

THE Freethinker

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The simple diminution of the freedom of the press is enough to diminish the stature of a people.

—VICTOR HUGO.

Certainty.

AGNOSTICISM is a term that is open to all sorts of misunderstanding. To many people it signifies simply the doctrine of nescience, or the theory that no real knowledge is acquirable. Freethinkers are often described colloquially as *nothingarians*, that is, people without belief, knowledge, aim, or purpose. It is conveniently ignored that, as originally employed by Huxley, Agnosticism applied only to the supernatural. In point of fact, however, Freethinkers are earnest seekers after knowledge, knowledge being to them the staff of life. Even in relation to the supernatural, perhaps the majority of them are not willing to be called Agnostics, because they are so sure that there is no supernatural. An Atheist is the opposite of a Theist. It is the latter term that gives to the former its signification. A Theist is one who believes in God, and whose belief is sometimes so strong and blind that he is emboldened to say, "I know God." An Atheist believes that there is no God, and his belief, too, occasionally runs away with him until he is tempted to exclaim, "I know that there is no God." His claim to knowledge is, to say the least, quite as valid as that of the Theist. But in the absence of knowledge can there be any certainty? By certainty is meant assured conviction, conviction so strong that it completely shuts out all doubt. It is incontrovertible that without certainty life would be scarcely worth living. As Bonar, in *My Old Letters*, so aptly says:—

"That which is certain can alone set free;
It is uncertainty that makes us bondsmen."

It is a notorious fact that Christians are often in a state of the profoundest uncertainty. Their sky is frequently overcast with dark and heavy clouds of doubt and despair. At experience meetings the disciples are always bemoaning the weakness of their faith. Usually they put all the blame upon the Devil. Being a liar and the father of lies, he is openly accused of constantly trying to make them forget God and turn away from the Savior. There are very few Christians who are not at times tormented by unbelief, doubt, and fear. We have again and again heard the cry: "O! if I only knew; if I could but subdue this monster, doubt; if I were quite sure!" The religious life is generally full of such uncertainty. We find it sorrowfully expressed in the works of the most illustrious saints. Freethinkers, however, are entirely free from this mental torture. They have fought their doubts, "and gathered strength"; they have "faced the spectres of the mind and laid them," with the result that they now dwell in an atmosphere of serene peace and rest. It is customary to speak of them as Sceptics, but taking that word in its etymological meaning it cannot legitimately be applied to them. A genuine Freethinker is in no sense a doubter. With him certitude has become "a habit of mind," and certainty "a quality of propositions."

Take the existence of God. Atheism is the negation of every form of Theism. A Theist is not merely a person who believes that there is a God,

but rather a person who believes in and has a doctrine of God. Correspondingly, an Atheist is not simply one who disbelieves in the existence of God, but one who rejects every doctrine of God. When a man says, "I believe in God," he gives expression to no intelligible idea. As we listen to him we do not know what he means. Before we can either believe or disbelieve we must ascertain what definition he attaches to the word God. As everybody is aware, Greece had sixteen Gods and Goddesses, all of whom were supposed to be supernatural beings, which is equally true of such Oriental deities as Osiris, Adonis, Attis, and Mythra. No doubt all Christians are convinced that all those divinities were purely mythical; and we fully share their conviction. But when they repeat their own creed, saying, "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible," we beg to ask them, "Wherein does the God you believe in differ from those deities you reject as myths?" Time was when this Supreme Being, too, was one of many, when he was small enough to be carried about in a wooden chest, when he was known as "a man of war," and when his moral character was a disgrace to the tribe to which he belonged. In the Old Testament we find numerous instances of his anger, injustice, cruelty, and immorality. As a sample of the orders that came from him we take the following:—

"Of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth; but thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee" (Deut. xx. 16, 17).

When we point out that Jehovah, who was once believed to be capable of perpetrating the darkest and most criminal deeds, and the Christian God are one and the same being, it will be seen that in all the stages of his career he was a human creation. His worshipers have always been busily engaged on the task of reforming his character, or of bringing him up to the standard of the age. In reality the task is incapable of accomplishment. The consequence is that the divines are everlastingly making futile apologies for the object of their worship. Well, clearly, a Deity for whom his devotees have to be offering endless excuses cannot be an object of sane belief. Of his non-existence we are in no doubt whatever. We are absolutely certain that he is a myth. His very name is mocked at by the world he is said to have created.

We are equally certain that mankind are children of the earth. They are differentiated from the earth's other children only by the size and educability of their brain and the faculty of speech. In all other respects the resemblance between us and the higher animals is of the closest kind. The belief that we possess a soul or spirit, which all other animals lack, is utterly groundless. We are born, we grow and develop, and then decay and die in precisely the same manner as all other living things. The so-called desire for immortality is only a theological interpretation of the natural love of life which we share with all the animals. When we cry for help to some unknown, mysterious Power we only make fools of ourselves in Nature's eyes. Metaphorically speaking, she pities the man who is

entangled amongst "the fables of the Above"—

"She hears his wailful prayer,
When now to the Invisible he raves
To rend him from her, now his mother craves
Her calm, her care."

How well Meredith understood this great truth, and how beautifully he expresses it. One can easily realise of what enormous value the soul-theory has been and is to the Churches. Soul-saving and soul-feeding have proved their most profitable line of business. Special soul-catching campaigns are every now and then resorted to, when professional soul-catchers give exhibitions of their powers. When a revival is in progress everybody in its vicinity is asked, "Is your soul saved?" or "Is it well with your soul?" People brought up in the Churches take it for granted that they are endowed with souls which are naturally lost, and that their most pressing duty is to go and get them saved. After they have found their souls and got them saved, they will certainly lose them again unless they attend churches and chapels two or three times a week to have their requirements seen to by specially appointed soul-nourishers. Pastors of churches are shepherds of souls, and, judging by innumerable pulpit utterances, souls are as fond of wandering as sheep, and as difficult to find. At the present time they are extraordinarily wayward and perverse. They disappear from the fold in crowds, and the majority of them positively decline to be coaxed back. The truth is that the soul-theory is breaking up with great rapidity. People are beginning to perceive that the Buddhist no-soul theory is much truer to the facts of life. When Wordsworth sang—

"The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar,"

like Plato, he was only drawing upon his imagination. Both men believed that as long as the soul is in the body she is undergoing punishment of some sort, with the result that she loses her pristine purity and loveliness. That neither of them knew anything about the subject is proved by the fact that they flatly contradict each other. Plato maintains that after her incarnation the soul is trying hard to remember the life she lived and the things she knew prior to it, while Wordsworth is equally sure that whilst in the body pent she is quickly forgetting all about her previous existence. Well, we are quite as certain that man, in the totality of his being, is a child of the earth; that he begins his existence at birth and ends it at death; and that his chief duty is to make the most and best of his present life. On this point we do not cherish even the shadow of a doubt. All possible knowledge lies between birth and death. So far as the individual is concerned, birth begins and death ends all. With Freethinkers this is an absolute certainty.

God and the unseen world are creations of the fancy alone. Even ardent believers are often by no means sure of them, and they are nearly always aware of the possibility that their beliefs are not well founded. We are never worried by such misgivings, because we know that this earthly life, in proportion to its degree of conformity to Nature's laws, is well worth living; and its value depends, in each case, upon the benefit it confers upon the race. According to Meredith, Nature says to every one of us, "Live in thy offspring as I live in mine." In other words, we are instructed so to live as to leave the race a little stronger and richer than we found it. That this is man's chief end is an undeniable certainty; and as for Nature—

"Meanwhile on him, her chief
Expression, her great word of life, looks she."

J. T. LLOYD.

The Failure of Science.

WHEN someone remarked to Douglas Jerrold that the winters were not like they used to be, Jerrold replied "they never were." One is reminded of this

story when one reads long rigmaroles about the present being a time of change, or that the foundations of civilisation are threatened, etc. To those who lament that things are not now as satisfactory as they used to be, one feels inclined to reply "they never were." Was there ever a time when a certain number of people were not remarking that all things were changing, and looking back mournfully at the more settled times that had gone? You can find the same alarms, the same fears, the same doleful prophecies, any time during this last five hundred years at least. They are due, perhaps, to a want of perspective, perhaps to an over-developed egotism, perhaps to a want of grasp as to the real nature of national growth and intellectual development. Most probably all these things have something to do with the phenomenon.

Mr. Raymond A. Coulson has just brought to a conclusion a series of articles on the general failure of everything—including, one may observe, that of Mr. R. A. Coulson. For all that Mr. Coulson has made clear is that there is unrest—which has always been the case; that moral ideals are being questioned—which also is no new thing; that politics have not solved all our social problems—which, in the nature of the case, it can never do, and never really claims to do. We should all come very much nearer failure if there did not exist unrest, or if we were quite content that we had reached perfection in any of the directions noted. Change is one of the indications of life, and dissatisfaction with things as they are does not necessarily mean that all that has been done is a failure. It may mean, and often does mean, no more or less than the possibility of still further improvement. And there is nothing easier, cheaper, or less helpful than to dwell upon the shortcomings of science, or art, or sociology as though we had reached a state of intellectual bankruptcy. I admit it is a popular plan, because it requires no great penetration on the part of writers, and no great mental strain on the part of readers. One could point out more than one playwright or writer who has managed to achieve considerable popularity by these means.

Mr. Coulson's concluding words on the failure of everything in general is concerned with the failure of science. And his words here are just those of the average journalist who, because his business is to write glibly of any subject that turns up, has come to take himself quite seriously as an authority. Mr. Coulson explains that "about thirty years ago there was a tendency to imagine that science could give man an explanation of the universe," and "it was popularly supposed that 'scientific fact' and 'scientific proof' were the most unassailable of things, and that what science gave us we might at least be sure of." This turns out to have been quite a delusion. "Science is very useful as a tool by which we may take hold of the universe, but when it comes to presenting us with an idea of what the universe really is, there is no pea under the thimble."

"Modern science confesses that it does not know what light is, what heat is, what electricity is, what magnetism is, what matter is, what life is, what anything is. Radium, and subsequent discoveries of the the radio-activity of many bodies, have played havoc with Dalton's Atomic Theory, which was the foundation of chemistry. Biology knows nothing of the origin of life. Physics has lost the laws of matter in a new world of doubt.....The great laws of Nature, which up till a few years ago were regarded as unassailable and proved beyond question, are now held in doubt. For example, it is now admitted that Newtonian mechanics, on which our system of astronomy and much more of our knowledge is based, may not be absolutely true for the universe as was once thought, and that things may really work on a quite different system of laws."

Now, here is a style of writing that is very common, very mischievous, and quite false or misleading. It is the kind of chatter that results from knowledge that is only half digested, and gives ill-informed readers the impression that they are acquiring useful information. Above all, it gives a helping hand to those who are only too ready to

seize upon an assumed scientific failure as grounds for encouraging pure superstition. Let us take as an illustration of half-digested knowledge the statement that "Radium, and subsequent discoveries of the radio-activity of many bodies, have played havoc with Dalton's Atomic Theory." Mr. Coulson may be surprised to learn that this conclusion is pure nonsense. Dalton's Atomic Theory—the foundations of modern chemistry—remains exactly where it was and is quite unaffected by the discovery of radium. Dalton's laws of definite, multiple, and equivalent proportions are as true now as ever, and are not questioned by a single chemist. The statement that the Daltonian Atomic Theory has been upset by radium or by anything else, is simply absurd. What has been disturbed is the notion that the chemical atom was ultimate. Dalton thought it was; but his thinking so did not affect the laws of atomic action propounded by him in the slightest degree. Just as science advanced from the molecule to the atom, so it now advances to a still finer form of matter—the corpuscle, which builds up the atom as the atom builds up the molecule. As one of our foremost scientific writers remarks, the foundation of the atomic theory "is none the less firm because it is now realised that these indivisible atoms.....are themselves composed of smaller particles." If Mr. Coulson had submitted his article to the judgment of a friend with a little scientific knowledge, he would certainly have advised the deletion of the passage criticised.

And this brings me to another very common fallacy which Mr. Coulson popularises in his article. There are no "great laws of nature" that were a few years ago regarded as unassailable, but which are now held in doubt. A scientific "law" once established is true, *so far as it goes*. It may turn out, and sometimes does turn out, that other laws are discovered of a wider and more comprehensive character. It may also happen that the value of certain generalisations is at first over-estimated. This seems to be the case, for instance—although the point is not yet demonstrated—with the theory of natural selection. In this case, all that happens is that the operation of natural selection has to be supplemented by other processes. And even though it were true that the "Newtonian mechanics" may not be absolutely true for the whole universe, this would not affect the value of the "Newtonian mechanics" so far as they do extend. There is no proof of failure in any one of these instances. Scientific men are not at sea, and physics has not, as Mr. Coulson suggests, "fallen through the bottom of the cosmos." All it really means is that scientific generalisations are being continually enlarged. One stage is reached, and some people hastily conclude that it is ultimate. Then a further step is made, and the assumed ultimate is seen to be only a stage in a process. But this is not failure, and no one who understands scientific methods and appreciates scientific ideas considers it as such. It is only part of the growth of scientific certainty. The generalisations left behind are not discarded; they are usually the foundations on which wider ones are built.

One gets a little tired of correcting the delusion that science is ignorant on matters that admit of neither knowledge nor the opposite, but it must be done. Where is the modern science that confesses "it does not know what heat is, what electricity is, what magnetism is, what life is, what anything is"? Of course, I know that this is continually being said by all kinds of people; but it is sheer folly, nevertheless. It is all a question of "What went ye out for to seek?" If anyone goes about looking for light and heat and electricity, etc., apart from the special group of phenomena covered by those terms, it is certain his search will not be rewarded, and science will be unable to help him. And this for the simple reason that light and heat are not things apart from the phenomenon thus called, they are the phenomena. All that science means by light is vibrations that exceed a certain rate per second.

And when we have been told what this rate is, under what conditions it occurs—in other words, when we have the laws of the phenomenon stated—we really know all there is to know about it. Light is not something apart from vibratory phenomena, it is vibratory phenomena. There is no "is" apart from this. The question of what light is, or what heat is, apart from laws describing their occurrence, is not a scientific question at all; it is not even an intelligible question. It is a survival of metaphysics, which in turn was only a survival of the animistic theory of things. There is more to learn, true, about light and heat and other things, but to say we do not know what light and heat are, is downright nonsense.

It is, in brief, quite useless coming to science with a number of manufactured conundrums, and expecting an answer. To such questions no answer will be forthcoming. When a man like Sir Oliver Lodge says that even though the chemist were able to manufacture living beings, and describe accurately all the conditions under which vital phenomena are manifested, this would not be saying what life is, only describing the conditions under which life manifests itself, he is not talking science, but nonsense. The statement is scientifically unintelligible. It is exactly equal to saying that when we know under what conditions H_2O produces water, we have not shown what water is, but only described the conditions of its manifestation. Speculation on these lines is exactly equal to speculating as to what will happen when an irresistible force encounters an immovable object. It is easy to spend time on this question, but it is much more profitable to realise that it is downright nonsense. So also with talk such as has been noted concerning the failure of science. It is easy enough, but it is sheer futility. Its only positive consequence is the encouragement of frames of mind that are simply fatal to the spread of rational thought and orderly progress.

C. COHEN.

Science and the Soul.—III.

(Continued from p. 84.)

"Consciously or unconsciously, most men are influenced in all their general views, and, therefore, in their theory of life, by the dogma of personal immortality; and to this theoretical error must be added practical consequences of the most far-reaching character. It is our task, therefore, to submit every aspect of this important dogma to a critical examination, and to prove its untenability in the light of the empirical data of modern biology."—PROFESSOR ERNST HAECKEL, *The Riddle of the Universe* (1900), pp. 192-3.

"The idea of a future life is supported by not a single fact, while there is much evidence against it.....It is easy to see why the advance of knowledge has diminished the number of believers in the persistence of consciousness after death, and that complete annihilation at death is the conception accepted by the vast majority of enlightened persons."—PROFESSOR ELIE METCHNIKOFF, *The Nature of Man*, pp. 161-2.

"The thoughts to which I am now giving utterance, and your thoughts regarding them, are the expression of molecular changes in that matter of life which is the source of other vital phenomena."—PROFESSOR HUXLEY, *Lay Sermons*, p. 138.

"In the eye of science the animal body is just as much the product of molecular force as the stalk and ear of corn, or as the crystal of salt or sugar."—PROFESSOR TYNDALL, *Fragments of Science*, p. 417.

MODERN science knows nothing of the soul; it teaches that the mind is a product of matter, and that the higher intellectual faculties are a function of the grey matter of the brain.

No mysterious spiritual being lurks within us, forcing us to obey its imperious will, and surviving the decay and destruction of our bodily frame. Man's mind, like his body, is the outcome of the blind evolutionary forces of nature, and we can trace the path by which it evolved. As Professor Calderwood has observed:—

"The novelty of the situation lies in this, that man's alliance with all animal life has been established with a clearness and fullness of representation never before

possible in the history of the world. The long-hidden secrets of nature are disclosed, and behold! man has his heritage among the beasts of the field. The discovery is indeed a large one; the demonstration has been worked out in minute detail till no place is left for doubt."*

Or, as Lester Ward, the American evolutionist, puts it:—

"One revolution of the wheel of organisation evolved the living vegetable world; another culminated in the creation of sentient beings. Higher and higher has arisen the type, finer and finer has grown the product, till brain has become the ruling force, and man has emerged from that darkness which hitherto had never permitted Nature to contemplate herself."†

Mind, the highest product of evolution, which, he says, has been described as that which "sleeps in the stone, dreams in the animal, awakes in man."

The brain depends for its working upon the blood supply. If the blood circulates too rapidly, as in the case of drunkenness or fever, the ideas become confused. If a drop of water passes into the cranium, loss of memory follows. If the brain is flooded by the bursting of a blood-vessel, we have an apoplectic fit. Dr. Buchner asks:—

"If the mind, as spiritualists contend, be a thing independent or self-existing, and controlling or utilising matter, why is it so little able to defend itself against or repel these attacks? Why does it yield or succumb to a blow on the head, the commingling of a few drops of blood with the substance of the brain, a sunstroke, a few inhalations of chloroform, a few glasses of wine, or a few drops of opium, prussic acid, or other poison?"‡

Mind is a purely material product; more blood is supplied to the brain than any other organ. One-fifth of the blood in the body is constantly traversing the brain; and Professor Bain tells us that "thought exhausts the nervous substance as surely as walking exhausts the muscles."§ Gavarret found that "the blood which comes to the brain red and oxygenated, returns by the capillaries black and charged with carbonic acid."||

The ingenious researches of Dr. Byasson have shown that every brain cell in working expends its phosphorised materials, and that wearisome intellectual labor is followed by the presence in the urine of sulphates and phosphates, the waste products of the brain at work, "which serve as a chemical measure of the intensity of cerebral work done in a given time."¶ Dr. L'Heritier has also shown that "in old age and in a state of idiocy, the phosphorus contained in the brain is but one-half in quantity of what it used to be, and recedes in point of fact to the proportion contained in the brain of an infant."** These facts were summed up in the famous phrase of Moleschott, "Without phosphorus no thought!"

Then, again, the brain generates heat, when at work, just the same as the muscles do, although it never exceeds the twentieth of a degree Centigrade. Lombard, who was the first to experiment in this direction, gave reasons for thinking that "Every cause that attracts the attention—a noise, or the sight of an object or a person—produces elevation of temperature," which also occurs under the influence of an emotion, or during an interesting reading aloud.†† These experiments were conducted outside the cranium. The brain was not directly investigated. It remained for Professor Schiff, by directly experimenting upon the brain itself inside the skull, to demonstrate by means of thermoscopic instruments of extreme sensibility, that Lombard was right. Dr. Luys says:—

"Schiff, in his recent experiments, as ingeniously contrived as delicately executed, succeeded in demonstrating in a precise manner, that in the animal under experiment, the cerebral substance was subject to local increase of temperature, according as it was successively

excited by such and such kinds of sensorial impressions, and that thus, in the brain of a dog, which was made to hear unexpected sounds, such or such a region of the cortical substance was heated, and that in another, in which tactile, olfactory, or gustative sensations was excited, other regions of the brain were reciprocally erethised and heated in an isolated manner."*

Which, being interpreted for the plain man, means that a different part of the brain was brought into action, and rose in temperature, for every sense that was exercised. Thus, one part of the brain was brought into action by hearing, another by seeing, another by feeling, another by taste, and another by smell; which proves, as Luys remarks, that this inward labor of the mind reveals itself by sensible signs, and "the brain, like a muscle in action, manifests its dynamic power by a local increase of heat, appreciable by the instruments of the physical laboratory" (p. 76).

Thus we understand, says the same writer, how prolonged efforts of the mind, and "sustained intellectual work is accompanied by a loss of phosphorised substance on the part of the cerebral cell in vibration, that it uses it up like an ignited pile which is burning away its own essential constituents." He points out that "Sleep is to the brain what needful repose is to our fatigued limbs, the necessary condition of its health," and numbers have sown the seed of brain disease "who through reiterated vigils and exaggerated expenditures of activity, have thus passed the physiological limit of the resources at their disposal, and incurred expenditure above their receipts." The same author cites the case "of a celebrated lawyer, who lost his memory in consequence of too-long-continued intellectual work"; and of "a similar case which occurred in a German savant, after an intense concentration of mind" †

When the brain becomes weary, its energy diminishes, the flow of blood to it becomes less, and the brain tissue becomes insensibly bloodless. The condition of comparative bloodlessness in the brain during sleep, says Dr. Luys,—

"has been directly proved by different observers; thus Coldwell, in the case of a wound in the head, with loss of substance in the bones of the cranium, observed that when the patient was plunged in deep and peaceful sleep, the brain remained almost immovable in its envelope, but that when he was dreaming it increased in volume, and when the dream was vivid it protruded through the opening. Blumenbach, in an analogous case, similarly remarked that the brain subsided during sleep, and that waking was accompanied by a more or less considerable afflux of blood, and an augmentation of volume" (p. 75).

The same writer records a case which came under his personal observation. "In a patient affected with melancholia, with prolonged stupor ending with death, I succeeded in discovering a most characteristic condition of anæmia of the cerebral substance, which was as it were washed clean and deprived of sanguine material" (p. 248). Now, the crucial question arises—Why, if our thoughts are due to an immaterial soul, or spirit, should they be affected by the quantity, or quality, or rate of circulation of blood supply to the brain? Why should the power of thought, and the intellectual faculties, cease altogether with the withdrawal of the blood from the brain?

W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

Hope Deferred.

RECENTLY, in my portion of the country, the solemn-faced gentlemen have been greatly distressed. Not that this deserves comment: they are easily perturbed by the fluctuations of the pew rents; but some of the mental margarine they produce while in this state is of the well-advertised, heavy-weight quality, and gives occasion for the presence of an inspector.

* Luys, *The Brain and its Functions*, p. 68.

† Luys, *The Brain and its Functions*, pp. 78-79.

* Professor Henry Calderwood, *Evolution and Man's Place in Nature* (1893), p. 261.

† Lester Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, vol. ii., p. 74.

‡ Ludwig Buchner, *Force and Matter*, p. 291.

§ Bain, *Mind and Body*, p. 80.

|| Luys, *The Brain and its Functions*, p. 70.

¶ Luys, *The Brain and its Functions*, 70.

** Buchner, *Force and Matter*, pp. 272-3.

†† Luys, *The Brain and its Functions*, p. 76.

It seems that the majority of the people, who are factory workers and miners, are gradually becoming more and more demoralised. Pleasure is eating into the heart of their life, like a cancer germ; and the pastors would like to operate and destroy it. There is too much frivolity; too much demand for excitement; too great a request for amusement nowadays. This, we are told, leads to a social instability directly antagonistic to the teachings of Christianity. It means that the serious aspect of life as an aviation garage and training field is being very sadly neglected. It means that the vision is dulled with tears, and the heart crinkled with care, and only ignorance mistakes those tears for the pearls of the laughter of fools, and the crinkles for the physical contortions of merriment. It means that Religion is losing its supremacy.

Of course, we do not accuse Christianity of being responsible for this social demoralisation; not at all, despite its supremacy. We are only now discovering what *real* Christianity, and *real* Religion, are. Hitherto, the people have been blinded by sectarian prejudice. Although convinced of the truth of their beliefs, our forefathers had not the educational resources afforded us, and consequently their attitude towards the divine wisdom was rather constrained, and, in many cases, led to a false interpretation of the Word of God. Logically, therefore, one cannot very well impute to the *true* Christianity of to-day the responsibility for the existent social evils.

Anyone who suggests that the Christianity of contemporary life and that of yesterday are practically the same is a monstrously bad logician, and the truth is not in him. Should he assert that the religion of our grandparents exercised so powerful a mental influence in favor of social conservatism that it delayed progress, he becomes a suspicious character. And if he assert that this *real* Christianity of the present is no more than divine "swank" of the ordinary Christianity of the past, and is as much responsible for the continuation of social degradation as anything else, economic or otherwise, he is a man who should be treated like a naughty child: hunger lock-out.

Suppose you say that dirty horrible work coarsens the mind, and that the rough mind seeks rude pleasures. Suppose you say that ten hours' hideous monotony demands fleshly excitement, and that the cravings of an ill-educated mind can only be appeased by a glare and glitter the cultured mind would despise. Suppose you say that the child brain is moulded by its environment, and if the surroundings, mental and material, be unrefined, the child brain will become like them. And suppose you say that Christianity has flirted with, and fawned upon, in the past and in the present, nearly every influence that tended to prolong the coarseness of human life. Moreover, suppose you prove, as the Freethinker can prove, that the vaunted power of Christianity is indictment enough; then can you honestly say that Christianity is not in the least responsible for the very demoralisation its prating professors bemoan?

All this verbal whip-cracking about social demoralisation on the part of priests is so much sound, proving they are the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Hope deferred invariably gave the religionist delirium tremens of the tongue if that organ happened to be loosely hung in the making, or creating, by God. Jesus Christ, according to modern interpretation, suffered from this deferred hope of an earthly paradise. So suffered they all, down through the centuries, *vid* Savonarola to Mr. Campbell. Not contented with the prospect of an eternity of woodbines and threeha'penny, they wished cigars and champagne here; and they all took the same way in their irrational methods of ridding the world of its demoralisation.

Emphasising a good thing is, psychologically, an excellent procedure if one desires the ultimate realisation of it. Dwelling persistently on a bad thing accentuates it. Every priest who agonised under this deferred hope foolishly com-

manded the people to fling off long-accustomed habit, as one flings off an overcoat. In other words, his dream of regeneration could only be accomplished by a social miracle, absolutely impossible. Every tongue-twitching priest has laid all his verbal weight upon the bad thing, sublimely ignorant of the fact that only a long course of educational emphasis upon the advantages of the good thing will elevate the social mind to its level.

Society is only a child yet in many respects. Punctiliousness over a fault evokes dourness, stubbornness. Emphasise evil and you manure it by increasing its influence; but emphasise the good and simultaneously the bad is relegated to desuetude and the influence of the good develops. The social mind can only be successfully treated in a similar manner.

Sometimes we are inclined to the belief that the religious idea of a sudden and complete conversion of the individual is responsible for the opinion of the possibility of a lightning-like removal of social degeneration by the grace of God. Ministers of the gospel seem to imagine the only requirement to be a turning to God. They forget that the customs of centuries are stronger than the power of deity. God may rule angels; he does not rule humanity. He may reorganise the population of paradise by a wave of his mighty arm; but the same method is useless with the people of the earth.

It is an extremely difficult thing to aver that the typical representative of the "Have-nots" of contemporary times is rougher in the grain than the Chinese peasant of the year 9999 B.C., or the Egyptian carpenter of the same year, or the Assyrian tent-dweller of 2345 B.C., or the Roman slave, or the Gallilean fisherman of the time of Jesus Christ. It is an extremely dangerous assertion to say that the masses of to-day are more demoralised than the masses of any other semi-historical period in the evolution of society. It is futile to dogmatise on the subject in the absence of sound knowledge.

The ministerial rumpus concerning the "Materialism" of the people is as ancient as the first fully credentialed medicine-man, who, very probably, used the wickedness of his fellow-barbarians as an excuse for surrounding himself with legions of bad spirits. It is a trick of the trade, a survival of religious savagery.

Priestcraft has always aspired to be socially dominant. When it discovered inimical forces in operation, immediately it endeavored to raise a dust around them to distract attention. And what was more convenient at any time in the world's history than the social degradation of the "Have-nots"? The Holy Bible is prolific in examples of this religious characteristic. Every prophet was missioned to lead the people to a land flowing with milk and honey. Christ is the best instance of all. His estimation of the people's Materialism was concentrated in the opprobrious phrase "generation of vipers." Like them all, he suffered from hope deferred. Like them all, past and present, his mission in life was miraculously to cure the masses of their Materialism. And, like them all, he failed.

If the name "Have-nots," and its inevitable social coarseness, have to disappear from the memories of man, the change will certainly not be accomplished successfully by emphasising the black places; nor by painting a fancy heaven on the skies of poverty's hope; nor by keeping men's minds supernaturalistic; nor by enshrining autocracy on a purple throne in paradise. But the change may take place after centuries of the application of materialistic science, after centuries of the teaching of Humanism, when the average mind has been taught to honor human justice, when it has been taught to be rational.

ROBERT MORELAND.

Rev. Caller: "Well, Mrs. Mangles, and is the good man any better?"

Mrs. Mangles: "Oh, yes, sir. 'E's nearly all right agen, sir. 'E don't say 'is prayers no more of a night now, sir."

Acid Drops.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* says that "Mr. Balfour has laid the country under an obligation by the delivery of his Gifford Lectures." We should have thought that he was fairly well paid by the £500 he received for the "delivery." Besides, he ought to feel easier after it.

Mr. Balfour is back from his Glasgow lectures on "God" and once more engaged in fanning the flames of religious bigotry in Ireland. The "classes" have always used the "masses" in this way. Comte was right when he said that "God" was the figure-head of a hypocritical conspiracy against mankind.

Drop religious bigotry and what "Irish question" would be left? "To hell with the Pope!" and "To hell with King William!" cover the whole wretched situation.

Without arguing the question of Home Rule, which is a political question, and outside the scope of this journal, we once argued that it was a mistake, in any case, to assume that "Home Rule meant Rome Rule." That aspect of the case is quite within our province. If it isn't we have no province at all. We have no time to argue the point again now, but we abide by what we wrote then. Imagine our astonishment at finding this made almost an excuse, by a "saint" we should never have expected to take up such an attitude, for not attending the recent Annual Dinner under the auspices of the N. S. S. The gentleman's language was sufficiently emphatic. We overlook that fact, however, for it is really not Freethought but politics that breeds too little regard for what the late Lord Chief Justice Coleridge called "the decencies of controversy." What we wish to say is that the "saint" in question is quite wrong in stating that the N. S. S. has committed itself in any way to any solution of the Irish or any other problem of party politics. It has been one of the President's most difficult duties to maintain this neutral policy, but he has always been supported at critical moments by the good sense of the party. Secularists are not all of one way of thinking in politics, sociology, and ethics; and if they are to keep together and work together as Secularists it must be exclusively upon the grounds on which they are not only practically but necessarily agreed. Humanism as opposed to superhumanism—understanding the words in a fairly wide sense—is the basis of combination amongst Secularists. There are other Societies for the promotion of other objects, and Secularists are free to join them individually just like other citizens. This is the only sensible and successful policy in a complicated life of modern civilisation.

It cannot be deduced, however, from this wise principle of action that the editor of the *Freethinker*—which, by the way, does not belong to and is not in any way controlled by the N. S. S. or any other Society—is debarred from holding and stating a view of what is but incidentally an aspect of the Home Rule question; holding that view as a Freethinker and stating it to his readers as Freethinkers. The purely religious and ecclesiastical part of an Irish problem is as open to our criticism as the same part of an English problem is. Suppose a Secularist who happened to be a Conservative called upon us to abstain from hostile criticism of the Church of England. Suppose a Secularist who happened to be an orthodox Liberal called upon us to abstain from hostile criticism of a Government Education Bill. Suppose the same person rebuked us for speaking more or less contemptuously of Mr. Lloyd George's excursions in the region of Nonconformist religion. What should we say in reply? We should say, of course, that these things were what the *Freethinker* existed for—that we were strictly attending to our own business—and that it might be as well if such correspondents tried to do the same. We fight religion, we fight churches, we fight priesthoods, and we are really not going to be warned off our work by apprehensive political partisans of any variety whatsoever. We may displease even friends now and then, but that is the highest form of courage. Displeasing your enemies is rather a luxury.

The Government promises a new Education Bill in the present session. Four bills have already been introduced and either lost or dropped by Mr. Asquith's lieutenants who have occupied the Education Ministry. Another lieutenant is to be responsible for the fifth bill—which will almost certainly share the fate of its predecessors. This is well known to the Government, but it is bound to do something to keep the Nonconformists quiet. The new measure is to

be something short and sweet, dealing with single-school areas only, and virtually giving the Nonconformists control of the Church schools—and, indeed, all other schools—in such districts by establishing "Cowper Temple Teaching" and making Anglicans, Catholics, Jews, Freethinkers, and all other bodies, fight or finesse for any other kind of education they may prefer. Dr. Clifford is not ashamed to patronise this detestable swindle. And the Government is not ashamed to patronise Dr. Clifford.

A correspondent advises us to test Dr. Clifford's shibboleth of "no tests for teachers" by getting an Atheist teacher to apply to give the Bible lesson and then to tell the children the plain truth. If the Nonconformists mean what they say they would let him go on without interference. Quite true. But we know they don't mean what they say, and that the teacher who tested their honesty would soon be out of employment. If he could afford it, or others could afford it for him, he might try the experiment. Not otherwise.

How stupidly people will talk when religious ideas dominate their thinking! Here is Mr. Lloyd George assuring a Glasgow audience that "one deep, underlying principle" of all sound land laws is that "the land in all countries was created by Providence for the benefit of all those who dwell therein." Providence means one thing, but the Dukes determine another! What a Providence! What a Chancellor! How presumptuous to think that, if the Dukes can get the better of God Almighty, they can't get over the Liberal Government! Really what Mr. George is saying is, "It was all very well while these great landowners only had God Almighty to bother about. Then they did as they liked. But now they have me; and God plus Lloyd George is a combination they will not so easily get over." And it is these men who complain of Freethinkers treating God disrespectfully!

Over a hundred years ago the French people found that the aristocracy had also overcome Providence, as Mr. Lloyd George says that our own aristocracy has done. So they put Providence on one side, rightly deciding that that kind of Providence was not worth bothering about. And they settled the land question in the name of *Man*. We are still lagging behind, troubling our silly heads about the designs of Providence. As though the Dukes are not as much part of those designs as Mr. Lloyd George.

"Many a Christian minister," says Dean Inge, "found in politics a welcome refuge from preaching dogmas in which they no longer actively believed, and which bored their congregations." This is only a polite way of saying that Christian preachers are being paid for preaching what they don't believe, and that some of them evade this by preaching what they are not paid for. And Dean Inge, being one of the trade, ought to know. Of course, everyone knows this to be the case; but is there any other profession save that of the ministry about which such a confession would be made? People in other professions may be equally dishonest, but they do not openly admit it. The striking thing is that the dishonesty of the clergy in this direction is accepted as something that is part of the established order.

Dean Inge added that "a man must be either a saint or a humbug to preach the gospel in its pure unalloyed form." "Either a fool or a liar" is the plain English of this sentence.

We wonder under which class of parsons Dean Inge himself comes when he says that the groan of horror that went up over the loss of the *Titanic*, and the question how one could reconcile that with the belief in a good God, carried humanitarianism "to an unmanly absurdity. Christianity was, after all, an austere creed. It taught them to be ready to suffer, and was not always reluctant even to inflict pain for a higher good." Well, will Dean Inge tell us what "higher good" was achieved by the loss of the *Titanic*? Does he really believe it did good? If so, why not arrange for a few more ships to be wrecked in the same way? As a matter of fact, no one believes the loss of the *Titanic* was a good thing. Dean Inge himself does not believe it. And such unadulterated nonsense could find a place nowhere but in the pulpit.

Truthful James once asked the question, "Is Our Civilisation a Failure?" and Dean Inge, the gloomy follower of the Man of Sorrows, laments that laymen think for themselves instead of obeying their pastors without question, and that

the pulpit is invaded. Worse remains, for all this means fewer threepenny-bits in the collection plates.

New York Spiritualists are claiming to have received messages from the late Mr. W. T. Stead. It refers to the "beautiful and touching tribute to his memory paid by those who strewed flowers on the waters of the Atlantic at the spot where the *Titanic* went down." We should hardly have thought that so trivial a thing would be occupying Mr. Stead's attention; and the flowers squandered on the Atlantic might have been more sensibly and humanely bestowed upon hospitals or other public institutions, where a gleam of beauty may lighten even the load of pain. Besides, messages of this kind are easily made up on the present side of "the great Beyond." Mr. Stead's ghost should communicate something more original. But this is the worst feature of all the messages in the world from "the bourne from whence no traveller returns." They reveal nothing—they inform us of nothing we did not know before—they give us no real tidings of the alleged future life. They leave unbroken the silence and the darkness of the tomb.

Not one of the occult people has been able to throw a ray of light upon the recent murder mysteries. They and their supposed instructors in the spirit world are just as ignorant and helpless as other people. Yet it ought not to be so. If the late Mr. Stead can see flower-strewing on the Atlantic, some other spirit could see the murder of the little boy Starchfield in a railway train. But the police get no help from that quarter. They have to rely upon their own researches. And if they fail a murderer is allowed to walk about freely in human society.

It cannot be too often mentioned that the late Mr. Henry Labouchere kept a £1,000 Bank of England note locked up in a safe for many years, and publicly offered to give it to any Spiritualist, Theosophist, or other "occult" person who could discover its identity. None of them could read it. None of them had a "spirit" friend who could supply the requisite information. "Labby" knew his note was safe.

A lady, seeing a portrait of the Bishop of London in full episcopal rig-out in a shop window, said, "How original." Her husband, who was with her, rejoined, "You mean aboriginal."

We have the Bishop of London's word for it that 243 churches have been consecrated in his diocese during the last fifty years. We beg to remind his lordship that there has been a great increase in lunatic asylum accommodation during the same period.

The Bishop of London appears to be about to imitate St. Simon Stylites. Speaking at a Temperance Demonstration at the Queen's Hall, he said he "was not going to sit down with a £161,000,000 drink bill and a public-house at the corner of nearly every street." He may resume his seat almost immediately by advising churchpeople to discontinue the use of "Communion Port" at one and-three a bottle. Something at about ninepence would enable believers to take up their crosses and follow their Savior.

At a recent concert in a provincial town the program included "Star of Eve" and "Adam's 'Comrades' Song of Hope." The latter should have been written as a duet, unless the talking snake volunteered to make it a trio.

Lecturing at Forest Hill, a returned Congo missionary told the audience how to be a witch-doctor, assuring them that a man must be cunning, unscrupulous, and have a knowledge of human nature. He need not have troubled about the recipe, for we are plagued with 50,000 of the creatures in England.

An ex-South African missionary writes in the *Christian Commonwealth* apropos of the Kikuyu controversy:—

"Next to the importation of 'Christian' vices and immorality, and 'Christian' ardent liquor, the worst evil that Christianity has imported is its 'sectarianism.' Tribal jealousy and rivalry were innocent enough in days when the different Bantu racial sub-divisions clubbed each other in dispute of the possession of the earth, compared with the rivalry that sectarian Christianity has brought into the hearts of the black people of Africa."

This missionary, Mr. H. E. Sampson, describes at length the quarrels, the ill-feeling, and the exclusiveness of rival "kraals," the denizens of which have been converted by missionaries of different sects. One thing appears plain.

In general good fellowship the natives can give the proselytising Christians "points."

Rev. Professor D. S. Cairns is delivering a course of lectures at Aberdeen on "The Reasonableness of Christian Faith." Their value may be gauged by his laying great emphasis on the fact that "Science has once and for all established that religion was practically a universal thing." This is what one may call an example of the pulpit art of telling the truth while suggesting its opposite. Of course, science has shown religion to be universal. But it is not the universality but the truth of religion that is denied. And Professor Cairns carefully abstained from telling his hearers that while science had shown religion to be universal, it had also shown that it was based on pure delusion, and that, with the removal of the delusion, the basis of religion crumbles. Universality proves nothing—except universality. Lying is universal, so is theft, so are various diseases. These things have always been, they are still, and will remain for a long time yet. All we can hope to do is to diminish their range. And this is really what the world is doing all the time in the case of religion.

We are surprised it doesn't strike thoughtful religionists that the universality of religion is a much stronger argument for its falsity than for its truth. God and the soul, heaven and hell, ghosts and goblins, are not things that man discovers as he increases in knowledge. He finds them while he is steeped in ignorance. He does not doubt them while he is ignorant; doubts only begin as he acquires solid knowledge. The savage who blunders everywhere else, is assumed to be on the right track here. He could not understand his body, but he knew all about his "soul." He could not understand this world, but he knew all about the next. Now, if the savage were ignorant of religion, and the civilised man discovered it, or invented it, a much stronger argument could be made out on its behalf. Religion is only universal because the majority of the world's inhabitants are still uncivilised or only partly civilised. And it is least universal—if the expression be permissible—where learning and civilisation are greatest.

Mr. Bob Sievier says that "The Disestablishment of the Welsh Church is a sin." We may take his word for it. He is considered to be something of an authority on that subject.

What a dear little word is "more" in uncertain accents from the lips of baby when she (by preference *she*) appreciates something you have given her. Poor *Oliver Twist* was not allowed to ask for "more" of anything he liked, and that was one of the worst signs of the child's misery. But it mustn't be supposed that Mr. Bumble and his fraternity are dead even yet. A film of scenes from *Oliver Twist* has been prohibited by the Censor. The gentleman is afraid that Charles Dickens would corrupt the good people of Munich and give any amount of trouble to the authorities—not to mention the clergy.

Tit-Bits—of all papers!—has been collecting opinions as to whether picture palaces should open on Sunday or not. Father Vaughan replies, "Why not?" He adds that no place of amusement should open on Sunday morning, that "ought to be left sacred for Church services." Quite a charming reservation in favor of a special trade interest. Besides, to do the Catholic Church justice, it has always favored a more "human" Sunday than the other Churches. Sir John Kirk, representing the other Churches, thinks they ought to be closed, because of their "probable influence upon the morals of the country." As though they could exert a worse influence than Church and Chapel. Mr. William Le Queux, Mr. John Hassal, and the Manager of Pear's Soap, also favor their opening. So does Sir Joseph Lyons, although, as he happens to be a Jew, we do not see what status he has in the matter. It is a funny world! A Jewish Lord Chief Justice had to decide recently a religious dispute between two sections of the Christian Church, and might even be called upon to sentence a Freethinker for ridiculing the Christian religion; and another Jew is asked his opinion about the Christian Sabbath. Oh for a sense of humor among the people! Most of our troubles would soon be at an end.

Meanwhile, we are surprised that some journal does not collect the opinions of the proprietors of picture shows as to the opening of Churches on Sunday evenings. We feel certain they must keep a lot of people away from the cinemas. And we are also convinced that a very strong case could be made out for presentation to the Home Secretary.

The Chosen People have for a good many years been deserting the old world for the new. There are said to be nearly a million Jews in New York. It is calculated that 40,000 mourners walked in the funeral procession behind the corpse of a Jewish comedian named Mogulesco the other day. A choir of 1,000 voices sang funeral dirges. Evidently the conversion of the Jews to Christianity is too tough a job for the present machinery and its operators. Jesus will have to pay them another visit, and even that won't be of much use unless it is a great deal more successful than the first appears to have been.

Fashionable Paris is running after Bergson. Ladies faint in the panting crowd. One knows what the end of this must be. And it is never very long between "Hosanna!" and "Crucify Him!"

It appears that the latest heresy of the Rev. Dr. Aked—first of Liverpool, then of New York, and now of San Francisco—has aroused the ire of the Presbyterian Association, which has intimated that his resignation would be acceptable. What will he do next? He might leave the pulpit altogether if he took Freethought in less homœopathic doses.

The Dean and Chapter of Canterbury have sanctioned the holding of a musical performance in the Cathedral with a charge for seats. The Free and Open Church Association calls it a "desecration" of the holy edifice "thus to convert it into a music hall." But suppose it gets used by-and-bye for a cinema show? It may. You never can tell.

Mackirdy's Weekly, a new periodical, has exalted aims, among which is to preach "that God is just, and to show that Christianity is good to work on, good to rest on." The first proposition is, we fear, beyond the powers of a lady journalist, and our dear friends, the clergy, have shown their flocks how to rest on the Gospel very comfortably.

The latest Gentle Jesusite wills run small. Rev. Oliver Raymond, rector of Middleton, Essex, left £6,180. Rev. Walter Hensell Gough, of Horsham, Sussex, left £6,759. Rev. Canon George Harrison Ross-Lewin, of Benfieldshire, Durham, left £10,048. Rev. Dr. Edward Maguire, of Ardmore, Bangor, Co. Down, left £8,559. But the aquarium boasts of one whale to several fish. Rev. Dr. Frederick Preston-Joy, of the Close, Winchester, left £42,985.

February 1 was a "go-to-church Sunday" in the United States. Invitations to attend were accompanied by milk-bottles, bread, and other gifts of eatables, and the result was the Brooklyn worshipers rose from 300,000 to 500,000 and the Chicago worshipers from 500,000 to 1,500,000. America seems to beat India in the matter of "rice Christians."

According to the Berlin correspondent of the *Christian World*, Otto Boruska, a Protestant watchmaker in Austria, was recently sentenced to a week's imprisonment for not falling on his knees at the passing of the "host," carried by a priest through the streets. The sentence was appealed against, and the heretic won his case, because the Court of Appeal considered that he had done nothing which was offensive. The revival of persecution is not confined to England.

According to orthodox apologists, civilisation is itself owing to the prevalence of the Christian religion. What do they make of the fact that during the few years of its existence the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has dealt with two and a-half millions of cases of cruelty against little ones, very many of whom were under two years of age? The putting in force of the Blasphemy Laws by the authorities is a clear proof that the Government is a religious one.

It is stated that Canon Fleming's sermon, *Recognition in Eternity*, has realised £1,760 since its publication in 1892. The clergy, who have made millions out of the Sermon on the Mount, will not think much of the canon's little explosion.

Although some of the daily papers have discreetly avoided mentioning the fact, the trouble in the Herefordshire schools has arisen in Church schools, where the staffs are as wretchedly underpaid as organists, bellringers, choirboys, and pew-openers. Strikes have caused the closing of over sixty schools, but in a few cases the dear clergy have

attempted the rôle of strike-breakers with the assistance of lady friends, whose only qualification seems to be that they are "over fifteen and vaccinated."

A woman fortune-teller has been sentenced at Guernsey to eight days' imprisonment for witchcraft. What with blasphemy prosecutions in England and a recrudescence of trials for witchcraft, "God's Englishman" seems to be slipping back to "chaos and old night."

The *Daily Mail* recently devoted a column to Voltaire, and wound up by declaring "that he was the greatest master of irony the world has ever known." Exactly! And he wouldn't have thought much of the scrap-irony of Carmelite House.

Reviewing the newly-found notebook of Voltaire's, published by the *English Review*, the *Daily Mail* says that "there are also touches of the boyish blasphemy which justified the hatred that all believers cherished for the philosopher." Voltaire lived to be over eighty years of age, and he was profane most of the time, and we believe that Christians liked the profanities of the master less than the efforts of his 'prentice days.

Some of the passages from Voltaire's private notebook are strong enough; the following, for instance, which embodies an old story about a tough piece of the "body of Christ" in the holy communion—and which it must have taken a good deal of courage to print in the *English Review*—

"There was a parson in France, who for to saunter away the time was playing one day in the morning at piquet, with his own whore. In the meantime, some good countrymen, and great many devout women were at loss round about the altar, in order to communicate, and waiting upon their knees for their parson. The clerk of the church comes in a great hurry to his master. Make haste, says he, good sire, come to administer god to your people. The parson rises on a sudden, leaves off his game, kisses his whore, takes up his wafers box, but by mistake, he puts in some counters of ivory of the same figure wherewith he plaid, and he runs to the altar as he was distributing god in wafers to the people. He gives to one old woman an ivory counter instead of a wafer. This old jade, after having received her portion of god, sneaks into a secret part of the church to pray and collect herself; she wonders at first she can't swallow up the host. She endeavours to chew it, but in vain, at last she goes to the priest in the vestry: Good sir, sais she, I believe you gave me god the father, so he is tough and hard."

There are many variants of this pious old story, but they are all essentially similar. The unchewable wafer is, as the Dutch communicant said, "de ole man himselben."

Bedford brewers attempted a 'cute bargain and failed. They applied for a full licence for a house to be erected on a new estate, and they let it be known that if it were granted they would give a site for a church on the same estate. But the magistrates were not to be caught so easily. Perhaps they concluded that one church was a poor offset to one public-house.

Adversity makes strange bedfellows, and newspapers make strange companions. There were two headings and two portraits in contiguous columns of the *Daily Chronicle* on February 7. One heading was "Sack Murder Verdict"—the other was "Three New Bishops." One portrait was George Ball, the Liverpool murderer—the other was the Rev. Watts-Ditchfield, the new Bishop of Chelmsford. So singular are the methods of the "great Creator" that the murderer was the better looking of the two.

For the first time in the history of Winchester Prison, a confirmation service has been conducted by the Bishop of Winchester, eight candidates being presented. The Bishop of Rochester conducted a similar service at the Borstal convict establishment. It will be a pleasant distinction not to be a Christian presently.

Evan Roberts's poor old mother is dead at last. The operation she underwent a short while ago could not save her life. She wanted to see her boy before she died, but he would not see her. He had the impudence to tell her that her sin had separated her from him; her sin being no more than her inability to believe the spiritual claims he set up on his own behalf. The vain creature hugs himself still as God's favorite. And if the New Testament be true he is a thoroughly sound Christian. He realises the terrible text about hating one's father and mother for Christ's sake.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

March 1, Glasgow; 22, Manchester.

To Correspondents.

- W. PALMER.—We have friends enough, if the deed were as good as the will, to be free from all financial worries.
- J. D. JOHNSON.—Received. We are writing to you on the matter.
- P. M. W.—Acknowledged as desired. Thanks for personal good wishes.
- A. E. WILLIAMS.—See paragraph.
- R. WALLIS.—May your good wishes be realised.
- E. W. COOPER.—Your subscription is passed on to our publishing department. Glad to hear you "look forward eagerly" to the *Freethinker* every Thursday and "consider it an intellectual treat." We don't see what can be done in the lecturing line in South Wales at present. People care there for little else than party politics, prize-fighting, and football. Another revival might give Freethought another opportunity.
- W. DAVIDSON.—It seems impossible for these Christian Evidence people to quote anything correctly.
- E. B.—Much obliged for cuttings.
- D. C. DRUMMOND.—Thanks for your warm good wishes.
- "LEMINGTON."—It has been a difficult "tiller" to hold, but we have done our best, as Bradlaugh knew we would when he passed over to us the President's hammer.
- W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.
- F. S. L.—Mr. Foote's booklet *Darwin on God*, price 6d., contains what you want. Pleased to hear you like this journal so much that you wish it were published oftener.
- JAMES NEATE.—With Mr. Quinton as M.C. you should have a good time on March 1.
- R. OGLVIE.—We have read your encouraging letter with pleasure.
- A. WELLS.—Your efforts to promote our circulation must surely have had some success; if not, they deserved it.
- P. C. H.—Thanks for your pleasant message through Miss Vance.
- W. H. MORRISH.—Glad to see your signature after "Your old chum." Good old comforting word used in our boyhood!
- S. B.—Thanks for "best wishes and keen appreciation" of our work.
- BRANDON T. BRIERLEY.—Acknowledgment may not be "necessary," but we prefer it when not forbidden—for many reasons. "No better literature than our *Freethinker* ever enters my doors" is good reading at this end.
- J. BREESE.—No one gave us a hint that publicity was not desired. That would have prevented all the trouble. We are sorry that you think we meant to be personally offensive. You are one of the last men in Birmingham that we should have chosen to insult.
- WHEN the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Shop Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months 2s. 8d.

The President's Honorarium Fund.

To the Freethinkers of Great Britain.

January, 1914.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—

We renew our appeal on behalf of the above Fund, which is now so well known to the Freethought party that its object may be stated in a very few words. It is sought to relieve Mr. G. W. Foote—President of the National Secular Society, Chairman of the Secular Society (Ltd.), and Editor of the *Freethinker*—of his worst financial worries, so that he may be as free as possible to devote his time and energies to his work as the leader of the militant Freethought movement in this country. We suggested that £800 a year might be raised in this way

and placed at his disposal. We are happy to say that the average has reached that amount.

A generous subscriber made up the deficit of some £20 in 1912, and another friend offered to make up any deficit in 1913. Happily but £8 odd was necessary. Perhaps it will become a fashion for the £800 to be made up fully in this manner.

Mr. Foote's income from other sources at present is more restricted than ever. He intends to explain this matter himself very shortly. In the meanwhile we have to assure the Freethought party that the time has not arrived when they might think of diminishing their subscriptions to this Fund.

With regard to the *Freethinker*, we are sorry to learn from Mr. Foote that it still yields him no salary. The business of the Pioneer Press (including the *Freethinker*) has turned the corner from loss to profit; but the latter is as yet scarcely worth a mention.

All subscriptions received have been acknowledged week by week in the *Freethinker*, and will continue to be acknowledged in that way.

Subscriptions for 1914 can be forwarded to either of the undersigned. Those who prefer to do so can send, as before, direct to Mr. Foote himself, at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, London, E.C.

Subscribers who do not wish their names to appear in print should state the form of acknowledgment they prefer.

We are aware that all subscribers cannot conveniently respond to this appeal at once, but we hope a great many will do so as early as possible.

Yours faithfully,

J. W. DE CAUX, J.P.,
92 St. Peter's-road, Gt. Yarmouth.

R. T. NICHOLS, M.D.,
28 Park-road, Ilford.

A. J. FINCKEN,
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London, N.

First List of Subscriptions.

J. M. Gimson, £2; D. C. Drummond, 10s.; A Friend, 1s.; "Lemington," £1; L. Gjemre, £2; W. H. Morrish, £1; A. C. Brown, 5s.; W. Dodd, 10s.; W. Palmer, 2s.; P. M. W., £1; F. G. Margetson, 5s.; A. W. Hey, 10s. 6d.; J. Hurcum, 10s. 6d.; — Rantell, 4s. 6d.; Col. H. H. Hart and Wife, £5; Wolverhampton Friends (per R. Wallis), 5s. 6d.; A. Harvey, 10s. 6d.; J. F. Flood (Pittsburg), £1; J. F. Shoulto, 5s.; T. Sutcliffe, 5s.; C. Harding, 2s. 6d.; Harriet Baker, 11s. 6d.; Robert Gibbon (Gainsborough), £1 6s. 8d.; Robert Miller, 2s. 6d.; C. J. Simpson, 10s. 6d.; T. H. Elstob, 10s.; E. B., £1 1s.; F. C. H., 2s. 6d.; S. B., £2; Brandon T. Brierley, £1 1s.; Dr. R. T. Nichols, £5 5s.

Sugar Plums.

A military officer, writing to us from India, says that "Freethought could be advanced much more rapidly if there were a few rich Freethinkers among us who would give money when it was urgently needed." Of this journal he says: "The *Freethinker* interests me more than any other paper. If you will allow me, I wish to say that I think it improves from month to month. Writers appear to me to be bolder, and more pronounced, in their statements." A personal passage is very welcome. "I might mention," our correspondent adds, "how sorry we were to hear of your being ill last year. Every week we followed the accounts of your health in the *Freethinker*, but thought it better not to worry you with any letter. We are glad to know you are nearly restored to good health." May we observe that letters at such a time are not a worry. It is good to find that many readers are friends.

Mr. W. Heaford lectures this evening (Feb. 15) at the Secular Hall, Humberstone-Gate, Leicester, on "War, Religion, and Rationalism." The subject should prove attractive and provoke discussion.

Our attention is called to the fact that Mr. Clier, whom we referred to as an esteemed London magistrate, gave up

his work at the Police-Court some time ago and became a County Court Judge. "Curiously enough," our correspondent adds, "one of the Courts over which he presides is Shoreditch County Court, which is also situated in Old-street."

The Bethnal Green Branch holds a social party on Sunday evening (March 1) at the King's Assembly Rooms, Cottage-grove, Mile-end-road. Tea on tables at 5.45. Concert and Dance at 7. Tickets for both 1s.—for latter only 6d.—can be had of Mr. James Neate, 375 Bethnal-Green-road. Profits go to the Branch fund for further work.

Lady lecturers are all too few on the Freethought platform. There are reasons for this, which we do not enter into at present, but they are entirely honorable to the ladies who do venture to speak publicly for our cause. Miss Kough lectures for the West Ham Branch this evening (Feb. 15) at the Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford. "Christianity—a Relic" is a challenging title. We hope to hear of a full house.

It must have been my bad illness in the spring of last year. Somehow or other it fastened itself in my memory that my old friend, Mr. H. Side, was not present at last year's Dinner on account of the weather. I find I was mistaken. There is a paragraph of mine in the "Sugar Plums" of the *Freethinker* for January 26, 1913, referring to the pleasure I had of seeing him at the Dinner. I repeat that it must have been that bad illness that muddled my memory, which has always been a pretty good one, but, of course, far from infallible. Friend Side will accept my apology for representing him as absent even once from the great festive function of our Freethought year.—G. W. F.

I am writing on this matter at my office on Thursday afternoon, February 5; I am ahead of the corrections that I daresay will pour in upon me from many sources. I am chuckling at being in front of them for once. Correcting your own mistake is a luxury in the world of journalism. You generally get put upon a pin, like an entomological specimen, by somebody else.—G. W. F.

Goethe.—IV.

(Continued from p. 86.)

ON his return from Italy, Goethe resolved to dedicate his life to science and literature. He resigned most of his public offices, but he retained his position as State Minister, and continued to direct the working of the Ilmenau mines.

Goethe was fully determined upon the maintenance of his friendship with Charlotte von Stein, but her old warmth had died down. And now an event occurred which gave the death-blow to their former relations. In 1788 the poet was strolling through the Park at Weimar when a young and pleasing woman presented to him a petition on behalf of her brother. The poet was more interested in the girl than in her message, and she entered his house as his true and faithful wife. No priest blessed their union; society was scandalised at Goethe's conduct in treating as a wife a woman so much below him in the social scale. He loved her dearly; the Duke stood as godfather to their son, and Goethe's mother received his chosen companion as her "dear daughter." For a time Goethe and his spouse—Christiane Vulpius—kept their union to themselves, but the secret soon leaked out. When she heard the story, the Frau von Stein was incensed beyond measure, and never forgave Goethe for his shameful conduct. Goethe meanwhile was happy with his Christiane, and they remained unmarried until 1806, when they received the perfunctory blessings of the Church.

Whatever may be thought of the poet's domestic arrangements, the period that succeeded his union with Christiane Vulpius was rich in literary production. The *Roman Elegies* rank among the supreme poems of the world's literature. Although they may be "Italian and pagan in form, in color, in sensuality," and would certainly have been placed on Mr. Podsnap's black list, as works of art they are above and beyond date.

Goethe now turned his attention to *Tasso*, and evolved from his prose fragment a stately masterpiece of poetic art. In the language of a discerning critic—

"In *Tasso* Goethe reached a simplicity and limpidity of form which makes the words disappear behind the ideas they convey, and transforms the metrical movement of the language into a melody of the thoughts; and thus he succeeded in representing the most refined and delicate movements of the human soul with perfect clearness and great dramatical impressiveness."

One's interest in the story increases as the poem proceeds, and one is dimly conscious that the scene of action is that of picturesque southern beauty.

The tragedy of *Egmont* was now given to the world in its finished form. Despite much adverse criticism, this drama, in the writer's opinion, is a magnificent triumph. The characters of Egmont and Clärchen are as Shakespearean as George Meredith's immortal Richmond Roy. It is probably the most popular of Goethe's dramas, and still occupies the German stage. Nor does it detract from its merits to admit that the music which Beethoven composed for it has added to its original attractiveness.

"The first and last thing demanded of genius," said Goethe, "is a love of truth"; and this noble saying dominates the poet's ever-present interest in the wonders of nature. Recoiling in disdain from the sophisticated arts of mere word-spinning and mist-creating metaphysicians, Goethe sought to solve the secrets of Nature through a study of her phenomena. Constitutionally a realist, he never forsook reality for ideality. "Everywhere in Goethe," wrote Horn, "you are on firm land or island; nowhere in the infinite sea." No understanding reader of his works can dispute the justice of this verdict. The real, the living, and the concrete stand out in firm outline; the vaporous and vague are invariably rejected with something akin to repugnance. Nor was he sympathetic with the mystic religiosity of his friends. He said of Lavater that "When a great man has a dark corner in him, it is terribly dark." He looked upon Jacobi's metaphysical kink as something the gods had thrust upon him as a set-off against the blessings of "house, riches, children, sister, friends." "God," smiled Goethe, "has punished you with metaphysics like a thorn in your flesh; me he has blessed with science that I may be happy in the contemplation of his works."

"The achievements of modern science," wrote G. H. Lewes,

"and the masterpieces of art, prove that the grandest generalisations and the most elevated types can only be reached by the realistic method; and that what is called the 'ideal school,' so far from having the superiority which it claims, is only more lofty in its pretensions; the realist, with more modest pretensions, achieves loftier results."

The foregoing passage is one that Goethe would have enthusiastically endorsed; Nature to him was objective and real, not subjective and ideal. From this materialistic standpoint the poet put his questions to Nature, and the excellence of his method is demonstrated by the richness of his discoveries. With Spinoza, he regarded the Universe as the sum-total of existence, and within that Universe he placed all that was, or is, or is to be. Nature is neither kernel nor shell, but is all-in-all at once. Her varying garments bear no traces of manufacture, but everywhere present the evidences of growth. Over the mind of Goethe the idea of evolution exercised a constant sway, and the poet is to be numbered among the very greatest of the pre-Darwinian philosophers and scientists.

When quite a youth, Goethe's scientific bent manifested itself, and this interest in science never deserted him throughout his long life. His studies were very various, but it was in osteology that he made his first discovery. He had long been convinced of the oneness of human life, and he was deeply interested in the resemblance between the human skeleton and that of other vertebrate animals. Among anatomists it was the accepted view that the intermaxillary bone (mid-jawbone), which is

present in the upper jaw of most animals, is absent in man. In the presumed absence of this bone, Camper erected man into an order entirely distinct from other living creatures. This distinction proved in the sequel to be very unfortunate; for so far as the mid-jawbone is wanting in man, it is equally absent in the chimpanzee.

While working in the laboratory at Jena in 1784, Goethe noticed what appeared to be the intermaxillary bone in a human jaw. After carrying out a series of careful comparisons, Goethe established the truth of his discovery beyond all doubt. He wrote an essay on the subject which is a model of clear exposition, and this was submitted to several contemporary men of science. It was not published to the world, however, until some thirty years later.

Of far-reaching consequence was this discovery, as it completely overthrew the cherished dogma of man's select superiority to lower animal existence. When acquainting Knebel with his discovery, Goethe wrote:—

"Indeed, man is most intimately allied to animals. The co-ordination of the whole makes every creature to be that which it is, and man is as much man through the formation of his upper jaw as through the form and nature of the last joint in his little toe. And thus is every creature *but a note of the great harmony*, which must be studied in the whole, or else it is nothing but a dead letter."

Goethe was now led to the further view that all organisms of the same class are formed on a general plan which Nature adapts to meet the requirements of varying conditions of life. This conception constitutes an epoch in the evolution of scientific thought; for, by directing attention to the verity that organisms of the same class, no matter how widely their organs may appear to differ from one another, nevertheless display a fundamental agreement in structure, it prepared the path for the evolutionary revolution of the succeeding century.

Animated by the idea of organic development, Goethe had long pondered over the problem of the genesis and evolution of foliar structures in plants. In his celebrated essay, *The Metamorphoses of Plants*, Goethe enunciated the doctrine that the foliar organs of flowering plants are to be regarded as various modifications of the simple leaf. These were not the idle thoughts of an empty day, but were the outcome of prolonged and patient study. With certain reservations, this doctrine has long since been accepted, and now forms part of the philosophy of evolution. That Linnæus and Wolff to some degree anticipated Goethe's discovery in no way detracts from the poet's merits as a botanical reformer. In every department of human philosophy we discover that our new thoughts have thrilled dead bosoms. To Goethe the circumstance that his theory had commended itself to other minds was additional evidence of its truth.

When Goethe had penned his treatise on Plants, he found that contemporary botanists regarded the excursion of a celebrated poet into the realms of science with as much astonishment and amusement as the wise men of Weimar when it was suggested that a man of letters could fulfil the functions of a successful statesman.

"Had an obscure professor published this work, its novelty would have sufficed to render it unacceptable; but the obscurest name in Germany would have had a prestige greater than the name of the great poet. All novelty is *prima facie* suspicious; none but the young welcome it; for is not every new discovery a kind of slur on the sagacity of those who overlooked it? And can novelty in science, promulgated by a poet, be worth the trouble of refutation? The professional authorities decided that it could not. The publisher of Goethe's works, having consulted a botanist, declined to undertake the printing of *The Metamorphoses of Plants*. The work was only printed at last because an enterprising bookseller hoped thereby to gain the publication of his other works. When it appeared, the public saw in it a pretty piece of fancy, nothing more. Botanists shrugged their shoulders, and regretted that the author had not reserved his imagination for his poems. No one believed in the theory, not even his attached friends.

He had to wait many years before seeing it generally accepted, and it was then only accepted because great botanists had made it acceptable."*

In the light of the foregoing facts, the spiteful charge of brazen plagiarism which was brought against Goethe becomes as false as it is absurd.

While on his second visit to Italy in 1790, his stay in Venice was made memorable by yet another scientific discovery. He was walking with his servant Seidel in the Jews' cemetery, when the attendant took up a sheep's skull, and, handing it to his master, remarked that it was the cranium of a Jew. While steadily regarding it, the idea suddenly flashed across Goethe's mind that the bones which form the skull are of the same nature as vertebræ, and are in fact vertebræ transformed to meet a special need. Although this theory, in common with Oken's and Owen's speculations concerning the origin of the skull, is hardly to be accepted in the form advanced, it nevertheless occupies a high place in evolutionary science.

Goethe's physical inquiries were not so successful, and he appears to have lost his habitual self-command in his unfortunate attempt to overthrow Newton's theory of colors. Nevertheless, Goethe's *Farbenlehre* (Color Teaching) is a remarkably well-written and closely reasoned work, and contains much valuable matter relating to light and color which science even now has not completely explained.

No account of Goethe's career would be complete without some reference, however brief, to his friendship with Schiller. When first they met, each poet regarded the other with marked reserve. Goethe looked upon Schiller as a writer whose talents were exercised on behalf of the storm and stress school, whose ideals the greater poet had long outgrown. Schiller, on his part, derived the impression that he and Goethe were so dissimilar in nature that any genuine friendship between them was impossible. Still, Goethe was constantly on his mind, and he could not resist the temptation of enviously comparing Goethe's easy circumstances with his own abject poverty. The intimacy of the two poets began when Goethe secured Schiller his professorship at Jena, and remained unbroken until the author of *Wallenstein's* early death in 1805. Goethe's Freethought was part of his very being; Schiller's youthful piety slowly disappeared, until he was almost as completely emancipated as his greater contemporary. The realism of Goethe, combined with his incomparably higher genius, presented a striking contrast to the imaginative idealism of Schiller. They acted and reacted on each other; they took the greatest delight in each other's achievements; neither manifested the slightest jealousy, and Schiller spurred on Goethe to the triumphant completion of works which threatened to remain mere fragments.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be concluded.)

Stock in Trade.

ATTEND, my children! We have here a book entitled *Life After Death; or, Reason and Revelation on the Immortality of the Soul*. It is a popular treatise by the Right Rev. Monsignor John S. Vaughan, and we now take a second breath. In the author's introduction to this, the twelfth edition, he embarks on a joyous excursion in the barren fields of rhetoric; and, aided by the use of many capitals, he prepares us for a feast of divine consolation. "For Death [capital, please], to a faithful soul, is not the terrible ordeal that some imagine." Lest the reader may think that we are quoting from Ingersoll, we would remind them that the author is a good Catholic. Has it not been, in the past, the Christian cry that the last hour is the worst? Are not the most beautiful aphorisms on this phase of life gathered from the sayings of those partly or wholly unchris-

* Lewes, *Goethe*, p. 331.

tian in their attitude to life? Yet we have here a distinguished member of the Catholic Church stealing our arguments. Not content, however, with this exhibition of theft native to a religion which can boast of body-snatching, the author proceeds to say that "on the contrary, the death of the just is 'precious in God's sight,' and something to be looked forward to with longing, and even with a holy impatience." Remembering the ripe old age to which some divines live, it leads us to think that the good die young; at least, our opinion is somewhat strengthened after reading about the just and their impatience to die. But there are better things to come in this Arabian Nights' entertainment.

"Do not added years," the author asks, "often mean only added guilt and added responsibilities? If we are not now prepared, shall we be more ready, and better fitted, and less imperfect, in ten or twenty years' time? Such results cannot be guaranteed." We like the finish to this remarkable view of life; it reminds us of the jargon of shopkeepers about cheap articles. The only logical conclusion to arrive at is, that Christians should commit suicide with all speed and leave the world to those simple people who are content with one life at a time. With a fine peroration, the preface concludes with capitals well sprinkled, with the usual fastian about Death, Divine Summons, Angels, Saints, and a wish that "we, dear readers, one day, may meet in mutual charity." This traffic in death is almost too mean for words. The high priests of theology have worked this theme in a terrible manner; and now, when that fails, they turn and use the arguments the other way. We are inclined to believe in immortality, that is, immortality of the black brood of mankind that cajoles and threatens, that persecutes when powerful, and wheedles and insinuates when weak. When Rome rules the world, life after death will go begging.

Here we pick a plum. "As long as the Catholic Church is the guardian of Faith, so long must she continue to be the defender of Reason." We should be glad, as Freethinkers, to know when Rome began to defend Reason. Then we might examine her claim to the continuation of its defence. Did it commence after the Edict of Toleration? Did it start in the time of St. Augustine, who adopted that beautiful Christian attitude contained in the five words, "Compel them to come in"? Or was it really in full bloom in the year 1600, when Bruno was burned? We seek knowledge of the inception of this noble virtue in the history of a faith which in the present day is actively engaged in baiting Jews. Jew and Catholic ought to embrace if only through mutual reverence for their respective relatives who founded their religions, and Judas Iscariot ought to play no small part in the admiration of each.

We will not weary readers of this journal with further quotations. The author has advanced into new territory. We find that Byron, Shelley, Carlyle, and Buffon are all appropriated to fill out his book; we were rather surprised that the names of Rabelais, Balzac, and Voltaire were not included. It is significant that what these religious creatures cannot kill they annex; and who knows but that the name of our editor may not in the dim future back up some such similar work? Catholic impudence is always on the grand scale, and their industrious mischief on this earth only renders the idea of everlasting life revolting to those who are not swayed by sentiment and religious fear. For our part, we deny the cant that certain men are on speaking terms with a God who strives to hide himself from his children. We deny this sentimental rubbish about heaven colored to suit each individual's taste, and substantiate our denial by saying that priests have added terror to man's life to such an extent that he is in this respect worse than animals, and that the healing balm of heaven cannot compensate for a life lived in the shadow of religion from the cradle to the grave. Furthermore, heaven has no attraction for us; we should not be happy there. The unspeakable villain who lit the fire to burn Bruno

would be there, so also would the dastards who ordered Ferrer to be shot, so would — But why particularise? The riffraff and scum of the earth would all be there, and it is possible that we should ask awkward questions about thumbscrews and other beautiful instruments of the Catholic faith. Besides, we should want to see Omar Khayyam, Lucretius, and Swinburne.

As a constructive delusion, this Christian heaven will not do. It falls short in many respects; it is flyblown with inconsistencies, and will not even satisfy children, who would want to romp and play and have tea-parties. Take it away, ye black-robed desecrators of the earth, ye spoilers of human happiness, ye ghouls of existence! Black are your coats, and adders are black. And black is the most repulsive color in nature; if we did not know you, our natural abhorrence of black would warn us.

As we write there is a west wind blowing, and the sun is shining in a blue sky beautified by banks of white clouds, and there is the promise of spring in the air. There are a few golden tulips in bloom near to us, and we find that we have waded through this book untouched by any sentiment of fear or hope, or even depression. The forces of life are stronger than those of death, and we are tempted to speculate on the religious position if man was in a physical sense immortal. As Robert Buchanan says in *The Book of Orm*:

"I heard a voice from out the hollow ether,
Saying, 'The thing ye cursed has been abolished—
Corruption, and decay, and dissolution!'"

There would be such a rumpus in the rabbit-holes of religion that the end of the world would be as child's play compared with it, and the earth would not be afflicted with such works as the one under consideration. To its author we would say, "Hail and farewell!" Make hay while the sun shines, for as sure as the night follows day the time will come when all men will laugh at your descriptions of a place called heaven, and only believe you when you have been there and returned along with reliable witnesses.

WILLIAM REPTON.

Laws Against Religious Liberty.—II.

SIR JAMES STEPHEN, in his *Digest of the Criminal Law*, among alternative definitions of Blasphemy, gave the following: "A denial of the truth of Christianity in general, or of the existence of God, whether the terms of such publication are decent or otherwise." The same high authority, in a later magazine article (*Fortnightly Review*, March, 1884) held that the crime of Blasphemy consists in the mere expression of heterodox opinions; that it is only an *aggravation* of the crime to express them in "offensive" language; that "a large part of the most serious and most important literature of the day is illegal"; and that every bookseller who sells, and everyone who lends to his friend, a copy of Comte's *Positive Philosophy*, or of Renan's *Life of Jesus*, commits a crime punishable with fine and imprisonment.

Sir James Stephen detested this Law of Blasphemy. He even went to the length of drafting a Bill for its total abolition. He said that he preferred "stating it in its natural naked deformity to explaining it away in such a manner as to prolong its existence and give it an air of plausibility and humanity."

This view of the law is borne out by the language of indictments for Blasphemy. In the abortive prosecution of Mr. Charles Bradlaugh, and the successful prosecution of Messrs. Foote, Ramsey, and Kemp (1883), it was alleged against them in their indictments that they wickedly and profanely attempted "to bring the Holy Scriptures and the Christian religion into disbelief and contempt," not only "against the peace of our lady the Queen," but also "to the great displeasure of Almighty God."

Lord Coleridge, however, in summing-up at the trial of Messrs. Foote and Ramsey in the Court of

Queen's Bench, while admitting that the law of Blasphemy "is undoubtedly a disagreeable law," let humanity get the better of the legal tradition. Against the decision of all previous judges, he laid it down that "if the decencies of controversy are observed, even the fundamentals of religion may be attacked without a person being guilty of blasphemous libel."

"Such a law," said Sir James Stephen "would never work." You cannot really distinguish between substance and style; you must either forbid or permit all attacks on Christianity. Men cannot discuss doctrines like eternal punishment, for instance, as calmly as they do questions in philology. When they feel deeply they will express themselves strongly; and "to say that you may discuss the truth of religion, but that you may not hold up its doctrines to contempt, ridicule, or indignation, is either to take away with one hand what you concede with the other, or to confine the discussion to a small and, in many ways, unimportant class of persons."

John Stuart Mill expressed the same truth in an article on "Religious Prosecutions," in the *Westminster Review* of July, 1824: "To declare that an act is legal, but with the proviso that it be performed in a gentle and decorous manner, is opening a wide door for arbitrary discretion on the one part and dissatisfaction on the other. The difficulty is greatly increased when the act itself is offensive to those who sit in judgment upon the manner of its performance."

Such a law is a downright absurdity. It means that twelve Christians are to be put into a jury-box to decide whether a Freethinker has attacked Christianity in a "becoming" manner. What is the Freethinker's liberty worth in such circumstances? Would Liberal writers like to be tried by their opponents for attacking Conservatism without a proper respect for the "decencies" of controversy?

"There is one reflection," said Sir James Stephen, "which seems to me to prove with conclusive force that the law upon this subject can be explained and justified only on what I regard as its true principle—the principle of persecution. It is that if the law were really impartial, and punished Blasphemy only because it offends the feelings of believers, it ought also to punish such preaching as offends the feelings of unbelievers."

Unbelievers do not ask to have their feelings "protected." They demand—and sooner or later it must be conceded—that religious questions shall be discussed as freely as political and social questions. What has truth to fear from the wildest storms of controversy? "Let Truth and Falsehood grapple; whoever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?"

Freethinkers will never be satisfied until the odious Blasphemy Laws are swept out of existence. A beginning has already been made. The late Charles Bradlaugh introduced a Bill to abolish them, and, in the face of acrimonious bigotry, forty-seven members of the House of Commons voted for the measure.

* * * *

Sir James Stephen was right as a matter of logic. Bradlaugh and almost everybody else agreed with him. We took the same view in the Preface to our *Prisoner for Blasphemy* published in 1886. We joined in the opinion that Lord Coleridge had acted generously as a man but weakly as a judge. We lived to recognise, however, that he was wiser than all of us; wise with that practical wisdom which is so necessary in human affairs. He plainly said it was "a disagreeable law" he was called upon to administer; it was pretty clear that he would have abolished it if he could; but he made up his mind to rationalise and humanise it as far as possible, and in one sentence he revolutionised the Law of Blasphemy. This he did by separating the matter from manner. Henceforth it was perfectly legal to attack the fundamentals of religion; blasphemy consisted

entirely in outraging the decencies of controversy in discussing it.

This was illogical, of course; one must adhere to that judgment still. But it was all that Lord Coleridge could do, and he did it. It was worth doing—well worth doing; and at this distant date we thank him with all our heart. He was a great man—and he was a good man—and he was a wise man.

Years passed before we quite understood what had happened. Bradlaugh never understood it at all,—the sole reason being that his mind was too full of other matters. Other people never understood it—partly because they were incapable of doing so, partly because they could not understand any man's discovering what Bradlaugh had missed—and partly, we are sorry to say, for less respectable reasons. Holyoake would not admit to the day of his death that we were right. Everybody was against us. We had to convert them one by one, and always by the logic of fact. Lord Coleridge's judgment was not a temporary break in the legal definition of Blasphemy; it was final—it was revolutionary—it inaugurated a new epoch.

The more we looked at the matter the more we felt convinced that no single judge, in any future trial for blasphemy, would go behind the deliberate and reasoned decision of the Lord Chief Justice of England sitting on the bench in his own court in London. Lawyers were against us on that point, right up to the Boulter case in 1908. But they were wrong, and we were right. Judge after judge has since quoted Lord Coleridge's judgment as the Common Law of Blasphemy. The Home Secretary, in his reply to the petition for Stewart's release, was careful to remark that he was not imprisoned for the advocacy of his opinions. And in the latest memorial to Mr. Asquith, with regard to the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, it is admitted that this view of the law "has prevailed"—the confessions of this fact including some whose conversion is only very recent.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded)

PRIESTCRAFT.

The fundamental cause of all evil in the world is ignorance, and its yoke-fellow is superstition. As priestcraft is the promulgator and perpetuator of both these malign elements in human life, the one question which mankind has to solve is the superseding of priestcraft by something better. I make the assertion, and I wish to give it all possible emphasis and solemnity at this time, that the law of evolution would absolutely banish priestcraft from the world if the minds of men could be informed and convinced even to the extent that they have been informed and convinced that the earth is a globe instead of a flat plane, and that the earth revolves around the sun instead of the sun around the earth.

The priestcrafts which affect and afflict our generation are the heirs and successors of all the priestcrafts that have ever been since the mind of man began to reason, and since man himself emerged from a condition closely resembling that of the anthropoid ape. Evolution does not say that man descended from a monkey—but that priestcraft has made a monkey of him for several thousand years.—J. A. McKnight, *New York "Truthseeker."*

VACUUM THEOLOGY.

A colored Baptist was exhorting; "Now bredden and sistern, come up to de altar and hab yo' sins washed away." All came but one man.

"Why, brudder Jones, don' yo' want yo' sins washed away?"

"I done had my sins washed away."

"Yo' has? Where yo' had yo' sins washed away?"

"Ober at de Methodis' church."

"Ah! brudder Jones, yo' aint been washed away; yo' has jes' been dry cleaned."

This has been the fatal curse of man to cherish Customs that his better life no more demands; In the dust of generations dead we perish;

We are strangled in our race's swaddling bands.

—Allen Upward.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford, E.): 7.30, Miss Kough, "Christianity—A Relic."

OUTDOOR.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Edmonton Green): 7.45, Wm. Perry, "A Few Plain Questions."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (North Saloon, City Hall): Dennis Hird, M.A., 12 noon, "Nietzsche's Life and Message"; 6.30, "The Secret of Evolution as applied to Man's Development."

LEICESTER (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, W. Heaford, "War, Religion, and Rationalism."

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