my trial.

* * *

Mr. H. S. Salt's new volume, the *Humanities of Diet*, is published by the Vegetarian Society, 257 Deansgate, Manchester. It is neatly got up, and I fancy the price must be sixpence, but I cannot find any statement to that (or any other) effect. With the exception of the first article, reprinted from the *Fortnightly Review*, the contents of this little book are all gathered from the *Humanitarian*, the *Vegetarian*, and other propagandist journals. Some are in prose, some are in verse, and all are entertaining; for Mr. Salt is not always solemn,—he is often witty, humorous, and jovial, when the occasion calls for such treatment of the subject. Mr. Salt in his lighter vein will be an agreeable surprise to those who only know him in his serious moods. A wide circulation of this volume would be a good thing for the cause of Humanitarianism.

* * *

One may add a few words to the comments on Mr. Campbell at the end of Mr. Lloyd's article in this week's *Freethinker*. It is George Meredith that one has in mind, and for whose reputation one is concerned. Mr. Campbell is a very small matter in comparison. He is a born sentimentalist, and was bound to shudder when he came up against the sternest elements of Meredith's philosophy. Faith is a good thing if based upon reason, but not without reason, and still less in spite of reason. "You want to live for ever, do you?" says the strong man to the weaker one. "Well, nobody can add anything to what Nature has given you. I cannot add one day to your life, here or hereafter; and I do not know that I would if I could. Who are you? Who am I? that Nature should be strained to gratify our vanity and selfhood? We must just share the common lot. And if you like to dream of personal immortality, do so; I shall not quarrel with you, though I do not propose to join you. All I can offer you is what Nature offers you, if you choose to accept it,—an immortal life in the life of the race. Live in your children. Live in posterity. You owe something to the past; pay it to the future. It is the only way in which you can discharge the debt." But that is not good enough for sentimental egoists like Mr. Campbell. He calls it a "melancholy prospect." It is to him. It was not to Meredith. That is the difference between the two men. Character, like water, cannot rise above its own level. It takes a Danton to cry, "Let my name be blighted, so that France be free." It takes a Paul to hope that others may be saved even if he be lost. It takes a Moses to rejoice in his nation entering the promised land, though he is doomed never to set his foot upon its holy soil. These are instances in Mr. Campbell's sacred book. He will remember them. And perhaps he will think over again the matter of that "melancholy prospect." * * *

So far there is no particular harm done, but Mr. Campbell goes on until self-contempt makes him insolent. He says that Meredith's words of courage in face of the fact and thought of death remind him of "a small boy in the dark whistling to keep his courage up." Mr. Campbell reminds us of a street urchin who rings his superior's front-door bell and runs away. * * *

Human reason will never take us beyond Meredith's position. Mr. Campbell admits it, he asserts it, he emphasises it. Something more than human reason takes Mr. Campbell along the pleasant way he wants to go. He looks to the Cross of Christ. And what were the last words of Christ himself on the Cross? "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Wasn't that a "melancholy prospect"? * * *

By the way, Mr. Campbell supposes that Mr. G. M. Trevelyan is writing a book on George Meredith. He wrote one nearly eight years ago—the *Poetry and Philosophy of*

George Meredith. Mr. Trevelyan is not frightened at Meredith's teachings. If it causes terror at the City Temple it must be because of the plethora of shop assistants in the congregation.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Blasphemy Case.

In common with all true Liberals, we loathe prosecutions for opinion. It is the pride of Englishmen that they live in a land where a man can say whatever he will. Milton desired, above all liberties, the liberty to utter and argue freely. Holding these opinions, we have an instinctive aversion to prosecutions under the Blasphemy Laws. Not only do such prosecutions encroach on liberty of speech, but they almost invariably defeat their own object. Recently a petition influentially signed was presented to the Home Office urging the release of the man, Thomas William Stewart, who was convicted at the Staffordshire Assizes on November 18 for blasphemy at Wolverhampton, and was sentenced to four months' imprisonment. The Home Secretary declined to accede to the prayer of the petitioners, and for his refusal he has been bitterly assailed by some newspapers, notably the *New Statesman*. Now what is the duty of a Home Secretary in such a case as this? He is, of course, the Minister responsible for the exercise of the King's prerogative of mercy. That prerogative has to be exercised with the greatest circumspection. It certainly does not entitle a minister to arrogate to himself a dispensing or suspensive power in regard to the law of the land. The essence of the prerogative is that it must only be exercised with great rarity and under exceptional circumstances. Of those circumstances the Home Secretary is the only competent judge, for no one else has all the facts before him; no one else is able to consult the judge who passed sentence. In the Stewart case Mr. McKenna had to bear in mind that the prisoner had been found guilty by a jury, and that he had been tried before a judge of liberal mind and humane traditions like Mr. Justice Coleridge. He had necessarily to consider the nature of Stewart's language at the open-air meetings he addressed. The evidence showed that this language was coarse, ribald, vulgar in the extreme.

Mr. McKenna was evidently influenced, too, by the fact that after Stewart had attracted a crowd by his attacks on religion, it was his custom to send his wife to distribute handbills among his listeners advertising certain appliances. That in itself is no offence, but the Home Secretary seems to have asked himself: "Is this the sort of man in whose behalf I ought to take the exceptional step of exercising the prerogative when he has been lawfully convicted by a jury of his fellow countrymen?" He decided that he was not. Mr. McKenna himself is utterly free from all suspicion of intolerance, but he probably takes the same view in these cases that was taken by Macaulay, as good a Liberal as ever lived, in the following passage:—

"If a man in a place of public resort applies opprobrious epithets to names held in reverence by all Christians, such a man ought to be severely punished, not for differing from us in opinion, but for committing a nuisance which gives us pain and disgust. He is no more entitled to outrage our feelings by obtruding his impiety on us, and to say that he is exercising his right of discussion, than to establish a yard for butchering horses close to our houses and to say that he is exercising his right of property. He must use all his rights so as not to infringe the rights of others."

For our own part, we wish Stewart had not been prosecuted. We would leave speakers of this type alone, confident that the public's good sense is the best prophylactic against any abuse of free speech. But it is unjust to make a rancorous attack on a Minister because he has refused to release Stewart. The Secretary of State in these matters must act on his own judgment. To attack him for his decisions is easy, but fruitless. In order to avoid prosecutions for blasphemy, the effective way is not to abuse the Home Secretary, but to obtain the repeal of the Blasphemy Acts. We would like to see them repealed to-morrow. Religion would be in a poor way if it could not withstand the vulgar language of itinerant orators.

—*Daily Chronicle*, January 17, 1914.

Mark Melford: An Appreciation.

"Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note."

THERE were only three or four of us gathered within the little chapel of the Crematorium, which the leaden clouds of a grey January day rendered even more sombre than usual.

No organ pealed forth a melody of mockery upon ears close-sealed to earthly sound. No meaningless words were babbled from hired lips of a vague and theoretical future; not a tinge of morbid curiosity intruded within the mournful area of regret rendered sacred by its sincerity. The last tragic farewell had been spoken when the curtain fell at the close of the *Matinée* at the Little Theatre a few weeks ago.

The last dignified exit took place when, at a given signal, the frail shell was slowly drawn along the catafalque until it passed from view within the oaken doors, where "Neither foe nor stranger would tread o'er his head."

It was the perfect realisation of the solemnity of silence. One and all felt the passing of a mighty intellect paramount above all physical suffering; and as we stepped into the outer air the gentle drip, drip, of falling rain only seemed a fit accompaniment to our mood and surroundings.

Truly no man could have a more enduring epitaph than that he was ever a protector of the defenceless and a faithful friend; and it was thus that we "left him alone with his glory."

ANNIE BRADSHAW.

SHELLEY AN ATHEIST.

In religion, Shelley was an Atheist. There is nothing uncommon in that; but he actually called himself one, and urged others to follow his example. He never trifled with the word God: he knew that it meant a personal First Cause, Almighty Creator, and Supreme Judge and Ruler of the Universe, and that it did not mean anything else, never had meant anything else, and never whilst the English language lasted would mean anything else. Knowing perfectly well that there was no such person, he did not pretend that the question was an open one, or imply, by calling himself an Agnostic, that there might be such a person for all he knew to the contrary. He did know to the contrary; and he said so. Further, though there never was a man with so abiding and full a consciousness of the omnipresence of a living force, manifesting itself here in the germination and growth of a tree, there in the organisation of a poet's brain, and elsewhere in the putrefaction of a dead dog, he never condescended to beg off being an Atheist by calling this omnipresent energy God, or even Pan. He lived and died professedly, almost boastfully, godless. In his time, however, as at present, God was little more than a word to the English people. What they really worshiped was the Bible; and our modern Church movement to get away from Bible fetishism and back to some presentable sort of Christianity (*vide* Mr. Horton's speech at Grindelwald the other day, for example) had not then come to the surface. The preliminary pickaxing work of Bible smashing had yet to be done; and Shelley, who found the moral atmosphere of the Old Testament murderous and abominable, and the asceticism of the New suicidal and pessimistic, smashed away at the Bible with all his might and main.—*G. B. Shaw in the "Albermarle"* (Sept., 1892).

RELIGION AND INSANITY.

We frequently see persons in insane hospitals sent there in consequence of what are called *religious* mental disturbances. I confess that I think better of them than of many who hold the same notions, and keep their wits and appear to enjoy life very well, outside of the asylums. Any decent person ought to go mad if he really holds such and such opinions. It is very much to his discredit, in every point of view if he does not..... Anything that is brutal, cruel, heathenish, that makes life hopeless for the most of mankind, and perhaps for entire races—anything that assumes the necessity of the extermination of instincts which were given to be regulated—no matter by what name you call it—no matter whether a fakir, or a monk, or a deacon believes it—if received, ought to produce insanity in every well-regulated mind. I am very much ashamed of some people for retaining their reason, when they know perfectly well that if they were not the most stupid or the most selfish of human beings, they would become *non-compos* at once.—*Oliver Wendell Holmes*.

A HOLY POPE.

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INDOOR.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford, E.): 7.30, E. Burke, "Why Empires and Religions Decay."

OUTDOOR.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Edmonton Green): 7.45, W. Davidson, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.

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BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (King's Hall, Corporation-street): 7, F. E. Willis, "Blasphemy."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): J. T. Lloyd, 3, "Christianity, the Church, and History"; 6.30, "Vain Delusions." Tea at 5.

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