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Man's chief wisdom consists in being sensible of his follies.—ROCHEFOUCAULD.

The Virgin Birth.

BISHOP GORE has just published a Tract in which the Virgin Birth is depicted at once as a veritable fact of history and an essential dogma of the Christian Church. Without such a stupendous miracle the Divine Incarnation could never have taken place, and without the Incarnation there would have been no Christianity and no Church. It is true that many present-day divines either openly reject or ignore the supernatural birth of Jesus; but we are of opinion that Dr. Gore is fully justified in maintaining that no Christian teacher has a right to do either. Like the Resurrection, the Virgin Birth is a fundamental doctrine and cannot be laid aside without undermining the whole creed. "Conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," this is the phrase used by the Church in all ages as a fit expression of its belief. The now-famous Bishop of Zanzibar, Dr. Weston, preached an able and earnest sermon on the subject in Westminster Abbey, which appeared in the *Church Times* for March 20. To the Church, Dr. Weston observes, "the Lord Jesus Christ is God-in-manhood." The following is the gist of this remarkable discourse:—

"From the first moment of his Incarnation until his ascension to his Father's throne, and from the day of his ascension down the ages, and through the ages to all eternity, he is God-in-manhood; God true and perfect, yet living under conditions truly and perfectly human, with all the human instruments of self-expression that we call soul and body; and Man, true and perfect, yet in no sense at all a man. In order to become a God-in-manhood the Eternal Word took flesh and received his soul in Mary's womb; and from her he came forth to be the new Head of the human race. Virgin he found her; he left her virgin; and she, the Virgin-mother, is henceforth Mother of our Lord and God."

Such is the doctrine of the Virgin Birth as taught by the Orthodox Church. Dr. Weston frankly admits that it would be "folly to pretend that the modern Christian easily accepts" it. Failing to see the spiritual meaning and value of the alleged fact, the modern Christian cannot give due weight to the evidence for it. "The Church suggests that we accept her creed on her authority"; and, unfortunately for her, the modern Christian is strongly tempted to rely on the authority of his own judgment. What we suffer from to-day is "private judgment run wild." The Church is wonderfully patient, long-suffering, and sympathetic, "but not for one moment will she approve of any the least claim to be to ourselves the ultimate measure of truth." We are not at all surprised at this statement when we compare it with another more extravagant still; namely, that the discernment of spiritual values is the work of faith, not of reason." And what, pray, is faith? Nothing in the world but the power to accept as final the judgments of the Church, "the primary power of self-suppression, of humbleness, without which no heavenly society can embrace sinful men of disordered

minds." The duty of the individual, therefore, is "to cast himself upon the society, upon the family of the Lord God, who cannot deceive or be deceived."

According to Dr. Weston, Christianity is a religion founded upon facts, not upon ideas. The Virgin Birth is a fact, "the only mode of entrance into the world that is fit for, and proper to, him who is Eternal God." Of course, the conception was miraculous, but the Bishop assures us that the miracle was exceedingly simple:—

"We are asked to believe that Almighty God, through the Holy Spirit, dispensed with human co-operation in setting in motion natural forces; that once set in motion by immediate Divine intervention, those forces moved according to their own original, God-given laws, and the Christ was conceived by Mary his mother. In this miracle there is nothing contrary to Nature, no hindrance of natural results due to certain causes, no element of destruction and negation. All bears witness to a mighty act of the Divine Life-giver, in the supreme movement of the Divine Love."

The curious thing is that Dr. Weston completely ignores the question of evidence. Not a single shred of proof does he adduce. He tells us that natural forces were set in motion within Mary "by immediate Divine intervention"; but how does he know that? The nativity narratives are peculiar to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and New Testament scholars are convinced that they were inserted in these at a later date, say, at the close of the first century, or early in the second. That the birth-stories did not originally belong to these two Gospels is clear from the fact that the rest of the New Testament does not contain the slightest hint that the birth of Jesus was in any respect different from that of anybody else. Yet the Bishop of Zanzibar exclaims: "What I know is this, that Christ came down from heaven to a sinless mother, because before he came down he gave her the grace to be sinless." We challenge him to inform us when, whence, and how he acquired this amazing knowledge. If he tells us that he obtained it by faith, we beg to remind him that faith and knowledge are two totally different things. Of course, a man who believes that when a duly ordained priest sprinkles a baby's face with water, an act of supernatural regeneration is accomplished, can believe anything. A baptised child shows no signs whatever of having been twice born, being, on that account, neither better nor worse than other children. Even in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus never shows the least consciousness of having been supernaturally born. In all his intercourse with his disciples and others he did not once convey the impression that he even suspected that there was anything extraordinary about his advent into the world.

Dr. Weston's facts are all fables. He believes in the sinlessness of Jesus, and accounts for it in the following strange fashion:—

"The body and soul of Christ never had a moment's existence except in the person of the eternal God, the eternal Word of God. Therefore we claim perfection. And the Virgin Birth is necessary to this argument just for this reason, that had the body, had the soul of Jesus for a single moment existed in a human person, the whole process of the Incarnation would have failed, and our redemption would never have taken place. It is on this kind of lines that we defend the doctrine of the Virgin Birth."

The so-called fact of the absolute perfection of Jesus

is an unverified and unverifiable assumption. His character even as portrayed in the Gospels is not without fault; but even if it were, the Gospels tell us so little about him that we cannot legitimately come to the conclusion that he never did any wrong. But Dr. Weston *assumes* his sinlessness, and then *assumes* the Virgin Birth to account for it. Here is another fact which, on being examined, turns out to be a fable:—

"The Incarnation reveals the supernatural order in which we have become new creatures; in its power we find our foothold upon the supernatural plane along which we are to move upward and Godward throughout all ages; and in the Incarnate Person we find our own personal union with the Divine Being."

The supernatural order is a pure fiction. It exists only in the imagination of fanatics. We know only of one order, the order of Nature; and no one has ever shown us any other. Christians call themselves new creatures, but nobody else does; nor do they ever say or do anything to justify their so calling themselves. The supernatural plane is a sheer illusion, and we judge of it by those who claim to find their foothold upon it, for, surely, they are not superior people. Have they not their little quarrels, bickerings, and wranglings just like others? Is not Bishop Weston in this country now because of a bitter controversy which has agitated the Episcopal Church for months and threatened to disrupt her? Is such a state of things worthy of people who proudly aver that they have a foothold upon a supernatural plane? Dr. Weston says that Christians "date everything from the great miracle of the Virgin Birth"; but to what end and with what results? Read history, consult the conditions that prevail in society at this moment, and you have the answer. Like all his brethren, the Bishop indulges in Christian boasting, and hears not the mocking laughter of the facts.

The Virgin Birth is a decaying superstition. Even to the modern Christian it is scarcely believable. When he finds any record of it outside the Bible he does not hesitate to say openly that he rejects it. The time is coming when the Biblical record will be treated in precisely the same way. J. T. LLOYD.

The Cant of Brotherhood.

If we attend to theory only, there is nothing with which the Christian is so much concerned as universal love and brotherhood. If we check theory by practice, there are no other qualities that he so completely ignores. Theoretically every Christian is ready to spend himself in the service of at least every other Christian, if not of every human being. In practice they show themselves certainly not better than non-Christians, and do not betray an overwhelming confidence in even their fellow-believers. They watch each other most carefully in all business transactions; they "wink the other eye" if they are asked to trust another merely on the ground of a community of religious belief. Clergymen of all denominations accuse each other of being animated by petty jealousies, greed, hatred, and of stooping to slander and misrepresentation to further their ends. In a corporate capacity Christian nations act towards each other in exactly the same way. Each one laughs at the notion of trusting to the other's sense of honesty, justice, or generosity. They say frankly that self-interest is the only motive by which they will be ruled, a display of brute force the only argument to which they may be expected to yield. And still the cant of love and brotherhood goes on.

Now I am not arguing that the conception of human love and brotherhood are bad things. No one does so argue. Quite the contrary; they are fundamental to human welfare, and their practical realisation is the true measure of social development. I am merely taking these qualities in connection with religious beliefs—particularly Christian beliefs—and trying to estimate their value. For Christians

write and talk of human love and human brotherhood as though these were in some peculiar sense Christian products, and formed the very essence of the Christian faith. They have done this until the very words themselves have acquired a cant significance. They have gained the aroma of the pulpit, and evil associations have not yet lost their time-honored power to corrupt things otherwise good. Of course, they have no real connection with religion, although the forces of modern life have forced genuine religious beliefs into the background, and brought a number of accidental and extraneous qualities to the fore. And the fact remains that of all the failures that may justly be placed to the credit of religion, none is more marked than the utter inability of religion to induce a feeling of genuine brotherhood and good-fellowship. There is no question of opinion here; it is simply a statement of demonstrable fact.

Look at the case of Ireland. Whatever other factors may be at work here, this much is certain. The rallying cries of the two great parties in Ireland centre round a difference of religious belief. Remove that difference, and so far as one can see there would be no insuperable obstacle to the speedy solution of the Irish difficulty. Protestants declare that they can never trust to the sense of justice or brotherhood of Roman Catholics in a position of authority. Catholics declare that they have suffered, and suffer still, from the religious bigotry of Protestantism in power. Whichever one is right, or if both are right, the same fact emerges—the distortion of a sense of justice and fairplay by religious belief. Catholics cannot trust Protestants; Protestants cannot trust Catholics. They do not mean that they cannot trust each other in business—they do, as a matter of fact. They do not mean that, religion apart, the Roman Catholic Irishman and the Protestant Irishman are not as good as each other. What they each point out is that the religious convictions of the other narrows his outlook, stunts his sympathies, blinds him to a sense of national duty, and makes him a worse citizen than he would be otherwise. A Free-thinker need not argue which one is correct; it is enough to point to the facts, and the facts are a decisive disproof of Christian claims.

Look at home, amongst ourselves. What is the most divisive, the greatest separative force that one can introduce into association of human beings? Clearly religion. Up and down the country are thousands of associations of various kinds. The almost universal rule among them is that discussion of religious opinions must be tabooed. It is not that the individual members do not believe in religion; quite the contrary. The more firmly they believe, the more they perceive the necessity of the rule. They believe in religion individually; individually they would assert that it was of all beliefs the most important; but they dare not discuss their differences of opinion on religion as they discuss differences in literature, or art, or science, or sociology. Do that, they say—permit the introduction of religion—and our association will break into fragments. They also will repeat the cant phrases about brotherhood as an essential part of religion, and the value of their assertions are shown by the fact that one thing they dare not introduce if they wish to continue in friendly and brotherly intercourse is religion. Still they believe that Christianity promotes brotherhood. Nothing seems able to shake that superstition.

It is useless arguing that men take their religious beliefs as the most serious they possess. That may be admitted without weakening the force of the indictment. The charge is not that religious beliefs are not taken seriously, but that they serve as a cause of division rather than as a bond of union. And side by side with this you have the complementary facts that there are other aspects of life that really do unite people, and other beliefs about which people differ and yet dwell harmoniously together. You can see members of various religious sects uniting for various social and ethical ends;

they will be friendly together on points of difference about things that are unconnected with religion. It is only when religion is on the carpet that union becomes impossible. Why, it is even paraded as a great triumph of the spirit of religious brotherhood that representatives of various Christian sects can stand upon the same platform in amicable mood. But, even then, it must be observed that what brings them together is not their religious opinion. When Anglican, Catholic, Protestant, and Jew stand upon the same platform the appeal is to a common sense of justice, a common humanity, a common appeal to moral feelings. Never is the appeal to religion.

There is, indeed, one case in which the religious appeal becomes a bond of union—of a sort. This is in connection with Sabbatarianism. Here it has been found possible to bring the Christian sects together on the basis of an appeal to their religious feelings. And the reason for this is as plain as it is discreditable. They are all faced by a common danger, and there is a chance of exercising the old spirit of religious tyranny. The "desecration of the Sabbath" affects them all alike. It means a direct loss to the Churches. It means the encouragement of the spirit of Rationalism and Secularism. It involves the secularisation of life, and in sheer self-defence religion forgets for a time its divisions, and closes its ranks to the attack of an enemy that threatens all alike. Then they all believe that they are their brother's keeper. And they interpret "keeper" to mean gaoler.

This, indeed, is the only way in which religion, and particularly Christianity, ever develops a sense of solidarity. Faced by an enemy that threatens all alike, the natural tendency is for the threatened individuals to draw together for mutual protection. In the earliest centuries Christians only held together in the face of persecution. So soon as the persecution was relaxed, the divisive consequences of religious belief began to show themselves. And for centuries nothing but the most intolerable tyranny of one of the most powerful and one of the most brutal Churches that the world has ever known was able to preserve unity amongst Christians. When social progress broke the power of the Church, the evil power of religious belief began to show itself. Existing causes of hatred were intensified. New sectarian reasons for ill-will developed. Men hated each other for political reasons, class reasons, or national reasons. But these were comparatively mild expressions of malevolence. On account of religion their malevolence knew no bounds, and the limit to their antagonisms was marked only by death—and not always then. One might almost lay it down as a law of social progress that the stronger religious beliefs are the greater the divisions that arise. An attempted union of religious believers only becomes possible when social culture has relegated fundamental religious beliefs to a position of subordinate importance.

In strict truth, the brotherhood of man has never been a part of the Christian religions, any more than it has been a part of other religions. What has been aimed at has been a brotherhood of believers. A human being became a brother when he believed, he remained an enemy as long as he disbelieved. Even the propaganda of Christianity was not due to any feeling of brotherhood. It sprang rather from the lust of conquest, and from the intolerance of the fanatic who felt that the existence of a new religion antagonistic to his own amounted to a slight upon the majesty of his own Deity. The long-continued denial by Christians of justice and consideration to those outside their creed proves the truth of this. During more recent times, the operation of a number of causes, chief amongst which was the growth of communication between classes and peoples, and weakened the petty divisions of sect and nation, and so have given emphasis to the more permanent qualities of human association. Powerful as it has been, and still is, Christianity could not withstand the influence of these developments, with the result that Christian teachers have been driven to a pre-

sentation of the doctrine of brotherhood less in accord with Christian practice, and more in harmony with the sense of the modern civilised State.

Religion can form no basis for genuine brotherhood, for the reason that there is nothing in it fundamental and inescapable. All men have not religious beliefs, and among those that have them there is endless diversity and contradiction. Let the religious appeal be as wide as possible, it still remains, and must remain, a sectarian one. And sectarian union depends as much for its strength upon hatred of outsiders as upon love between its members. On the other hand, the non-religious appeal to brotherhood does touch on elements or qualities that are common to all men, and which are, indeed, fundamental to the associated State. There is no man without some sense of justice, however rudimentary. There is no man without feeling for his fellows, however imperfect may be its expression. Beneath all differences of sect, class, nation, or color, there are qualities—mental and moral—that all men have in common. A rational, a far-seeing doctrine of brotherhood seizes upon these as the elements upon which it is to be based if it is to be at all successful. And, as a mere matter of fact, it is in proportion as these non-religious qualities have been developed that the doctrine of brotherhood has become realisable in practice. It may be true that these qualities are not irreconcilable with religion; but it is certain that they are independent of it. And it is also certain that their association with religion has served only to hinder their fruition.

C. COHEN.

The "Shadow Show."

THE *Shadow Show*, by J. H. Curle, is one of the most remarkable books of travel it has been my good fortune to come across for some time. It differs from most books of the kind, however, in that the author seems to have been everywhere and seen everything, except perhaps the hidden bowels of the earth and the North Pole. During his professional career he inspected no less than five hundred mines, in every part of the globe. "To-day, at forty," he says, "I have seen the world from end to end. A favored one, I have stood in the wings all my life, and have seen the mounting of a thousand tableaux." And as the reader travels with him, viewing the varied and picturesque scenery of every land—a dawn on the Karroo, the higher Alps outlined by moonlight, a spring morning in Kashmir—he feels indeed that that "the stage setting of the *Shadow Show* is extraordinarily beautiful." "To some of us who have failed to find God among the theologians, Nature alone is left," says Mr. Curle; and surely no goddess ever found a more fervent adorer.

The curious reader may ask, Why the *Shadow Show* as the title of such a book? It represents the author's philosophic view of world phenomena. He looks back on all the wonderful sights he has seen as a great and splendid phantasmagoria:—

"This world of ours is the *Shadow Show*. We men and women are the silhouettes on the curtain.....The stage is fantastic, and the players; the only real thing is that mechanism of wires which science calls the 'reign of law.'.....We are puppets. We are the sum of all dead men, the sport of all past happenings. We are present links in the endless chain of cause and effect, and as our structure is, so does our life inexorably unfold.

"'For man is man, and master of his fate,' sings the poet, and Smiles, Lubbock, and other genial and wealthy persons chortle in the same strain. But Old Omar knew better, and men of the calibre of Æschylus and Shakespeare and Ibsen have always known; free-will is very nearly an illusion."

If our author's philosophy, as stated in the Preface, should disturb the ideas of some of his general readers, it is likely that the first incident he relates will alienate the puritanical sympathies of many others. As he begins to write, it is the little inci-

dents, he says, that crowd upon him. And he takes them as they come:—

"On a Christmas afternoon, in the country behind Manilla, I watched cock-fighting. In a great bamboo structure some two thousand Filipinos and myself sat, lost to the world. There were a hundred cocks, the din was hideous, and the betting high. *I have spent many a worse Christmas.*"

One of the charms of *Shadow Show* is the author's comprehensive grasp of the problems that confront present-day civilisation. He sees the minor races of the earth as the ordinary traveller sees them in their geographical setting and native environment. But he brings to the consideration of their well-being and future position a sympathetic knowledge of their racial characteristics and relation to the progressive forces among the stronger races. He appreciates, too, at their full value, the virtues and qualities of the so-called inferior nations, without a single trace of that insular prejudice which characterises the writings of so many of our travellers:—

"As I sought out the world's beauties, so I have searched for the best peoples. The nations, first and last, have passed before me—good, bad, indifferent—to be judged, too, like men, with tolerance, for environment is the controlling factor."

Among the world's "best peoples," those to whom he finds himself closest—his "affinities"—he places the Chinese and the Zulus. This should give the supporters of missionary enterprise some food for reflection. For the writer is not only a broad-minded and cultured traveller, but he speaks from an intimate knowledge of both peoples. His memories of South Africa, he tells us, are full of the natives. "All the races interest me, but the Zulus I love. They are a race of gentlemen; they are, physically, the aristocrats of humanity." He speaks of them as a race who are as cheerful, kindly, and right-living a people as one may hope to see. "For many of the Zulus—laborers on farms, wagon-drivers, house servants, or quiet dwellers in their own kraals—I have the sincerest liking and respect. To the memory of N'Konjane ('the Swallow') and to Shingaan a 'kebele'—or head of a family—who came every year from the thorn country to the farm, and who, after many years of faithful work, at last came not, I raise my hat." Would that every traveller were as sympathetically appreciative of the virtues of these colored races.

Of the Chinese, he writes:—

"The Chinaman was civilised while we dwelt in forests. He had evolved religion, philosophy, and the highest conceptions of art and beauty while we yet stained ourselves with woad and pursued our quarry with a meat axe. To-day, with all our blissful ignorance of China, we call the people heathen, and send a swarm of missionaries to preach doctrines that our ablest men have already discarded. These men preach twenty different creeds, they advocate love, peace, long-suffering; but let so much as one missionary be killed or injured, and the clamor for compensation and revenge, backed always by threats of armed retaliation, resounds through the land. The Chinaman, highly intelligent, sees the irony of it all. Our various creeds, jealous, narrow, preaching salvation through twenty channels, bewilder him. *He wants none of our religion; he has told us so a hundred times.*"

Our author has an eye for the beautiful everywhere; and his comparative faculty, which often displays a touch of humor, sees the utility of many foreign customs and practices, as compared to the conventional methods of Europe. Speaking of the Hindu custom of burning dead bodies, he says: "There is no slow festering of the dead in the ground, no choosing of leaden coffins by old ladies, to whom the resurrection looms more physical than mystic. The burial rites of the Hindu must, indeed, become our own":—

"And to Hinduism we owe a great architecture. Each cycle furnished its masterpieces—the rock caves, with their rich and original figuring, the temples of Mysore, Gwalior, fortress of the Mahrattas, Amber, and the palaces of Rajputana, and golden-templed Amritsar, of the Sikhs. Lastly, note the small sect of Jains,

building at Chitoor that tower aforesaid, and at Abu, in the hills, a temple of white marble, whose glory will never die. I thought to write down the Jains as the Wesleyans of Hinduism; for in each is seen a revolt against sacerdotalism, a return to simple forms. But when I saw Chitoor and Abu, comparison was dead. To liken these princes of architecture to the men who can design Methodist chapels must be for ever impossible."

"Wanderings in South America" is not the least interesting of the chapters in the book. Our author depicts the effect of Catholicism upon the poor Indian races in language that does not spare their historical oppressors. The Indians of the Bolivian Andes, the degenerate descendants of the Incas, he describes as a people filthy in their habits, much given to strong drink, and of a deeply religious strain. On a Good Friday, he writes, I stood in the plaza of Oruro and saw the Holy Image carried in priestly procession. Thousands of Indians followed, reverent in mien: an Indian band played holy music, and the Host was raised; all hats were doffed; many fell on their knees muttering hoarse cries:—

"Such is religion in the Andes—a religion of the senses, not of the brain. Next day, feast-day and holiday, these people, men and women, lay in the very ecstasy of drink. For days they wallowed in it; then got up and went about their business, good-natured, ignorant, superstitious, filthy—a little higher than the beasts of the field."

In the summer months, after the melting of the snow, one can cross the Andes, he says, from Argentina into Chili. The summit of the pass is at 12,000 feet, and on the boundary line, erected by Chili, stands a colossal figure of Christ. Some years ago, when the figure was unveiled, the ceremony was made the occasion for a demonstration, and many political and religious personages from Santiago attended. Afterwards, champagne was served, and, having drunk heartily, the company proceeded to break the empty bottles against the statue for luck:—

"There are quite a number of statues of Christ in Chili. Their erection has been coincident with a marked deterioration in the national character."

In Lima, capital of Peru, the city he founded, Pizarro's corpse lies in the cathedral in a glass coffin:—

"Standing by this, my thoughts went back to Atahualpa, last of the Incas, made captive by Pizarro, ransomed with the treasure of Cuzco, then brutally murdered. By this act of treachery Spain set her foot on the neck of South America, while Holy Mother Church, herself torturer of men's bodies, looked on and palliated."

"'You brute, Pizarro,' I remember saying. 'I could kick your coffin to pieces!' The mummy's face grinned placidly."

In a chapter entitled "Women," our author presents us with perhaps the sanest estimate of the fair sex, and of the trend and meaning of the modern feminist movement, that has yet been written. His remarks on Spiritualism and Christian Science, under this heading, are an admirable summing-up of both these delusions:—

"Spiritualism, a result of too general education on the half-baked, hysterical of both sexes, is becoming rampant, but it is mostly women who are drawn into the vortex. One is often told by this or that woman that she communes with the dead, or lives in the occult world, or is in time with the Infinite. As the female is not open to reasoning, one can only leave these women to their obsessions. The 'in-time-with-the-Infinite' feeling is no doubt due to indigestion; but just how much of the rest is due to hysteria, or how much to lack of mental clarity and the consequent attributing of abstract processes of thought to supernatural origin, would be hard to determine. The reality or otherwise of spirits we need not discuss; but that so many of the less intellectual sex should be really media, or occult, when the greatest brains among men fail to detect any such phenomena, is to me unthinkable."

The most interesting phase in this whole trend, he says, is the spread of Christian Science—by a woman. Mrs. Eddy, a woman of little education, of

neurotic and hysteric tendency, swinging for hours together in a hammock, in earlier life divorced, he regards as altogether a poor type. But she is already in process of deification. In the "Mother's Room" of the Temple at Boston, candles are always burning above her picture, and it is no rare thing to see worshippers on their knees before it. Tens of thousands of the ignorant and hysterical already attribute to her supernatural qualities, while many look for her second coming.

"If the Eddy tradition gathers much more momentum, it is bound to crystallise. After that, for a large section of mankind, it is fact, and she is a goddess. Let us picture a baptism in Boston, a century hence. The pastor, sprinkling the babe, will say, 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and of Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy, I christen thee—Will Power,' and the guests will sit down to beans and bacon, or whatever viands are eaten in those days, unconscious of irony. The greatest traditions of theology sprang up in this way."

Of the future of religion, he writes:—

"All religions die in time. Their early virile conceptions become lost in a maze of mysticism, ritual, and dogma. Our religion is dying this way. She is but a shell now; and vestments and wafers and oriental genuflections and intonings and Athanasian creeds and burning candles are what she offers as the Waters of Life."

"The Church has lost its hold. By refusing to come in line with modern thought, it alienates those who think. What signifies an audience of old women or flighty girls, when the brainy men of the community are in their libraries or out on the links?"

"Religion, as we have evolved it, is become a flabby thing. It is a creed for the well-to-do, a creed of the tall hat, whose votaries dare not peer below the surface of things. We are concerned with the supernatural, with miracles, with three Gods who are one God; scornful of science, we treat sin and misery as casual factors, removable by prayer, and ignore the reign of law through which we move from birth to death. Meanwhile, in our rich, Christian England, one-third of the people live on the border line of poverty, or below it, drinking raw spirit to deaden their thought."

Our author offers some very friendly advice to the Bishops in their blindness:—

"One hundred and seventy-one bishops of the Anglican Church assemble at Lambeth, and they make decision, by 87 votes to 84, to deny the blessing of the Church to the innocent party in a divorce who may marry again. *Pshaw!* You old men are no doubt well-meaning, but you don't know. You must adapt yourselves to modern intellect, or it will presently pass over you like a steam-roller. Moreover, such a union is legal to the State, and yours is a State Church. Go carefully, if you would escape disestablishment! There are social dignities and fat endowments some of you would ill surrender."

These extracts will give the reader but a poor idea of the subject-matter of the book, which is a racy record of a life's experiences more wonderful than any fiction. They are merely the running comments of the genial author upon subjects or events as they arise in the course of the narrative. But they serve to show, I think, that he is a writer worthy of every Freethinker's appreciation and esteem.

JOSEPH BRYCE.

Old Noah.

WE are not so "touchy" these days. It is quite consonant with respectability to pass a joke about the Lord, to speak lightly of angels, and to display even a nodding acquaintance with the Devil. The stage property of Christianity has become worse for wear, and, despite the work of revivalists and other industrious people to spring-clean it, we find that sacred objects are receiving less veneration than usual. If a person hits his thumb whilst carelessly using a hammer, there are ten chances to one that his exclamation is of a Biblical nature. If anyone suddenly assumes a sitting posture as he walks down the street, he does not say, "Alas Æsculapius!"

His household gods are invariably invoked in a crisis of this description, and common use becomes a custom. I would not be prepared to say that all believers bandy words about in this manner, but many do who would safely be included in that elastic term "Church of England." In most of our present weekly papers this easy treatment of characters from the Bible is very evident, and we can safely say that there has been a landslide from the stern, uncompromising attitude of Christianity adopted twenty years ago. Without laboring the point, the mild curate's "damn" has become something stronger with the layman.

I was extremely shocked (I think that is the correct expression) when I found on the cover of the *New Witness* some rather disrespectful things said about Noah. In conjunction with an advertisement, there are verses from that lovable lump of humanity, G. K. Chesterton. Putting aside the question of taste in this matter, I found that the old patriarch was cheerfully digged in the ribs, and not by any means treated with the respect due to one who, in an amateurish sort of way, saved the world from utter destruction. It is not my duty to defend Noah, but I feel that a protest is necessary, and also that the moral needs to be pointed out when one more or less identified with the secret of England's greatness should so far forget himself, and do with impunity what would have probably meant, a few centuries ago, either having the tongue torn out or burning at the stake.

My readers must bear with me: I devoutly believe that I have a stern purpose in this article; but, as I write, within a few feet of my chair is a Noah's Ark. Scattered around this gaudily painted box are various pieces of wood representing cows, horses, sheep, and the familiar animals of England, and I laugh. I really think that the man who made them, the shop-keeper who sold them, and those who bought them are all accessories to a flagrant act of blasphemy. Poor Noah! What a fall! Thy brave efforts to save the world parodied at prices from a shilling upwards!

But to my purpose. The odious verses in question are entitled "Old Noah." He may have been an old man, but this habit of speaking of him is certainly not reverential, and would not be tolerated from the young in Sunday-schools. But of that no matter; there are worse things to come:—

"And Noah would often say to his wife, as he sat down to dine,
I don't care where the water goes, if it doesn't get into the wine."

Are you listening my readers? This is not by any common person who calls himself a Freethinker. It is not by Shelley. It is not by Omar Khayyâm. It is not by John Davidson. It is by one whom, as far as I know, has never belonged to the movement for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. We must smile and enjoy the humor of the situation. The Freethinker must console himself that he goes to gaol for the benefit of the Christian.

I cannot but think that Noah was a selfish old man, if we are to believe the new version. The Ark to him was the Christian's idea of heaven. What did it matter to him so long as he did not die a damp death!—

"And Noah cocked his eye and said, 'It looks like rain, I think.'"

This is truly shocking. Surely Mr. G. K. Chesterton has read Genesis vi. 17! Again, he would not have us believe that Noah had forgotten the Lord's terrible threat, and his method of carrying it out. I refuse to believe that the old salt (this disrespect is infectious) could overlook such a matter of importance. I refuse to agree that it is logical, as a Christian, to make fun of Biblical characters, and in all seriousness I warn the writer that it is but a short step from irreverence for Noah and his type to open blasphemy as interpreted by present-day "law and profits."

To Freethinkers there is a moral to this modern treatment of a famous boating excursion; but, unlike

most morals, it is a pleasant one. It is a proof of the advance of Freethought, whilst at the same time it is not a proof of religious sincerity. Mr. G. K. Chesterton can poke fun at every character from Genesis to Revelations, but he shall not do so without being reminded that Giordano Bruno was burned by order of Catholics. For buffoonery? Good God, no! For accepting the theory that the earth revolves round the sun. At Toulouse (1619) Lucilio Vanini, a learned Italian, had his tongue cut out and was burned. For saying that Noah was not a nice person in the matter of clothes? Merciful heavens, no! For a little difference with the priests of his time, and his belief in natural philosophy. These are but two instances of intolerance by Catholics, but they will serve to point out the fact that in the present day Christians can be skittish or cynical in their treatment of Noah, without whom it would have been impossible to build up the elaborate forms and ritual of the Church of Rome. For, if Noah had disregarded his divine message, Catholics would be without their patron saint. Therefore, I plead for the reinstatement of Noah as a person not to be trifled with, but as a man who was the keystone of Christianity. I also draw attention to the fact that the Blasphemy Laws should be enforced impartially. If this could be achieved, Freethinkers would have no cause for fear. As James Thomson has pointed out, you cannot accuse an unbeliever of blasphemy no more than you can charge an unmarried man with infidelity.

WILLIAM REPTON.

A SUNDAY-SCHOOL STORY.

Over on Capitol Hill there's a Sunday-school where a young man is superintendent. He is an earnest, conscientious young fellow, and, disagreeable as it may sound to say it, he means well. Sunday before last he rose to give a little talk.

"Dear children," said he, "I am very glad to be with you this morning, and when I look into your happy faces I am sure that all of you rejoice with me in the privilege of gathering together this morning to sing our songs of praise, and to listen to the lessons your dear teacher"—but then you know what he said; you know what they always say. This particular superintendent said that this beautiful Sabbath was "only a promise of the blissful hereafter, of the happy land to which we all want to go."

"And what is that happy land?" he asked.

The small boys on the front seat kicked each other surreptitiously and viciously, but nobody spoke till little Georgie said, with a tone midway between a sniff and a gurgle: "Heaven."

"Ah, that's it! that's it!" said the superintendent. "Little Georgie knew it. It is heaven. And we all want to go there. And now, children, can you tell me what kind of little boys go there?"

George was emboldened by praise. His head was dizzy with success. He rose in his place.

"Dead ones," he bawled.

SCEPTICISM AND PROGRESS.

Every advance in science, every improvement in the command of the mechanical forces of nature, every step in political or social freedom, has risen in the first instance from an act of scepticism, from an uncertainty whether the formulas, or the opinions, or the government, or the received practical theories were absolutely perfect; or whether beyond the circle of received truths there might not lie something broader, deeper, truer, and thus better deserving the acceptance of mankind.—*J. A. Froude.*

AN IMPULSE.

Free as the wind that stirs the crested larch;
Mad as a hatter, or a hare in March;
Nor prude, nor pietist;
Nor yet a moralist;
A simple humanist
Am I.
I've bid to all life's artificial starch
Good-bye!

—*Avon Dale.*

Acid Drops.

Here is a gem of a letter from a Christian judge which we think it best to print without mutilation. It was received by the secretary of the American Secular Federation in reply to a protest against the Bible being read in the State schools:—

"Probate Court, Franklin County.

"Samuel L. Black, Judge, Columbus, Ohio, Jan. 13, 1914.

"Mr. E. C. Reichwald, Corresponding Secretary,

"70 W. So. Water-street, Chicago, Illinois.

"DEAR SIR,—I am in receipt of your letter of the 12th and in reply beg leave to say that it is only necessary to glance at your letter and circular to learn that you are a lot of damn fools.

"Personally I have no objection to reading the Bible in public schools or in any other place, if anybody wants to read the Bible. I have no choice or any power to prevent it or otherwise. The only excuse I have for answering such rot as you and your co-adjutors are circulating is the last paragraph of your circular letter. Did it not contain that paragraph, I should have consigned it to the waste-basket without further consideration, but I am writing you and your co-adjutors to begin your propaganda as threatened and then go plum to Hell and take your propaganda with you.

"(Signed) Samuel L. Black."

We do not know whether Judge Black desires publicity, but he deserves it.

Mr. Arnold Bennett says his experience has caused him to lose all faith in the legend of literary talent going a-begging because of the indifference of publishers. Publishers are, in fact, looking for ability, and only too eager to utilise it. We have no doubt that this is, within limits, true. Publishers are quite glad to get a work of ability—provided it is not likely to seriously offend public prejudice. But let a man produce a work of unquestionable ability on, say, Atheism; let him state his case fairly, uncompromisingly, telling the truth so that any man of average education will be able to understand it; and then see what chance there is of any of the well-known publishers issuing it. We are not going upon mere surmise when we say that such a work would stand little or no chance of seeing daylight. We know it would not. The same influence that causes newspaper proprietors and editors to exclude Freethought news from the columns of their papers causes publishers to decline such works. They may admit the ability displayed, but they dare not publish. Sometimes they are honest enough to say so.

It is reported that six native mission teachers have been killed and eaten by the natives of Malekula Island, New Hebrides. One thing is fairly certain their place will not be taken by the white missionaries from home. It may, however, serve as a useful call for more subscriptions.

About three hundred English bluejackets were recently received in audience by the Pope, who expressed his pleasure at seeing the English seamen, who, he said, spread civilisation all over the world. That settles it. Hot-headed priests will note that the Head of the Church did not ascribe civilisation to the circulation of the Bible.

Nothing seems too silly for a newspaper correspondence. The *Times* has for some days been inserting letters on the subject of an additional human sense. Certain men are afraid of spiders, and some correspondents have been advocating the existence of a "spider sense." Others dislike cats, and another correspondent puts in a claim for a "cat sense." We do not see why there should be any limit to the number of senses we possess on these lines. Why not a whisky sense, a cold bath sense, a debt-paying sense, and so on? These things help one to realise how little genuine education exists among the "educated classes."

Rev. E. Griffith Jones complained at the recent Free Church Congress of the scarcity of children in the churches. He said "the truth was that children were not now being born"—quite a startling piece of news in its way. We have heard of a declining birth-rate, but that all births had ceased is indeed news. Still, we suppose the Churches must account for their losses somehow. "The serious point," says Mr. Jones, "is that it is affecting the Protestant Churches equally with non-churchgoing portions of the community." That is the parson all over. It is all a question of trade interest. He wants a large birth-rate so that there may be a chance of good pickings for the Churches. For ourselves, we are far more concerned with quality than quantity. We agree with Ruskin, it is not of

vital concern whether a man has two children or four, but it is of very vital concern whether the children he does have deserve hanging or not.

Principal Garvie complains that the Churches are over much concerned about "the lapsed masses." He says they are too little concerned "about the lapsed class of the cultured, who, in large and growing numbers, are becoming more indifferent, and sometimes even hostile or contemptuous, to the Christian faith. The dominating tendencies of the age are science, philosophy, and criticism, and each of these might make Christian faith more difficult." A shrewd man is Principal Garvie.

According to that intellectual periodical, *T. P.'s Weekly*, the Moravians despatch wives to their missionaries where such articles are required, but not "on approval," for they must be kept, however unsuitable. One missionary had lost two wives in his malarial district, and he sent home an order for the third. On his first glimpse of his latest he gasped, "Oh Lord! Carrots again."

At this season of the year the proprietors of the picture theatres are hard driven to cater for religious folk. Accordingly they have been presenting films of *The Messiah* and *Daniel*. We fancy that the Annunciation would be more troublesome to screen than even Daniel in the lion's den.

Newly-minted coins and a copy of the *Daily Mail* in a sealed jar were placed under the foundation-stone of part of a new church at Spondon, Derbyshire. The church-wardens might have used a copy of *Truth*.

Rev. A. J. Waldron has written what he calls a "Morality Play" for a Brixton music-hall. He says it is "a contribution to present-day social reform," and calls it *The Carpenter*. Its central feature is the old and stupid notion of a man who works a beneficial influence on his fellows by the exertion of some supernatural influence. Any fool can write a play, or anything else, on these lines. Nothing is impossible to the supernatural, and so anything may be accomplished. And, unfortunately, there is enough latent superstition and general silliness abroad to make the running for this kind of thing easy. But it is the supernatural influence for good off the stage that most people would like to see. Producing it before the footlights is quite easy.

Providence still continues its unwelcome attentions. In Russia, as the consequence of a terrible storm off the Sea of Azoff, a township of 1,000 persons was overwhelmed. It is believed that only eight of that number were saved.

In the *African Times and Orient Review*, for March 23, Mr. F. Hugh O'Donnell points out that the motive underlying the Protestant side of the Kikuyu controversy is not the desire for unity or a feeling of brotherhood, but a simple device to hide Christian divisions from their Mohammedan competitors. He says:—

"In order to hide this disgraceful state of misbelief, a large number of English missionaries, including some Anglican bishops, met at Kikuyu, in East Africa, some weeks ago. They said to one another: 'We cannot make any conversions, we cannot oppose the success of Islam, unless we agree to hide the points of belief on which we differ, unless we only mention those beliefs on which we appear to agree, and unless we lend to one another our different congregations so as to pretend to the Moslems that we have One Faith, like Islam, and that we have many converts who believe it.'

"And all these contradictory and English Protestant sects agreed to pretend to have only one religion and to lend their different congregations and followers to one another. There were Anglicans, and Presbyterians, and Independents, and Baptists, and Anti-Baptists, and Congregationalists, and Quakers, and a lot of separate and contradictory sects, who all agreed to pretend to believe in one another's strange religions in order to deceive the Mohammedans! It was Sectarian lying made a religious virtue! Lying and deceit. Nothing more."

Mr. O'Donnell, it should be pointed out, is neither a Mohammedan nor a Freethinker.

A *Christian World* writer says that the many attempts to establish religion by State action are not encouraging, and asks "Where is there a case when such attempts have succeeded?" We agree with the first statement—for different reasons than the writer would advance, and in reply to the concluding question, would point out that the voluntary establishment of religion has met with even

greater failure. True, the State establishment of religion has broken down sooner or later, but this was not really because of the action of the State in patronising religion, but because no State has ever been able to secure uniformity of belief. And this is equally true of religious establishments apart from the State. The same process of disintegration affects both equally. None of the sects that have been outside the State establishment show themselves better able to hold their own against the forces that make for the destruction of religion than does the Established Church. The State Church does exactly what all the other Churches do, it holds all it can and finds the number it can hold steadily diminishing. From a religious point of view it is as effective as any other Church. From the view point of human evolution they are all fighting an equally hopeless battle.

But it must not be forgotten that the Nonconformist Churches do actually benefit from the State patronage of religion. To begin with, the State patronage of religion kept religion alive as nothing else could have done. It saturated our public institutions with religion, and so encouraged the conviction that in some way or other religious belief was essential to the well-being of the State. Just imagine what a different state of affairs would exist to-day if religion had been kept as a purely voluntary affair. It would not be in schools, or in the courts, or in Parliament, or in any public function or ceremony. Religion would have been a purely personal, voluntary affair, and there would have been none of the social taboos against the non-religious man that at present exist. It is the State patronage of religion that establishes the social power of religion, and it is on that that all religions live nowadays in civilised countries. The sectarian outcry against the evils of the State patronage of religion is as shallow as are most other sectarian cries.

A sum of £2,046,126 was raised in the United Kingdom last year for Foreign Missions. This year it is proposed to expend an additional £50,000. With a tenth of this sum to be spent on a counter propaganda, we would undertake to diminish the contributions to the Foreign Missions Funds by one-half.

"The musical composer must be attended to," says Mr. Hubert Bath, musical director to the London County Council. We should like ourselves to attend to the genius who composed "Tell Mother I'll be There."

A simple life exhibition at the Royal Horticultural Hall, Westminster, has some novel exponents on view, including a married couple who have lived in a cart for years, and a man who carries a tent on his person. What a pity the Biblical king who ate grass is not alive.

"Empire Theatre: *The Messiah*" runs a startling announcement on the street hoardings in a well-known town. We are glad to hear it. Better late than never.

"Happily the God whom women worship is as unlike man as possible," writes a lady contributor in the *Referee*. Presumably a magnified and non-natural replica of Mrs. Pankhurst would be preferable.

Dr. J. S. Haldane has just published a book, entitled *Mechanism, Life, and Personality*, in which he dogmatically asserts that "we have parted company, once and for all, with the mechanistic philosophy—the notion of a real and self-existent material universe," but it is a notorious fact that at the Dundee meeting of the British Association, held a year and a half ago, this gentleman's "we" represented a miserable minority. At that time an overwhelming majority emphatically preferred the mechanistic philosophy, and certainly no radical change of opinion has taken place during the interval. Like Sir Oliver Lodge, Dr. Haldane woefully misrepresents the attitude of present-day biologists. Professor Loeb, a much more competent judge than either, agrees with Sir Ray Lankester in his oft-repeated declaration that the science of biology was never more materialistic than it is just now.

Calvary Reformed Church, Philadelphia, has just started a choir of boy whistlers to lead the singing, and Lincoln Baptist Chapel, Cincinnati, has a choir of canaries, who chirp to the accompaniment of the organ. Truly, a farcical ending to a tragic superstition.

"The whole world is going to Hell so fast that it is breaking all speed limits," says the Rev. Billy Sunday, one of America's flannel-mouthed preachers. Yet some of

Sunday's colleagues tell us there is no such station in the Church's time-table.

Thirsting After God is the title of a new book by Dan Crawford, the missionary. Most people prefer something more spirituous.

Mons. Scriabine considers there is a connection between color and speech. This may account for the fact that when Christian ministers discuss Freethought they always "see red."

The Land of Open Doors is a title which occurs in the booksellers' latest catalogues. It does not refer to Christian England, where there are so many thieves.

"Are Modern Preachers Inaudible?" is a subject discussed in a religious contemporary. We only wish it were true.

The Punjab Government has demanded a sum of money, equal to £133, from a Christian newspaper, the *Ludhiana Missionary*, as security for its future good behavior. The offence committed was the publication of an article which was considered likely to bring the Mohammedan religion into contempt. A case of Christians being hoist with their own petard.

How easy it is for a superstition to get established, and how difficult to overthrow it, once it is established! Mr. T. A. Glover, reviewing, in the *Daily News*, a recently issued life of Calvin, says:—

"It is curious that a generation which is terrorised in its thinking by semi-scientists, speaking in a vague and large way about Heredity and Environment, till we have almost lost the sense of individual responsibility and thrown over everything for an indefinite Social Righteousness, should have forgotten that the first European city in which Social Righteousness became a deliberate civic aim was Geneva, and that Geneva was inspired and nerved to carry this aim into actuality by the rejected Calvin himself."

It is easy for the ordinary newspaper man to write columns in this strain. He is fairly safe. The bulk of his readers are already believers in the story he is repeating. But it is almost pure superstition.

In the first place, the evil state of Geneva before Calvin has naturally been exaggerated by his biographers, as well as the purity that followed his government. Many of their "sins" consisted in dancing, and women were punished for this serious offence. In the next place, the opposition to his rule came from the better classes, including his fellow ministers, and not from the lower orders. Finally, the very records of the city during Calvin's rule decisively dispose of the notion of Geneva as a City of Righteousness under Calvinism. A Genoese authority sums up his examination of Geneva records of Calvin's time as follows:—

"To those who imagine that Calvin did nothing but good, I could produce our registers, covered with records of illegitimate children, which were exposed in all parts of the town and country; hideous trials for obscenity; wills in which fathers and mothers accused their children not only of errors but of crimes.....I could instance multitudes of forced marriages, in which the delinquents were conducted from the prison to the church; mothers who abandoned their children to the hospital, whilst they themselves lived in abundance with a second husband; bundles of law suits between brothers; heaps of secret negotiations; men and women burnt for witchcraft; sentences of death in frightful numbers; and all these things among the generations nourished by the mystic name of Calvin."

Still, we suppose these traditions of the immense good worked by Christian agencies are too valuable as assets to be given up on the testimony of mere official records.

There are numerous suggestions as to the best way of dealing with the Irish question, and of course the religious crank was bound to appear with his suggestion. In a letter to the *Times*, Mr. J. Currie Macbeth asks "Why have none of our great church dignitaries called for a day of national humiliation and prayer?" Perhaps the reason is that there is a limit to even the foolishness of "church dignitaries." As a matter of fact both sides have prayed, and how on earth can God Almighty answer so as to satisfy both? Very wisely, he does nothing. Mr. Macbeth concludes his letter by repeating the legend that when the *Titanic* was sinking the band played "Nearer, my God to thee." Nothing of the kind happened; but this story appears to have established itself in religious circles, and one can hardly expect that the fact of its not being true will be considered sufficient reason for not repeating it.

The absolute "bunkum" of these large revival meetings that one reads about was unconsciously illustrated by Gipsy Smith in the course of a *Methodist Times* interview. He confessed that all but few of the people at the large gatherings addressed by himself and the President of the Conference were already members of the Methodist Church. In an audience of 1,500, not more than fifty were non-Methodists. That being the case, one would like to discover the value of the meetings. True, they please the attendants. They are able to once more "give themselves to Christ," as they have been continually doing, and are ready to do again when a new revivalist comes along. But meanwhile the Methodist Church is losing ground. Gipsy Smith says he is not "looking forward to any big increase of membership." That, too, after addressing over 150,000 people!

Professor David Smith tells an inquirer who complains that whenever he is ill he gets no help whatever from religion, that Jesus had a similar experience on the cross when he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" If God deserted his only begotten Son, in his most trying hour, is it any wonder that he abandons an ordinary person when in trouble? Think of that, says Dr. Smith, and be comforted. Surely this is to trifle wickedly with a real problem. The inquirer's difficulty is not dealt with at all. There are multitudes of religious people to whom the belief in Christ and his salvation never ministers the slightest comfort or joy. If Christ exists, why is this?

Now that Christians are compelled to admit George Meredith's Freethought they give some very grotesque explanations. The *Daily Chronicle* recently stated that Meredith had Secularist friends and he was curiously chary of offending their peculiar sensibilities." We hope this sentence was paid for at the usual rate.

Archdeacon Sinclair has been complaining in the *Daily Mirror* of the "disproportionate rating of the incomes of the clergy." The founder of the Christian superstition had no income to speak of, and was sold up for thirty shillings.

Still further proofs of the benefits of Christianity as a civilising force. The Archdeacon of Richmond said the other day that he had been told by one who had lived in San Francisco, Sydney, and Leeds, that the latter place was the most impudently vicious in the world. A Leeds clergyman added that the comment was fully justified. As a redeeming feature we have no doubt that Leeds contributes its share towards the two millions sterling raised for foreign missionary work.

Nothing is real, say the Christian Scientists, but mind. There is a division of mind generally into mortal mind and spiritual mind. The late Mrs. Baker Eddy, foundress and head of the sect, left a fortune of £518,126. This, we presume, goes to the "mortal mind" portion of the concern.

Russia, which already possesses a number of semi-erotic religious sects, has just added another one to their number. A woman, with her son and another man, have just been charged with blasphemy and swindling. The woman's offence consists in representing herself as the Mother of God, who had descended from heaven for the special purpose of revealing new truth to the people. Part of this new truth consists in the inculcation of very common everyday morality, along with the practice of certain rites that are reminiscent of some of the erotic sects of antiquity and of the primitive Christian ages. She is also accused of extracting money from her dupes, but in these cases that is almost always a feature. Her male companion was said to be an incarnation of St. Peter, and her son an incarnation of King Solomon.

The new Woman's Church at Wallasey Cheshire, arranges that at the afternoon service only women are to be admitted. In the evening men and women may attend. This is rather a queer way of exhibiting the equality of the sexes. It looks more like a reversal of the practice in the early Church that prohibited women approaching the altar under certain conditions. Sermons to women only seem almost as objectionable as sermons to men only.

After our last week's batch of clerical wills, it seems hardly worth while to notice that of the Rev. William Pope with £7,287, Rev. G. Stanley with £7,108, and Rev. H. Shepherd with £76,638. Still, they may as well go with the rest, and may the Lord have mercy on their souls.

To Correspondents.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1914.—Previously acknowledged, £119 6s. 11d. Received since:—A. E. Maddock, £5.

E. B.—Thanks for cuttings, which we have found useful. We appreciate your point concerning the leopard changing its "spots." Many of us would like to possess the same facility for changing our "spot" for others more desirable.

C. HYLTON, of 32 Lancefield-street, Queen's Park, W., requests us to say that if C. Attwood will write him, he will gladly supply him with a few copies of *Facts Worth Knowing*. From another correspondent we learn that application to America has elicited the information that this pamphlet is quite out of print.

SECULARIST (Halifax).—There is no Branch of the N. S. S. in Halifax at present, but there is no good reason why there should not be one. Seven members are required before permission may be given to open a new Branch. The nearest one to you at present is Huddersfield.

A. J. MARRIOT.—We believe the usual effect of Christian settlement among a black people is that of "lightening" the population.

A. E. MADDOCK.—Thanks for cheque, which has been apportioned as you desire. Your MSS. came quite safely to hand, and is at present in type. We hope to publish in the course of a week or so.

D. MATT.—Very pleased to hear that Mr. Lloyd's recent lectures at Manchester gave the audiences so much pleasure and satisfaction. We should have been glad to have recorded the success of the meetings earlier, but yours is the first letter that has reached us on the subject. Obviously, no one could have regretted his inability to lecture at Manchester on March 22 more than Mr. Foote himself.

CORRESPONDENTS will greatly oblige, and will also facilitate the despatch of business, if they will mark all letters "Private" that are intended for Mr. Foote and are of a personal nature. Those containing editorial matter may be addressed in the usual manner.

J. N. LEARY.—Thanks for pamphlet. Several correspondents have written offering copies. Will they please take this as a general acknowledgment of their kindness.

T. L. BARRETT.—It is quite safe to assume that if Colonel Ingersoll declined to reply to Father Lambert his reasons were of a perfectly satisfactory nature. A man in Colonel Ingersoll's position could hardly be expected to publicly discuss with anyone who felt disposed to throw out a challenge. As a matter of fact Colonel Ingersoll did reply to Father Lambert, among others, but refused to be drawn into a lengthened discussion.

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

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

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

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

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

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.

Special.

I AM happy to say—and a good many "saints" will be happy to learn—that the worst of my recent illness is over. Shorter and sharper was the motto on this occasion. I am now clothed and in my right mind, as the prophet says; and am even eating ordinary food with reasonable appetite. The question for me now is the weather. If I can get out of doors freely I think I shall soon be myself again. Sunshine and balmier air are what I want now. I shall be lucky, of course, if I get them. For the only certain thing about the weather in England, and at this time of the year, is that you have got to have it, anyhow.

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

Under the present conditions of parliamentary business the Prime Minister's reception of the deputation on behalf of the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws was all that could reasonably be expected. The case against these laws was put forward by Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner and Professor L. Dickinson, who were accompanied by Sir W. Byles, M.P., Mr. H. G. Chancellor, M.P., Mr. R. D. Holt, M.P. (who has charge of the Bill for repeal), Mr. Silas K. Hocking, and others. With Mr. Asquith were the Home Secretary and the Attorney-General. Replying to the deputation, Mr. Asquith said—we quote from the *Daily Chronicle* of March 27—

"he was glad they realised that prosecutions in recent years were due not to any act of the Executive Government, but to the zeal of local authorities (the Boulter case excepted). A good deal of what had been urged was absolutely common ground among them. No one could defend the existing state of the law.

Our statutes were absolutely obsolete, and he did not believe any recent prosecution ever took place under them. He agreed in thinking that the statutes might also be swept out of the book with very great advantage. The interpretation of the judges had varied from time to time, and of late years a more restricted view had been taken by them.

"I understand your desire to be that we should go a step further, so that even this attenuated fragment or relic of the old blasphemy laws should altogether disappear. I confess, speaking only for myself, that I am in sympathy with you. I see no good object, certainly no object which is bound up in any way with the cause of religion, which the maintenance and the enforcement of these laws provokes.

"They are partial. They are uncertain. They have been differently interpreted from generation to generation; and I am afraid that there is a certain amount of truth in what has been said to-day, that they are rarely enforced, except against ill-educated and humble persons. That adds a sense of special injustice to a grievance which is already a considerable one. I do not know of any object which they serve.

"I think that if the law is adequately defined and maintained against the use of any form of language which would be reasonably capable of creating a breach of the peace, the context or the purpose for which it is used is wholly irrelevant. I think this rather outworn and obsolete chapter in our law might very well disappear, not only from the statute, but from the common law. I see no reason to repent of the vote I gave in favor of Mr. Bradlaugh's Bill, and if the opportunity offered I should give a similar vote again. I do not know what more you want." (Laughter.)

A Voice: 'Government assistance.'

Mr. Asquith said that was a very different thing. 'We have a pretty heavy cargo to carry at present.'

Sir William Byles: 'This is a very little thing.'

Mr. Asquith: 'But every little counts, and I am not sure there is any room in the hold of our ship for an additional legislative parcel, however small. I cannot honestly promise you anything in the nature of Government time. Sympathy and good will I do promise you in full measure, so far as I am personally concerned. You have many opportunities open to private Members to prosecute legislation which is beneficent in itself, and generally desired. If you can manage to find a nook or cranny for this little Bill of yours, we shall be very happy to support you to the utmost of our power.'

Mr. Asquith deserves the highest praise for his unpromising condemnation of these iniquitous laws, and for the straightforward declaration that he would repeat the vote he once before gave for their abolition should the occasion for so doing present itself. It now rests with those members of the House who are in favor of their abolition to see that the opportunity comes as speedily as possible. Unfortunately, there is small chance, in the present state of Parliamentary business, for any measure that is not a Government measure. The time of private members in the House is at best a precarious quantity, and at present is more than usually doubtful. Still, the Prime Minister's promise of "sympathy and goodwill," "in full measure," should inspire members to press the matter forward. We should imagine that there would be a clear majority in the Cabinet in its favor. For the rest, the description of the Blasphemy Laws as "absolutely obsolete," as "partial" and "uncertain," and adding "a special injustice" to an already considerable grievance, ought to give pause to possible opposition to the abolition of these laws.

Mr. Asquith stated that blasphemy prosecutions in recent years were not due to any act of the Executive Government—"the Boulter case excepted." The exception is of some little importance. It will be remembered that this case was taken up by the National Secular Society, and a considerable sum of money expended in its defence. And this was done on the broad principle that, whatever the kind

of language used by the defendants in these cases, the real object in invoking the Blasphemy Laws was to suppress an objectionable opinion. The Executive of the N. S. S. declined to consider whether the language used was coarse or refined, so long as the attack was made in the shape of an indictment for blasphemy. In doing this the N. S. S. stood practically alone, and it is pleasing to record that its straightforward attitude commanded greater respect and support than one might have, at first, thought probable. The Boulter case has, therefore, some little historic value. It obviously taught the Government that even uneducated men could not be attacked with impunity under cover of the Blasphemy Laws. It drew from a judge of eminence the first ruling in confirmation of Lord Coleridge's interpretation of the law on the occasion of Mr. Foote's trial. Finally, it brought the whole Freethought world into line in protesting against prosecutions under the Blasphemy Laws whatever the character of the speaker or speeches.

The friends of Miss Vance—and that means almost everyone in the Freethought party—will be glad to learn that she has decided to undergo a course of treatment for rheumatism in one of the London hospitals, and we hope that systematic care will have a beneficial effect. Her complaint has been more than usually troublesome of late. During her enforced absence from the office, her correspondence, and all matters connected with the Society's business, will be dealt with by Miss Kough, who is perfectly familiar with the routine work, as she has been assisting the General Secretary for some time.

Owing to the date (March 24) on which the annual meeting of the Secular Education League was held being that on which our last week's issue went to press, we have had no opportunity of referring to it before now. The necessity for doing so now chiefly arises from the careful manner in which the London papers avoid reporting anything that might offend the more bigoted of their readers. Fortunately, this boycott did not prevent the Caxton Hall meeting being one of the best hitherto held. The hall was full and the speakers all in excellent form. In the absence of the League's President, Mr. G. Greenwood, M.P., the chair was taken by Sir Henry Cotton. Sympathetic reference to both the absence of the President of the League—due to disablement from a broken knee-cap—and of Mr. Foote from illness, was made by the Chairman and Mr. Halley Stewart, both of whom paid high tribute to the work of Mr. Greenwood and Mr. Foote on the Executive Committee. The leaders of the League were all in fighting form, and the annual report and balance-sheet were both satisfactory documents.

The principal resolution of the evening was moved by Mr. Halley Stewart, and seconded by Lady Byles in a speech that bristled with epigrammatic utterances. This is the first time that Lady Byles has spoken at these meetings, but we hope it will not be the last. Not the least interesting part of her speech was the reading of a hitherto unpublished letter from Thomas Carlyle. A second resolution was moved by the Rev. Dr. Walsh, who, in the course of some forceful remarks, bore testimony to the influence of the League in most out-of-the-way districts. Mr. Swinny seconded the resolution, and Mr. Cohen brought the speaking to a close with a brief speech that was highly appreciated by the audience. There is plenty of work ahead of the League, and the results of its past work will be best shown whenever the promised Education Bill brings the question once more prominently before the public. As it is, the League has succeeded in bringing together people of all classes and parties who are agreed upon the importance of confining education in State schools to secular subjects, and in providing literature that will serve as ammunition in the coming fight. We cordially commend the League to those of our readers who are not yet members. The secretary is Mr. H. Snell, 19 Buckingham-street, Strand.

Whether we consider cases where individuals have had to suffer out of all proportion to their deserts and without ostensible, declared, or conceivable reason; or whether we consider the terrible natural calamities which befall great numbers of men and deal suffering and destruction to both good and bad together; in all cases we find that that view of life which would maintain that we, either as individuals or as a race, are under the protection of some external Providence will not fit the facts of our experience.—*Sir F. Younghusband, "Within, Thoughts during Convalescence."*

Death is the most important transaction of the religious life.—*Anatole France, "The Garden of Epicurus."*

A Three-Cornered Contest.

OFTEN when I have been arguing with Christians on some doubtful points concerning their faith, I have been in a minority of one, but I have never felt the least doubt that I should be able to hold my own against any number of them, if they only allowed me fair play. They have bombarded me with questions, and insisted upon me answering them to their satisfaction; but when I have returned the compliment, and told them that their replies were really no answer to my questions, they have generally lost their temper and become distinctly uncomplimentary, not to say offensive, in their remarks.

In the Council Chamber of Camberwell I have assailed the Christian belief in the efficacy of prayer under absolutely fair conditions, with a Mayor to keep order and insist upon my right to a fair hearing. I have also defended the *Freethinker* against the malicious and unfair charges of Christians, and been listened to calmly, though outvoted by an organised majority. Sometimes I have had the good fortune to have a friendly discussion with some Christians of various sects, a sort of round-table contest, in a room in which there was an audience of about twenty persons, mostly nominal Christians, or persons who might be more correctly described as "nothingarians." Of course, the great difficulty in such a discussion is to get the disputants to keep to the point, as most of them have a disposition to dodge about from one subject to another. There is also the further difficulty of keeping the spectators out of the discussion—especially when there is no chairman and no general rules of discussion are observed. In this little discussion I recently had, my opponents were a Roman Catholic and an active member of the Church of England. We discussed various questions relating to the Christian belief, but the main theme was "The Myths and Miracles of the Bible."

In this discussion I took the initiative, and opened the debate. The following dialogue will give the reader some slight idea of the matter and method of discussion:—

Freethinker: In my opinion the Bible, as a book, is full of myth and miracle; in fact, the whole story of Creation is one vast miracle.

Roman Catholic: But you do not deny that an Almighty God could create the universe in the manner described if he so desired?

Freethinker: No. I merely say that the story is so improbable and so contradictory that I cannot believe it.

Roman Catholic: Do you say that because you cannot believe it that therefore it is not true?

Freethinker: No, I do not take that ground. I take the ground that the story of Creation as given in the Bible is more likely to have been written by men who knew little or nothing of physical science than that it is an inspired production containing the utterances of the Jewish God—who, in my opinion, is a perfectly mythical personage.

English Churchman: But we are taught to believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and for my part I see no reason to doubt it.

Freethinker: Which version of the Bible do you think inspired—the Septuagint, the Douay, or the Authorised English version?

English Churchman: Oh, the Authorised English version, of course.

Freethinker: But why of course, when there are other versions? Your Roman Catholic friend probably thinks the Douay version inspired?

Roman Catholic: Certainly as much as any other. But as Roman Catholics we do not accept the literal interpretation of everything we find in the Bible. We have an Infallible Authority at the head of our Holy Church in the person of his Holiness the Pope, and in all matters of theology we accept his authority.

English Churchman: As Protestants we have no such authority. We believe in the Bible generally,

but we are allowed to exercise our reason in the interpretation of it.

Freethinker: You are a Freethinker, then, in a sense. You are allowed to pick and choose what you shall believe, but you must not call in question the fundamental doctrines of your faith.

English Churchman: What fundamental doctrines?

Freethinker: The doctrine of man's fall in the Garden of Eden, the miraculous birth of Jesus, his atonement for the sins of mankind by his death on the cross—

English Churchman: Of course not. We could not call in question these dogmas of the Church without giving up our belief in Christianity altogether.

Roman Catholic: We accept these teachings without question. Whatever our priests tell us on the question we accept, for we recognise the danger of allowing the ordinary lay mind to put his own interpretation upon them.

Freethinker: Exactly; the Roman Catholic is logical. He allows the priest to think for him; but the Protestant claims to exercise the right of private judgment. When, however, he comes up against his fundamental teachings, he gives up his reason and exclaims "I believe."

English Churchman: But there are a good many things in the Bible that I am not called upon to believe. I need not believe, for instance, in all the myths and miracles of the Old Testament.

Freethinker: Not now. But Christians had to believe a few years ago. Biblical criticism has knocked the bottom out of the incredible stories of the Old Testament; but I suppose you still believe the myths and miracles of the New Testament?

English Churchman: What myths and miracles do you refer to?

Freethinker: In my judgment the whole story of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus is founded upon myth and miracle.

Roman Catholic: Not so. Jesus Christ was undoubtedly a historical personage. Does not Josephus say so?

Freethinker: The passage in Josephus is an admitted forgery.

English Churchman: Who says so?

Freethinker: I can quote you plenty of Christian writers on that point. But what I say distinctly is this: There never was such a person as the Jesus of the Gospels. There never was a child who was born of a virgin; there never was a man who walked upon the sea, opened the eyes of the blind, fed thousands of people on five loaves and two small fishes, raised the dead to life, and finally, after being crucified, resurrected himself from the dead, and after showing himself to a few friends, ascended bodily into the heavens, and disappeared from the gaze of mankind for ever.

English Churchman: Oh! it's all very well for you to say there never was such a being as Jesus Christ, but greater men than you, even Freethinkers, say there was such a person. For instance, Renan, John Stuart Mill, and others.

Freethinker: Renan and John Stuart Mill, it is true, both believed that there was such a man as Jesus, but they did not believe that he was miraculously conceived and born of a virgin, and they did not believe in any of the miracles attributed to him.

Roman Catholic: All the great teachers of our Holy Catholic Church implicitly believed in the historical character of Christ. Why should we commence to dispute it to-day?

Freethinker: Because we have more information on the subject, and science and modern thought have changed the whole aspect of the question.

English Churchman: In what way?

Freethinker: Because we now know by a study of other religions that many of the great religious teachers of other countries are said to have been born of a virgin, delivered Sermons on the Mount, and were crucified and rose again from the dead—such, for instance, as Buddha, Christna, Indra, Vishnu.

English Churchman: Well, but what are these myths and miracles that you refer to in the New Testament other than those you have mentioned?

Freethinker: Have patience, kind friends. You must remember that the sacred books of Buddhists and Brahmins have their marvellous tales of the dead brought back to life, of incarnations and virgin mothers, of angelic appearances, visions, and voices, magical fish with money in their mouths, talking serpents, and other such extraordinary occurrences as those recorded in the Gospels.* People with no knowledge of science were always on the look-out for the marvellous. As Shakespeare says:—

"No natural exhalation in the sky,
No scope of nature, no distempered day,
No common wind, no customary event,
But they will pluck away his natural cause,
And call them meteors, prodigies, and signs,
Abortions, presages, and tongues of heaven."

English Churchman: Well, we are not bound, at this time of day, to believe in all these things. The English Church is very liberal in these matters; we are only bound to believe in the fundamentals.

Roman Catholic: And Catholics do not concern themselves about such mere details. We have our Articles of Faith and our Catechism.

Freethinker: Minor details, you call them. You might say they are minor details when speaking to me, but you would not tell your local priest or your more pious co-religionists so. It is wonderful how liberal-minded religionists of all denominations can be when they are speaking individually, and not as representatives of an organisation.

English Churchman: The clergy of the Church of England, especially the most distinguished scholars among them, are gradually giving up belief in the miracles of the Old Testament, and many of them have given up some of the miracles in the New, while few of them believe in a personal Devil or the old-fashioned idea of eternal torment in hell for the wicked.

Freethinker: Well, but what has caused this change to come over them? In my judgment it is the growth of scientific knowledge among the educated classes, and more important still, the growth of common sense among the masses.

English Churchman: To a certain extent, I agree; but surely you will admit that religious folk are not without intelligence, also.

Roman Catholic: There is plenty of intelligence among Catholics.

Freethinker: Yes, but they are not allowed to exercise it on theology or religion.

English Churchman: As far as I can see, you throw over everything that cannot be proved—cannot be settled at the bar of reason.

Roman Catholic: Reason is but a poor guide.

Freethinker: It is the best we have got.

English Churchman: And so you make yourself an outcast from your fellows upon the mere vanity of your superior reason.

Freethinker: I am bound to be true to myself. I cannot be a hypocrite. And if I must lose the society of some of my friends by being true to my convictions, I am willing to go out into a larger world in which I can breathe the pure air and exercise intellectual liberty in the pursuit of truth. Gentlemen, I thank you for your courtesy, and wish you a very good evening.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Organisms Antagonistic to Health.

THE wonders of life become the more wonderful the more closely they are studied. All diseases concerning whose genesis and development adequate knowledge is possessed are due to living germs, and doubtless all other ailments will be sooner or later traced to the malign influences of organic matter. As is generally known, the clearest water, which contains, or has contained, plant or animal organisms,

* *The Bible: What It Is and Is Not*, Joseph Wood.

soon becomes turbid and coated on the surface with a film. When the surface scum is scrutinised under a microscope, a multitudinous medley of lowly life leaps into view. Simple-celled animals, such as infusoria, will in all likelihood be seen, as well as unicellular plants. These organisms are minute enough, but they appear as giants in comparison with the dense masses of dwarf bacterial life by which they are surrounded. These bacterial creatures usually assume the appearance of minute spheres, threads, or rods which move amid their liquid home with the aid of delicate lashes, or they may lie in a condition of comparative repose in a jelly-like mass. The bacteria multiply with astonishing rapidity by cross division; one soon gives rise to a thousand, and the microscopic specks which first appear will, in suitable conditions of nutrition quickly form a mass which fills the containing vessel. Wherever organic matter is undergoing decomposition in infusions such as that instanced, in cases of disease or death, or within the body of the living organism itself, there these bacteria are gathered together.

Throughout its historic period, and doubtless through many of the prehistoric periods which preceded it, the human family was familiar with the poisonous and death-dealing nature of many of the larger plants. But it was reserved for nineteenth-century science to discover that various simple plants, which lie far beyond the range of unaided vision, are the generators of the most terrible scourges which afflict mental and bodily health. These minute plants belong to the lowly group of bacteria, and that department of organised knowledge which concerns itself with them is termed bacteriology.

Strictly speaking, every bacterium is a one-celled plant. But bacteria, germs, micro-organisms, and microbes are all popularly regarded as various varieties of one fundamental living form. As a matter-of-fact, however, germs, micro-organisms, and microbes are not necessarily bacteria, which are plants, whereas the others may be, and frequently are, animals. All these forms are micro-organisms, but the bacteria are a special kind of such organisms. It is, of course, very convenient to employ the more general terms, as the following instance shows. The germ of typhoid fever is a plant (bacterium) while the germ of malaria is an animal, although both of them are micro-organisms.

The average rod-shaped bacterium is about 1-10,000th of an inch in length and about 1-50,000th in diameter; others are much smaller and are only rendered visible by the highest powers of the microscope, while many are probably too minute to be seen even with the aid of the most powerful instruments so far invented. The germs which cause foot-and-mouth disease are so minute "that they will pass through the pores of the earthenware tubes in a Pasteur-Berkefeld filter, which removes bacteria large enough to be seen with a microscope."

As already intimated, in conditions favorable to growth, a bacterium soon attains its maximum size, and then splits into equal halves. Each of these feeds, develops, and soon divides again. Some bacteria divide every twenty minutes, and it has been computed that if the descendants of a single bacterium were to divide once an hour only for two days, there would result a population of these plant organisms of more than 280 millions. If this rate of multiplication were doubled, and the descendants of the one original bacterium divided every half hour, in 72 hours there would be 4,772 billions, and their total weight would probably exceed 7,000 tons.

Fortunately for higher animal life, such a reproductive rate is seldom or never possible for any length of time. Nevertheless, the figures just given help to convey some idea of the danger from baleful bacteria to the human or other body that harbors them.

In normal cases the food supply of disease germs is soon exhausted, and their own waste products

help to set up poisonous conditions, which inhibit any constant rapid rate of reproduction.

Spore formation is a distinguishing feature of some bacteria. Through providential care, perhaps, few spore-producing bacteria are responsible for human diseases. This is a gratifying circumstance, as spores are extremely difficult to kill; they are much more tenacious of life than the more mobile bacteria. Their death-resisting powers are well illustrated by the fact that spores from the bodies of cattle that have succumbed to the dread anthrax disease have been known to germinate several years after the dead cattle were buried.

The wide range of temperature through which bacteria live and reproduce their kind is very remarkable. Some are capable of multiplying at freezing-point; others abound in hot springs so near to boiling-point that they obviously flourish in conditions that are absolutely fatal to all high forms of life. Nor is this all. Intense cold is by no means fatal to some bacteria.

Several species of these, notably those of typhoid and diphtheria, have successfully resisted the temperature of liquid air (about -190°C.) for several days. When thawed out these germs have displayed every evidence of their power to multiply quite normally. The majority of bacterial forms, however, perish when congealed, and very few, indeed, can be restored to activity after water has remained in a frozen state for six months. Still, serious danger may lurk in ice procured from impure sources. At least one epidemic of typhoid fever has been definitely traced to ice kept in stock for fully seven months. As Dr. Bigelow, who records this case, very truly says, "All ice from waters contaminated with sewage should be regarded with suspicion. While most of the bacteria will probably die, the few which remain may multiply rapidly when taken into the human body."

The boiling-point of water is fatal to nearly all bacteria. One minute's exposure to ebullition suffices to kill the bacterial germs of both typhoid and tuberculosis. The hardier spore-forms of bacterial organisms are able to survive several hours' constant boiling, but when the method of discontinuous sterilisation is adopted, in other words, if the bacterial spores are boiled for a short time, and then allowed to cool, the spores germinate and are then easily sterilised by a little extra heating. It is a reassuring circumstance that contaminated water or milk very seldom harbors spore-producing disease germs, and a single boiling is thus usually sufficient to bring their inglorious career to a speedy termination.

It is also important to know that the *direct rays* of the sun are fatal to all bacteria. Some species succumb to a few minutes' direct exposure, and scarcely any can withstand an exposure of a few hours' duration. The services rendered by the sun in our streets and houses and other structures where disease-generating bacteria freely abound pass the limits of all ordinary calculation. The solar orb is, indeed, the supreme lord of light and life.

In all surface soils bacteria are abundant; no river, pond, lake, or sea is without its bacterial population; bacteria dwell in the bodies of plants and animals; the air is everywhere peopled with them except in the moteless atmosphere of high mountains, at the Poles at certain seasons, and possibly in some of the greater deserts.

Although it appears as if science long since rendered us familiar with the germ-theory of disease, this view of the origin of bodily ailments is of quite recent growth. Although much was suspected, little or nothing was definitely established until, in 1876, that great pioneer, Dr. Robert Koch, of Berlin, procured pure cultures of rod-shaped bacteria from the blood of sheep and oxen affected with anthrax, or splenic fever, and thus furnished the first proof that bacteria are responsible for disease.

Six years later, the same bacteriologist demonstrated the connection between human tuberculosis

and a bacterium which he christened "Bacillus tuberculosis." In the following year he announced the further discovery that the fearsome disease of Asiatic cholera owed its existence to a specific bacterium. Many of the more progressive medical experts were quickly impressed by the remarkable results that Koch's inquiries had opened up, and in the comparatively short space of thirty years the important science of bacteriology has been evolved. And, if we base our expectations on the already vast achievements of this new science, we are not only entitled to the anticipation of the near approach of the period when all portions of the earth's surface will be rendered habitable, but we may also look forward with the utmost confidence to the coming day when all the more malignant diseases will be banished from the haunts of men.

The list of diseases demonstrably due to bacterial agency is now a formidable one, which steadily increases every year. The many forms of tuberculous disease, cholera, pneumonia, tetanus, meningitis, blood poisoning, leprosy, and a large number of other scourges are all contagious or infectious bacterial diseases.

Various diseases are now known to be due to the sinister influences of animal micro-organisms which are embraced in the unicellular group known as protozoa. Sleeping-sickness, dysentery, and malaria are to be numbered among the ascertained products of these animal organisms. Other diseases which are more than suspected of organic genesis, but whose specific causes as yet remain undetected, are small-pox, yellow fever, and similar complaints.

The most successful treatment of these diseases so far discovered has been based on the assumption of their microbic origin. It is now demonstrable that yellow fever has been transmitted by the bites of mosquitoes which have previously feasted on the blood of a victim to yellow fever, and this has led physicians into the belief that, by adopting the plan so fruitfully followed in cases where disease is most certainly due to organic infection, they will be enabled to secure the best results in cases where the organism responsible for the disease has so far eluded observation. The method in question is either to destroy the mosquitoes or to prevent their biting healthy subjects or patients afflicted with malaria or yellow fever. Similarly, in battling with scarlet fever, small-pox, measles, etc., experience has completely justified the assumption of their respective micro-organisms as the real generators of the various diseases. Those that are smitten with these disagreeable ailments are therefore isolated as far as possible, and the rooms they have occupied, and the utensils they have employed are thoroughly disinfected.

Diphtheria furnishes an excellent illustration of the manner in which bacteria generate disease, as the following instance advanced by Dr. Bigelow shows:—

"A child is 'exposed' to diphtheria, perhaps in school where other pupils have shown signs of the disease, and after a number of days the symptoms of the disease may appear. Examination of the throat discloses certain peculiar spots, and microscopic examination of material from the surface of these spots shows thousands of bacteria of the diphtheritic species. The reason why the disease did not appear immediately after exposure is that it required time for the one or two bacteria which first lodged in the throat to multiply and form a colony."

The symptoms of this disease are not merely those of sore throat; many organs are affected. The explanation is that, although the bacteria are more or less confined to a given area of the body, they excrete toxins which enter into the blood circulation, and poison the system of the patient as a whole. When the sufferer has a sound constitution, the diphtheria toxin shows a lessening hold on the body in the course of a few days; the critical period is now past, and the patient begins to mend. Where the disease is overcome, this is due to the fact that the victim's body cells have slowly secreted a sub-

stance which fights the toxin; this substance is an anti-toxin. But in all cases in which the body fails to secrete sufficient anti-toxin, the patient dies.

Science, however, can cope with this difficulty. Diphtheria toxins are known to cause the tissues of the horse to form anti-toxin, which is contained in the animal's blood. Hence, the doctor injects into the human sufferer's blood a certain amount of this anti-toxin, and this prevents serious illness, and has proved a highly successful method in saving life.

(To be concluded.) T. F. PALMER.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON MARCH 26.

Members present:—Messrs. Baker, Barry, Bowman, Cohen, Cowell, Cunningham, Davey, Davidson, Heaford, Judge, Neate, Nichols, Quinton, Samuels, Silverstein, Wood, Miss Kough and Miss Stanley.

A letter was read from the President, Mr. G. W. Foote, explaining his inability to attend in consequence of very serious illness, and making suggestions concerning the business to be transacted.

Mr. Cohen was elected to the chair.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

The monthly cash statement was presented and adopted.

New members were admitted for the St. Helens and West Ham Branches and the Parent Society.

The General Secretary reported as to the recent meeting of the Camberwell Branch.

The forthcoming Conference was discussed, and the final arrangements adjourned until the next meeting.

On the motion of Mr. Cunningham, certain business remitted by the Conference to the Executive was dealt with, and, in regard to the resolution:—

"That one Sunday in the year be called the Charles Bradlaugh Sunday, and that all Branches be requested to arrange for lectures or readings to be given on this day, bearing on the life and teachings of Charles Bradlaugh, our late great leader."

—it was resolved to recommend that the day be the nearest Sunday to September 26, the anniversary of Charles Bradlaugh's birth, and that this year it be Sunday, Sept. 27.

In regard to a contemplated testimonial to Mr. W. J. Ramsey, after a statement by Mr. Davey, delegate from the Kingsland Branch, it was unanimously resolved that Miss Vance, the General Secretary, and Mr. Davey should, on behalf of the Executive, confer with the representatives of kindred and political societies, who intended to co-operate, and to report at an early date.

A vote of sympathy with the President concluded the meeting.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

THE SWORD OF BALAAM.

A Scotsman on a recent visit to Dublin went to see a private museum, which was advertised to contain the oldest and queerest antiquities in the world.

The Irish showman brought out a large sword and said: "This is the sword that Balaam slew his ass with."

The Scotsman, being well up in Bible history, here interrupted and said: "Balaam did not slay his ass; he only wished for a sword to slay it."

"Oh!" returned Pat, "then this is the very sword he wished for."

His evening prayer was notorious, and the reverend vicar of Postbridge had not seldom exhorted him to abandon such a narrow-minded petition. But Dennis would retort that he had but little time for devotion, and was not minded to spread his prayers thin.

"God Lord, bless me and my wife, and father and gran'-father and my girls—us six an' no more! Amen."

"That's all I've got to say, and 'tis enough," declared Dennis, "and as for t'other people in Postbridge, they've all got tongues in their heads, except old Drake Dicker, and they can pray for themselves."—*Eden Phillpotts, "The Master of Merrypit."*

A mother noticing that her young son had omitted from his prayers a special favor she had impressed upon him to submit to divine sanction, said to him, "Archie, why did you not pray for what I told you?"

The little fellow then eagerly explained, "Because it's a secret; if I had asked God about it, he would be sure to tell Mrs. God, and then it would be all over heaven in no time."

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 postpaid.

LONDON.

INDOOR.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Mr. Schindle's, 91 Church-road, Stoke Newington): 7.30, Business Meeting and Social—Conference Resolutions, etc.

OUTDOOR.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Edmonton Green): 7.45, Mr. Marshall, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, E.): 7.30, W. Davidson, a Lecture

PROPAGANDIST LEAFLETS. New Issue. 1. *Christianity a Stupendous Failure*, J. T. Lloyd; 2. *Bible and Teetotalism*, J. M. Wheeler; 3. *Principles of Secularism*, C. Watts; 4. *Where Are Your Hospitals?* R. Ingersoll. 5. *Because the Bible Tells Me So*, W. P. Ball; 6. *Why Be Good?* by G. W. Foote. *The Parson's Creed*. Often the means of arresting attention and making new members. Price 6d. per hundred, post free 7d. Special rates for larger quantities. Samples on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—MISS E. M. VANCE, N. S. S. Secretary, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

THE LATE

CHARLES BRADLAUGH, M.P.

A Statuette Bust,

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