

# THE Freethinker

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*There can be no safety in an illogical position, and one's chances of snug quarters in eternity cannot surely be bettered by believing at one and the same moment of time self-contradictory propositions.*

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL.

## "The God of this World."

**BIGOTRY** is the very atmosphere in which the Christian religion lives and moves and has its being; and in proportion as Christians cease to be bigots the faith loses its hold upon them. The better Christian a man is the greater is his bigotry. The word "bigot" is of unknown origin, though there is something to be said for the old supposition that it is a corruption of *by God*, a phrase which the French, who often heard it, would easily pronounce as *bigot*. But, whatever the origin of the term may be, there can be no doubt whatever as to its meaning. By general consent a bigot is a fanatical and intolerant adherent of a religious creed; and of all the creeds the Christian is the one in which bigotry flourishes most luxuriously. It is impossible to be a Christian, in the New Testament sense, without being a bigot. Even the Gospel Jesus was the incarnation of bigotry. The greatest of all sins was not to believe in him. He cursed Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum simply because they turned a deaf ear to his Gospel. The Scribes and Pharisees were called all the bad names imaginable solely because they were his opponents. The moment Paul was converted he blossomed into a hot-headed fanatic to whom toleration was unknown. All who ventured to introduce the slightest variation upon the Gospel preached by him were anathematised as enemies of God and man. Unbelievers in Christ were under the dominion of "the god of this world," and, consequently, doomed to eternal damnation. He and his converts alone possessed the light of truth, while all others grovelled in the gross darkness of ignorance and sin.

Now, this attitude of Jesus and Paul has been the attitude of the orthodox Church in all ages. In the strictest sense, toleration is a Christian vice, while persecution is exalted into a high virtue. Between the Church and the world there cannot possibly be any fellowship, because the former is a temple of the living God while the latter must be characterised as a synagogue of Satan. In other words, the Church belongs to God and the world to the Devil. With what delightful self-complacency Christians are in the habit of saying, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one." Well do we remember the time when Church membership was regarded as essential to salvation, and when to be cut off from it, for any reason, meant to be separated from Christ and driven back into the world of lost souls. We children did not quite know what and where the world was, but we profoundly dreaded it as a God-forsaken and accursed region. Indeed, only the other day, the Rev. John Hutton, of Glasgow, who is now hailed as an authoritative voice in the Free Churches, boldly declared that "the whole nature and principles of the world are opposed to that kingdom of God which Christ came to found."

This is doubtless true, but it by no means follows, on that account, that the nature and principles of the world are to be morally condemned. We hold that the world is opposed to the kingdom of God, not because it is wicked, but because that kingdom fails to meet its requirements. At this point Mr. Hutton seriously misrepresents Paul's teaching. The apostle does not say that "if our Gospel is hid, it is hid to them that are drifting away from the serious aspect and view of life." What he does say is this:—

"If our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that are perishing; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them" (2 Cor. iv. 3, 4).

In Paul's estimation, no aspect and view of life, however honest and serious, could be of any avail apart from Christ. As a preacher of the Gospel, his supreme point was that salvation can be realised, not by character, not by morality, not by good works, but by faith alone. No matter how valuable a member of society a man may be, or with what earnestness he may devote himself to the promotion of human welfare, he is yet eternally lost until he accepts and relies upon the finished work of Christ. What the world lacks is, not "a serious aspect and view of life," not simplicity and sincerity of heart, but trust in the redeeming blood of the Cross. The Pauline Gospel, as stated in the Epistles, is intelligible though false, but as expounded by Mr. Hutton it is unintelligible as well as false.

Let us calmly examine this point. The contention is that the people of the world are blind to all the higher things. Paul maintains that this blindness is due to the active interference of the Devil; but Mr. Hutton accounts for it thus:—

"The Apostle says there is an eye of the soul, and that fragile, delicate, but most authentic organ, whereby man perceives and knows God, like the eyeball of the natural eye, may be veiled over with a tissue of coarsened fibre.....The delicate mechanism of the soul by which we apprehend the unseen and communicate with God may, through neglect or misuse, lose its power, so that the whole world to which our souls at one time lay open may shrink and retreat, until as a basis for—the supreme concern of—a man's life it ceases to exist."

Here the reverend gentleman builds wholly upon a pure assumption. Of the soul we know absolutely nothing, not even that it exists. Consequently, the eye of the soul exists only in the preacher's imagination. It follows from this that the spiritual world, which it is claimed the soul apprehends and has intercourse with, is as hypothetical as the soul itself. But this gift of spiritual vision is a false inference from a baseless assumption. The vision at best as at worst is an illusion, a will-o'-the-wisp, into which mere belief often transforms itself. Vision invariably grows out of belief, but belief never out of vision. There is a legend that the disciple Thomas disbelieved in the resurrection of the Master, and gave vigorous expression to his unbelief. Soon, however, the Lord appeared and invited the Sceptic to inspect him carefully, and when he saw and recognised him Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." Then "Jesus saith unto him, Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are thou that have not seen, and yet have believed."

That blessedness may be claimed by all Christians, who believe and *imagine* that they see, but who never see first, and then believe.

Mr. Hutton asserts that non-Christians "are deprived of something," and we agree with him. They are deprived of many illusions, doubts, and fears. "They do not see certain things." True; but they do not see them because they are not visible except to believers, which is the strongest possible argument against their reality. Mr. Hutton is of opinion that not to see such imaginary things "is the awful penalty," but we regard it as the reward, of unbelief. To our mind "the awful penalty" is to believe in things of whose existence there is no evidence. Piling on the agony, the reverend gentleman adds that they who "do not see certain things" are tremendous losers—"they lose that without which life is not worth living"; but this is a bare-faced bearing of false witness against countless myriads of people. Mr. Hutton knows full well that in this country alone there are many thousands of unbelievers who find life pre-eminently worth living. Do our scientists live in vain, though the overwhelming majority of them "do not see certain things"? Were Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, John Tyndall, and Thomas Huxley, while they lived, merely "doing time," with no other object than to were out their boots? Only the blindest, most inveterate bigotry could so characterise the lives of such great, bold, and noble thinkers. Who is Mr. Hutton that he should thus sit in judgment upon men incalculably his superiors? It is true that unbelievers do not see that "the world of God's intention is moving towards some wonderful thing from which" they shall be excluded; but has such a vision been vouchsafed to this oracular pulpit orator? We venture to affirm that he knows absolutely nothing, either of God or the world of his intention. Surely, if there were a God, the world of his intention would be identical with the world of his actual creation. He would not *make* one world while *intending* another.

We rejoice exceedingly that we do not see certain things. We do not see the dawning of Christ upon the world for two valid reasons; first, that if Christ were a reality it would be an insufferable insult to him to say that, after two thousand years, he is only just dawning upon the world; and secondly because, as a matter of fact, Christ is not at the dawn of his career, but at the evening twilight. He has had his day, such as it was, and the world is now turning its back upon him. It is false to say that he ever won Europe. Europe never wanted him; he was thrust upon her by force; and the man who began the job was one of the worst men that ever sat upon a throne. No, Europe never desired Christ, and she is now gradually getting rid of him. Neither do we see God, for the simple reason that we are convinced there is no God to see. Life largely becomes what we take it for. It more or less comes round to our way of looking at things. We do take the view that we are in the world to have a good time, to have our way, and see that we get it. And after all said and done, is not Mr. Hutton here for the same purpose? Is he not having a very good time just now? But we do not believe in having a good time at the expense of a terribly bad time for some other people. We believe rather in being happy by doing our utmost to promote happiness all around us. No true man can ever have a thoroughly good time when his neighbors are being crushed down by injustice and greed, unless he is doing his best to destroy injustice and greed by fostering the sense of universal brotherhood.

The God of this world is not a superhuman being called the Devil, but, at bottom, the spirit of goodwill and fairplay. It is a fair, sweet goddess in whom we believe, and her name is Reason. As yet, she is not seated upon her throne, but her feet are on the steps, and her ascent is nearer completion to-day than it ever was before. As soon as she begins to wield the sceptre with consummate authority, superstition, which is the cause of all bigotry, shall

wither away; and with the disappearance of the Fables of the Above shall come into happy force the Facts of the Around.

J. T. LLOYD.

### Christianity and Politics.

THE emergence of the religious preacher in the political field is at once the most sinister and the most encouraging of present-day events. It is encouraging because it is a confession of the truth that the purely religious appeal is losing ground. The preacher who keeps strictly to religion finds either a dwindling body of listeners or has to select them from the admittedly least enlightened portion. Others tell him with almost brutal frankness that his message lacks reality; that people cannot be interested in their souls while their bodies are in a state of semi-starvation or while the social environment makes for material degradation. Preachers confess quite openly that under present conditions hell has lost its terrors and heaven its attractions; and they add that if religion is to maintain its hold on people, it must show itself capable of dealing with matters that really interest the man of to-day. And what interests the more thoughtful men and women of to-day is not religion.

So far the phenomenon is encouraging. But it has also its sinister aspect. For even though the parson may be *in* politics, he is not *of* it. His work in church or chapel is the promotion of sectarian influence and interests. And his work in Parliament or on the political platform is still the promotion of sectarian influence and interests. The object is the same; the method of achieving it has changed. His outlook on life is bounded by his sect; his point of view remains that of the religious advocate sworn to subordinate everything to the religious interest. To realise this one need only consider the attitude of Nonconformist leaders in the House of Commons on the question of education, or the recent Sunday Closing Bill introduced into the House of Lords by the Bishop of London. They talk largely of other things—of sobriety, of social justice, of morality, etc.; but it is the religious interest that bulks largest in their minds, and which determines action. They would, if they could, make politics a department of religion; and if this cannot be done, they will at least infect it with the religious temper.

It may be said that the clergy always have been in politics, more or less, and have always influenced the course of political events. And this is quite true. But there is an important distinction between things as they were and as they are. So long as religious belief is avowedly a question of national concern, the interference of the clergy will at least be open, and people will submit to it with open eyes. If they subordinate other things to religion, it is done consciously, and because they believe it right that things should be so. To-day this interference is not open. It is masked in a thousand-and-one ways. Support is asked for on social and ethical grounds, and is given in the belief that social and ethical reform is being accomplished. And the support, once gained, is used to bolster up religious pretensions. How much support—to take only one instance—would the bald principle of Sabbatarianism gain if preached to-day? It is probable that a majority even of religionists are against it. But by confusing this with various ethical and social considerations—the need for rest, for leisure time in which to cultivate character, etc.—people are induced to oppose the rationalising of the day of rest, and thus play into the hands of the priesthood. And not only play into the hands of the priesthood, but give this class a position of power and importance in the social and political world that it would not otherwise have.

The real question that lies behind all these tricks and turns of the political parson is that of the place of religious belief in the modern State. Is religion

a mere hypothesis, to be held as one may hold a theory concerning the habitancy of Mars or the origin of language? Or is it something vital to the wellbeing of the State—vital in the sense that no government can neglect it without impairing social efficiency? The very raising of the question is indicative of the decline of the power of religion. In primitive societies religion and sociology are one. Although essentially connected with another world, and with an order of beings other than human, religious belief is so powerful in early times that it colors social life in all directions, and determines the form of all social institutions. Under such conditions there can be no question as to the place of religion in the State. Its place is determined by the universal belief that to displease the tribal gods brings inevitable disaster. In this way religion becomes closely associated with every aspect of ethical and social life, and the association is maintained for so long that the ordinary mind finds it impossible to conceive their separation. Even today we find this to be the case in a very large number of instances; although if one carefully analyses the reasons given for the retention of the alliance, we find the real basis to be none other than the fact that religion always has more or less controlled social institutions.

But the growth of knowledge and of the social consciousness offer a fatal obstacle to the power of religion. It must be remembered that in the true sense of the word there is no such thing as growth in religion. What is called such is sheer delusion. To reduce the number of the gods from many to a few, and from a few to one, is not growth. To limit their functions from those of a direct, particular, and universal character to an indirect and general character is not growth. To refine the idea of a personal deity until it becomes the conception of a mere abstract force is not growth. All these are modifications of the religious idea under pressure of advancing knowledge—so many attempts to state religion in such a way that it can conflict with nothing we know to be true because it answers to nothing of which we are certain. The growth of man is not in religion, but out of it. He becomes less and less concerned with his gods as he becomes more conversant with the true nature of the forces moulding life.

The consequence of this is, as I have said, that we are all driven, sooner or later, to face the question of the place of religion in the State. And to the modern mind, only one of two positions is logically possible. Either we must direct social affairs from the point of view of religious beliefs, or we must judge religious beliefs from the point of view of social requirements. Either a theocracy or an atheocracy. The first is that which the political parson is really fighting for, although he lacks the courage to say so openly. And it is the one that religionists *must* fight for. So long as men believe that religion is the supremely important thing in life, they are bound to subordinate everything else to it. More; if right living is really dependent upon sound religious belief, if Atheism is—as only a few now say, but as many apparently believe—a growth that threatens social well-being, then the State as a whole has as much justification for enforcing right religious belief as it has for spending public money and using public resources on education. The State can only ignore this obligation on the assumption that it really does not matter what a man believes in religion. It is of no vital consequence. The normal forces of social life are by themselves adequate to social well-being and national progress.

Moreover, the practical evils that follow the attempts to regulate social life in accordance with religions are obvious. Jew hunts, witch-burnings, heresy hunts, persecution in all its forms, social division in its bitterest aspects, have been the fruits of allowing religion to control life. It is not true, as many Nonconformists assert, that religious persecution has to be placed to the credit of the State. Quite to the contrary, the State has invariably been

the peace-making partner in the combination. It is the religious influence that has forced persecution upon the State, because to the deeply religious man the heretic, the "blasphemer," was a social plague spot, a centre of contamination, the source of innumerable evils. And, granted the truth of the Christian religion, I, as a heretic, agree with him.

The second position, that we judge religious beliefs from the point of view of social welfare, is the more powerful one, and it is fatal to all forms of religion. For just as soon as people begin to discuss religions from this point of view, they begin to realise that there is not one of the functions of social life that cannot proceed as well without religion as with it. If people can be honest, truthful, just, loyal, good husbands, parents, and citizens, without religion, what justification can there be for the maintenance of huge religious organisations that involve the expenditure of millions of money and the withdrawal from productive pursuits of an army of men who might be otherwise employed? To say that there are still many who need the exercise of religion if they are to be good citizens, only—to use Sir Edward Carson's phrases—passes sentence of death with a stay of execution. It is saying that religion is necessary to socially undeveloped characters. And that is also saying that so soon as these have reached the level of development achieved by the Freethinker, the need for religion will be gone.

It is, indeed, the appeal to utility that is largely responsible for the decay of religion with the general public. The very appeal to utility by believers was, as Mill pointed out, evidence that they were doubtful about its truth. And its use proved it to be a two-edged weapon. To the Freethinker's charge that Christianity was not true, the believer retorted that anyway it was useful, and pointed to the good work done by Christians, the institutions founded by them, etc. The Freethinker did not decline the challenge. He met the Christian on his own ground. He pointed out, in the first place, that the plea was one-sided. It counted the good done by believers, and which was assumed to be the fruit of their belief, and said nothing of the evil which could be clearly shown to be the outcome of religious conviction. In the second place, the Freethinker pointed out that good works are not the fruits of the Christian life exclusively, and, therefore, Christianity cannot be credited with their existence. A Christian is not only a Christian. He is a human being, sharing in all the qualities that result from generations of social life. His Christianity is not something anterior to these qualities, they are merely added to them as the consequence of a sheer environmental accident.

This last sentence expresses what will be to some—and ought to be to all—a commonplace. And yet the whole discussion hinges on its appreciation. For it means that hitherto Christianity has gained credit by a sheer exploitation of human nature. It has claimed credit for that which belongs to humanity. It still does so. The political parson who gives us a sociology with a religious label, who appeals to our sense of truth, or justice, or beauty, on the grounds of religion is still engaged in an exploitation of human qualities in the interests of supernaturalism. The trick has succeeded in the past, and it still succeeds with many in the present. But there can be no question of its ultimate failure. Art and science have now shaken themselves completely free from religious control, and claims independency and self-sufficiency. It is only a question of time for sociology and ethics to achieve a like emancipation. Religion will then be seen in its true nature as a pure supernaturalism that has too long been allowed to obstruct sane views of nature and of man.

C. COHEN.

The only means of realising what is good is to teach it by education and propagate it by example.—*Francisco Ferrer.*

## Primitive Man.

"The savage is a human document, a record of man's efforts to raise himself above the level of the beast. It is only of late years that the full value of the document has been appreciated; indeed, many people are probably still of Dr. Johnson's opinion, who, pointing to the three large volumes of *Voyages to the South Seas*, which had just come out, said: 'Who will read them through? A man had better work his way before the mast than read them through; they will be eaten by rats and mice before they are read through. There can be little entertainment in such books; one set of savages is like another.'"

"But the world has learned a good deal since Dr. Johnson's day; and the records of savage life, which the sage of Bolt-court consigned without scruple to the rats and mice, have now their place amongst the most precious archives of humanity."—J. G. FRAZER, *Psyche's Task* (1913), p. 173.

"There can be no doubt that Darwin's theory ignores a personal Creator, and his direct interference in the transformation and creation of species, there being no sphere of action for such a being.....Even man is neither a distinct creature, formed in a special manner, and differently from all other animals, nor provided with a special soul and endowed with a divine breath of life—he is only the highest product of a progressive selection, and descends from the simious [ape-like] group standing next to man."—CARL VOET, *Lectures on Man* (1864), p. 449.

ACCORDING to the Bible, God created man perfect, and placed him in the Garden of Eden; but through disobedience—in the matter of eating forbidden fruit—he fell from his perfect state and commenced to degenerate. Luther said, "Since Adam's fall men see nothing, and are stupider than beasts"; and declared, "If Adam's fall had not spoilt us, we should have had no care either. We should have lived without pain, in possession of all kinds of knowledge, and have passed from time into eternity without feeling of death."† John Wesley held the same opinion, and, in fact, it was the belief of all Christians before Charles Darwin shattered it with his *Descent of Man*. Even to-day the majority of Christians give assent to this view, especially among those circles where the light of science has failed to penetrate.

But, as Professor Frazer remarks, science "assumes that civilisation has always and everywhere been evolved out of savagery. The mass of evidence on which this assumption rests is, in my opinion, so great as to render the induction incontrovertible."‡

As the great geologist, Sir Charles Lyell, pointed out,—

"had the original stock of mankind been really endowed with such superior intellectual powers, and with inspired knowledge, and possessed the same improvable nature as their posterity, the point of advancement which they would have reached ere this would have been immeasurably higher."

Since the immense period of time that has elapsed since man co-existed with the extinct animals, with whose remains his own have been found, continues Lyell:—

"During those ages there would have been time for progress, of which we can scarcely form a conception, and very different would have been the character of the works of art which we should now be endeavoring to interpret."

Instead of the rudest pottery or flint tools, so irregular in form as to cause the unpractised eye to doubt whether they afford unmistakable evidence of design, we should be finding sculptures, lines of buried railways or electric telegraphs, astronomical instruments and microscopes of more advanced construction than any found in Europe. "Still farther," continues Lyell,—

"would the triumphs of inventive genius be found to have been carried, when the later deposits, now assigned to the age of bronze and iron, were formed. Vainly should we be straining our imagination to guess the possible uses and meaning of such relics—machines, perhaps, for navigating the air or exploring the depths of the ocean, or for calculating arithmetical problems,

beyond the wants or even the conceptions of living mathematicians."\*

The older the geological strata in which the remains of ancient man are found, the more rough and rude are the implements he used. If, then, man evolved from the animal world, our best means of getting some knowledge of our earliest ancestors would be by the study of those primitive races now in existence, whose intellectual development has been arrested, and who represent an earlier stage of evolution which the higher races have passed through and left behind. And this is why scientists are so interested in the study of these primitive races, and scientific expeditions are continually being sent to out-of-the-way places where these surviving representatives of primitive life are to be found untouched by our civilisation.

It may be said—it is said—by old-fashioned opponents of evolution who still believe the Bible account of the original perfection of man, that thousands of years before Christ the Egyptians and Babylonians were highly civilised races, living in great cities and building immense palaces, temples, and tombs for their kings and priests. Therefore, these early men were highly civilised.

This is true. Professor Flinders Petrie, a great authority, who has himself made many important discoveries during his excavations in these countries, places the beginning of Egyptian civilisation at from 9,000 to 10,000 years ago.† And even so conservative a critic as the Rev. Professor Sayce quotes with approval the estimate given by Professor Hilpreth for the founding of the Babylonian Temple of Bel, "somewhere between 6,000 and 7,000 B.C.; possibly earlier.‡ That is nearly 8,000 or 9,000 years ago.

But, if the archæologists have traced the civilisation of man back to 10,000 years, the geologists have traced the existence of man back, not for thousands, or tens of thousands, but for hundreds of thousands of years! The last few years have brought to light astonishing evidences of man's antiquity, to deal with which would require a separate series of articles. Suffice it to say that so careful and cautious an authority as Professor Keith, in his *Ancient Types of Man* (p. 102) says:—

"We know now that the men who lived in Europe during the earlier and greater part of the Glacial period—one estimated to have extended over a period of from 500,000 to 1,500,000 years—were of the Neanderthal type."

This was written in 1911; and the same authority, lecturing to the Royal Dublin Society, last March, on the newly discovered Piltdown skull, which he does not hesitate to place in the Pliocene formation, believes it reveals a history for man "beyond the wildest guess or dream of the most speculative philosophers."§ Sir Ray Lankester is also a believer in the existence of Pliocene man||.

The beginnings of civilisation are but of yesterday compared with the immense period of time man has been in existence, and those far-away places where the savage still exists untouched by civilisation may be compared to those small islands in the Pacific Ocean, far from the mainland, like Juan Fernandez—the island dear to our boyhood as the home of Robinson Crusoe—where plants are still growing which have disappeared on the mainland, crushed out in the struggle for existence. A naturalist who recently visited the island of Juan Fernandez tells us "It is as if one had been carried back to past geological periods, as if one walked about in a living museum, crowded with rare specimens."¶ So the savage belongs to a past order of things that was

\* Sir Charles Lyell, *Antiquity of Man* (1873), p. 422.

† Hutchinson, *History of the Nations*, p. 6.

‡ Sayce, "Recent Discoveries in Babylonia," *Contemporary Review*, January, 1897, p. 83.

§ *English Mechanic and World of Science*, March 20, 1914, p. 161.

|| Sir Ray Lankester, *On the Discovery of a Novel Type of Flint Implements below the Base of the Red Crag of Suffolk, proving the Existence of Skilled Workers of Flint in the Pliocene Age.*

¶ Carl Skottsberg, *The Wilds of Patagonia*, p. 137.

\* J. Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1822), iv., 315.

† J. A. Froude, "Luther," *Contemporary Review*, July, 1883.

‡ J. G. Frazer, *Psyche's Task*, p. 162.

once universal. And that is why science takes such an interest in him, and sends out expeditions to remote and, to ordinary people, inaccessible places, to record his manners and customs, language, superstitions—if any—and modes of thought.

But, as Professor Frazer points out, no existing race of savages can be compared absolutely with the earliest representatives of man; savages "are not primitive by comparison with truly primæval man, that is, with man as he was when he first emerged from the purely bestial stage of existence," for, as he says, all the evidence goes to show—

"that every existing race of men, the rudest as well as the most civilised, has reached its present level of culture, whether it be high or low, only after a slow and painful progress upwards, which must have extended over many thousands, perhaps millions, of years."\*

For instance, no race of savages has yet been discovered without a language—although some of them are very rudimentary, as we shall see—none without stone or wooden weapons or utensils, none without the art of making a fire. No wild animals have ever attained to either of these accomplishments, and probably untold ages passed in acquiring, and improving upon, these arts, and every child that is born has to be taught these things, as he does not bring the knowledge of them with him.

So, again, from the child we can learn a great deal about the thoughts and ideas of primitive man. Many travellers have compared savages to grown-up children. Children have to be taught to reason and think properly—some even then do it very poorly—but the savage is never taught—or, rather, never educated—he grows up thinking the thoughts of a child.

W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

## Christian Apologetics.

### IV.—IRENÆUS.

IRENÆUS became bishop of Lyons in the year A. D. 178, and some years later—about A. D. 185 or 186—wrote a book in five parts "Against Heresies." It is from this work we derive the evidence which that bishop bears to persons and writings before, and up to, his days—including the canonical Gospels and their writers. Copies of this great book were in the hands of nearly all the so-called "Christian fathers" who succeeded Irenæus, for several centuries. Hence, everything relating to the Gospels or the apostles contained in this bishop's book we find repeated by later writers, who now and again name Irenæus as their authority, as does Eusebius, for instance; but, in the majority of cases, the statements are copied as undoubted historical facts, without mention of the source. Prior to the time of Irenæus, we hear only of the existence of the Pauline Epistles, the Book of Revelation, and a primitive "Gospel," though we know that all four of the canonical Gospels were written nearly thirty years before the time he wrote. This may be accounted for by the fact that each of the canonical Gospels, being supposed to be merely a revised copy of the primitive Gospel, was at first used only in the church to which the canonical reviser belonged; but that after a decade or two all four became known to the other churches, and, being found to be a decided improvement on the primitive Gospel, came into general use. Irenæus is the earliest writer who names our present Gospels. He says:—

"Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundation of the church there. After their decease Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, delivered to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the gospel preached by him. Afterwards John, the disciple of the

Lord, who had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia" (Her. iii., i., 1).

The testimony of Irenæus is unquestionable as to the existence of the four canonical Gospels in his day; but what he says about each proves conclusively that he did not know anything about the writers. In the first place, if Matthew wrote his Gospel when "Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome," he did not write a Gospel at all: for Peter and Paul never went together to Rome, and never preached and founded a church there. If we turn to Gal. ii. 11—14, we find that in consequence of Peter's dissimulation at Antioch, Paul in righteous indignation "resisted him to the face," and denounced his conduct before the whole church. Up to this time—about twenty years after Paul's conversion—neither Peter nor Paul had visited Rome; and after this public rebuke, Peter would certainly not desire to go there with Paul, nor indeed anywhere else in that fearless preacher's company. Moreover, from Gal. ii. 7 we learn that an agreement had been made between Paul and the apostolic party that Paul should confine his preaching to the Gentiles, while Peter kept to the Jews—which arrangement appears to have been carried out. To the apostolic party Paul was an interloper, who preached their new religion unasked, and received Gentiles as converts without requiring circumcision or the observance of the Mosaic laws. Instead of fraternising with him, they withstood him, and denounced him as a false apostle. In the time of Irenæus there were several apocryphal writings in circulation relating to Peter and Paul, in one of which—"The Travels of Peter and Paul"—the two were represented as travelling together to Rome, where they preached and founded a church, and afterwards suffered martyrdom. This was the source of Irenæus's statement respecting Peter and Paul at Rome. It was also from three of these apocryphal writings that Luke compiled the canonical "Acts of the Apostles"—which book is, of course, unhistorical.

Irenæus's statements respecting Matthew and Mark were derived from a book written by Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (A. D. 140—150), which work he names and quotes from. The statement of Papias was as follows:—

(1) "Matthew composed the Sayings in the Hebrew language, and everyone translated them as best he could."

(2) "Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately what he remembered [of Peter's preaching].....but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the narratives."

It will here be seen that no claim is made for "inspiration" on behalf of Matthew or Mark. As regards the latter, we are to suppose that Peter went about narrating all the sayings and incidents contained in Mark's Gospel, and that Mark remembered them all accurately—so accurately, in fact, that some of them are in verbal agreement with Matthew, and many others in verbal agreement with Luke.

But how came Papias to know the circumstances he has stated about Matthew and Mark? Well, he says he was told so by a presbyter of his acquaintance named John. As a matter of fact, we do not know that he ever saw either of the writings he mentions; neither do we know that he had ever heard of the Gospel of Luke or John—which he has not named. Eusebius, writing with Papias' book before him, says (Eccl. Hist. iii., 39):—

"Papias asserts that he had heard in person Aristion and the presbyter John, and mentions them frequently by name.....He has set down many things as coming to him from unwritten tradition, amongst these some strange parables and instructions of the Savior, and some other things of a more fabulous nature.....He moreover relates other narratives of the Lord's sayings given by Aristion, and traditions received from the

\* J. G. Frazer, *Psyche's Task*, p. 163.

presbyter John.....He also gives the story of a woman who was accused of many sins before the Lord, which is found in the Gospel according to the Hebrews."

From the foregoing it appears evident that Papias had never seen any of the canonical Gospels. He had but a Greek translation of the primitive Nazarene Gospel, to which he had added a large number of apocryphal stories and sayings, some of which even Eusebius recognised as "fabulous." In mentioning Matthew and Mark as evangelists, Irenæus, of course, referred to Matthew the apostle, and to an apostolic Mark—respecting whom nothing certain is known. Moreover, the fact of Mark being stated to have been "the interpreter of Peter" is a proof that Papias and his two friends, Aristion and John, had never seen the "Acts of the Apostles"; for in that book Peter is said to have been filled with the Holy Ghost, which gave him power to speak every known language—whence he would not need the services of an interpreter.

Neither had Papias seen our present Gospel of Matthew: this is evident from what he says of "Judas the traitor." The latter personage is purely mythical. Had the "chief priests" desired to arrest Jesus at night, they had only to commission one of their spies or servants to follow him. The New Testament accounts of the death of Judas are the following:—

Matt. xxvii. 3—8.—"Then Judas.....cast down the pieces of silver.....and he went away and hanged himself.....And the chief priests took the pieces of silver.....and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in."

Acts i. 18.—Judas "obtained a field with the reward of his iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and his bowels gushed out."

Neither of these conflicting statements was known to Papias: that credulous bishop's account reads as follows:—

"Judas walked about in this world a sad example of impiety: for his body having swollen to such an extent that he could not pass where a chariot could pass easily, he was crushed by the chariot, so that his bowels gushed out."

This, no doubt, is one of the stories which Eusebius thought was derived from "unwritten tradition." But, in the Acts account, it can be plainly seen that some of the circumstances connected with the story have been discreetly omitted. How, for instance, came Judas to "fall headlong," or to "burst asunder in the midst"? The buying a field does not account for either of these circumstances. Papias's story, however, explains both. Judas being knocked down by a chariot would account for his "falling headlong," and his enormously swollen condition for his "bursting asunder in the midst." Hence the Acts account was made up from that of Papias and from some other, in which the purchase of a field formed part of the story. In Matthew's account the field was purchased after Judas's death.

Coming, now, to the Third Gospel, Irenæus says that "Luke, the companion of Paul recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him." That the Third Gospel was written by one named Luke is certain; for had not the writer's name been known to be "Luke," the Gospel would have been ascribed to one of the apostles. But the compiler of the Third Gospel was not the Luke named in Col. iv. 14, Philemon 23, 24, or 2 Tim. iv. 11: nor was he a companion of Paul. He says himself that he did not live in apostolic times. Speaking of the narratives in the primitive Gospel in use in his days, he says—"even as they, who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word, delivered them unto us," etc. Here Luke asserts, and probably believed, that the Gospel narratives which had been handed down to his time (say, A.D. 150) were written by apostles or companions of apostles in apostolic times—the latter period being called "the beginning." Had Luke been a colleague of Paul, he would have been one of the "ministers of the word" in "the beginning"; but he was not. In compiling a Gospel he professed only to make a selection from

the Gospel stories in existence in his day, selecting and retaining those which he believed to be the most credible. Luke also made selections from some of the apocryphal writings, which he added to the older primitive Gospel, and revised the whole, altering or omitting as he thought fit, and improving the diction throughout. His work, when completed, was received, not as a new Gospel, but as a revised copy of the old one handed down. That the Gospel of Luke could have been derived from the preaching of Paul is an idea almost too absurd to be seriously considered. Paul knew nothing of our present Gospel "history"; it had not then been written, or even thought of. He did not know a single Gospel saying: none had then been composed. In the Pauline Epistles we have plenty of Paul's preaching—but no Gospel history. Some early Christian, it is true, has piously inserted an interpolation in 1 Cor. xi. 23—26, which is nearer to Luke's version (xxii. 19—20) than to any of the other Gospels. Irenæus has simply ascribed the four Gospels written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who lived in the second century, to apostolic men of the same names in the first century.

With regard to the apostle John, Irenæus has identified that unknown disciple with Papias's friend John the Presbyter. He says, for instance: "These things are borne witness to in writing by Papias, the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp." We have already seen that Irenæus made Polycarp also a hearer of the apostle John, though both these bishops lived half a century too late to see or hear that much-belauded individual. Irenæus may have thought that Papias lived at an earlier period than he actually did; for he says that John the apostle "remained among them [*i.e.*, the Christians] up to the times of Trajan" (A.D. 98—117) which reign he probably took to be the period when Papias wrote.

Irenæus several times bolsters up the opinions he has expressed by some alleged testimony of apostles. Speaking of the age of Jesus, he says: "But from the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed," and then states that the elders who had conversed with John the apostle "testified that John had conveyed to them that information": after which he quotes John vii. 56, 57 in support of his contention, and concludes by saying that "Jesus did not want much of being fifty years old" (Her. ii., xxii., 5). In another place he says: "As I have heard from a certain presbyter, who had heard it from those who had seen the apostles, and from those who had been their disciples," etc. This alleged "testimony" of apostles and their disciples was, of course, simply Irenæus's way of adding confirmation to some of his doubtful statements. He knew nothing whatever about the sayings or doings of any apostles. His book is useful chiefly as showing what was affirmed of the canonical Gospels in his days, and as describing the various "heresies" that had arisen up to his time.

ABRACADABRA.

Rector: "Are you denying yourself anything during Lent?"

Mrs. Lakeside: "Indeed I am. I'm putting off getting a divorce until after Easter."

#### A PROSELYTE.

A soldier is allowed to "change his religion," as it is termed, if he can convince his commanding officer that he had good reasons. On one occasion a man intimated his desire.

"Now," said the colonel, "what are your reasons? Have you conscientious convictions in regard to the matter?"

The man intimated that he had.

"And," continued the colonel, "to what denomination do you wish to be transferred?"

Said the ease-seeking Tommy, "I disremember the name, sir, but it's them as parades for church half-an-hour later than the others."

## Acid Drops.

The Blasphemy Laws (Amendment) Bill came up for discussion before the Lower House of Convocation of Canterbury the other day. In the course of the discussion, the Archdeacon of Surrey said there were "grave fears that if the Bill were carried in its present form there would be in many quarters a serious outbreak of profanity, a sort of thing which a civilised country, and above all a Christian country, could not tolerate for a moment." Profane is a very elastic word, and may mean either coarse or indelicate speech, or treating so-called "sacred" subjects with irreverence. If the Archdeacon means the latter, we can only say reverence is quite out of place towards a teaching or an opinion that one does not believe worthy of it, and if a Freethinker cares to speak "irreverently" of religious beliefs, there is neither justice nor common sense in preventing him. The utmost that can be done is to make him a hypocrite in addition to his being an unbeliever. And if coarse and indelicate speech is dreaded, the cure for that is not legal enactments, but education and culture. People will speak coarsely while their natures are coarse, and the language of a very large number of our religious fellow citizens is enough to show that this has no special connection with unbelief. Finally, the Blasphemy Laws do not prevent profane language, and never have prevented profane language. If anything, they tend to encourage it. For human nature being what it is, it would indeed be strange if the oppression of an opinion by legal enactment did not drive some people into more violent language than they would use if religious opinion was, like other opinions, left to hold its own without the protecting arm of the policeman and the gaoler.

It seems that there would have been more railway strikes during this last year or two but for one thing. Had they occurred the success of the Baptist Sustenance Fund of £250,000 would have been jeopardised. We do not mean that the railway men did not strike because they saw it would injure the fund; they were only pawns in the hands of Providence. This is what we gather from Mr. Shakespeare's report before the Baptist Conference the other day. That gentleman thanked God for the fund, and said "We have been under his guidance, and have only been the unworthy instruments of his will. As we began the country entered upon a season of unparalleled commercial prosperity. Up to that point there had been disastrous railway strikes which would have made our campaign impossible. But we have worked during a time of comparative peace." So the matter is plain. The Lord did not mind a building strike, or a strike of municipal employees, but he drew the line at a railway strike. For that, he said, would prevent my "unworthy instruments" from collecting the £250,000. Now, we presume, the railway servants are at liberty to strike when they please—unless the railway directors can arrange with Mr. Shakespeare to start another campaign.

When Gipsy Smith asked a Portsmouth audience "How many mean to be better Christians?" the whole of "the vast congregation rose to their feet." We do not for a moment question the need for improvement, but we do question the value of the resolve a week after it is made.

Saint George, the sanctified pork dealer, must have had as many bones as the dragon with which he was associated. For relics of George were once scattered over the land. Canterbury, Lincoln, and Norwich Cathedrals, and St. Nicholas Church, Great Yarmouth, each possessed an arm, and other places of worship had other bony relics.

Beer and Bible trotting in double harness is revealed once more by the transfer of the license of the "Beverley," Canterbury. This house is the perquisite of the parish clerk, who lives there. The new landlord of the "Beverley" is the butler of the vicar. Gospel temperance advocates will note this with glad eyes.

Dr. Crozier, Primate of all Ireland, says he views with "holy horror" the "growing prospect of intensified hatred and separation" in Ireland. Dr. Crozier should reflect that the principle cause of that "hatred and separation" is the religion he represents. If Protestants and Catholics in Ireland could suddenly forget their religion all other causes for difference could be settled in the way that political differences are settled all over the civilised world. The one thing that makes the Irish problem what it is, is religion. It is a "holy" business right through.

The Primate of All Ireland's "holy horror" reminds one of Lever's lines on the two parties in Ireland:—

"A glorious nation,  
A splendid peasantry, on fruitful sod,  
Fighting like devils for conciliation,  
And hating each other for the love of God."

The Bishop of St. Albans says it is a perilous thing in the twentieth century to tamper with "facts" that have been the creed and life of the Church for nineteen centuries. Perilous to whom? If the "facts" that are "tampered with" are real and valuable, no one need fear. The more they are examined, the more they are criticised, the clearer will their truth and value become. What the Bishop really means is that it will be dangerous for the Church if its creeds and statements are criticised. In this we agree with him, and can only say, so much the worse for the Church. In this world progress is only made by a continuous overhauling of our social and intellectual inheritance. We reject what is bad, retain what is good, and we modify what demands modification. Examination, rejection, and revision are the only means by which the present can prevent the past weighing upon it like a garment of lead. The fact that a thing has endured for nineteen centuries is no conclusive reason for retaining it for another nineteen. It is often a very good reason for its removal.

In a Yorkshire parish no deaths took place during last year. Before we praise God for this special mercy, let us remember that it nearly killed the local undertaker.

A seaside rector had announced his intention of holding an early morning Sunday service for golfers. It is suggested that the service should finish with "Let us play."

At the beginning of the winter the cinematograph proprietors in the County of Middlesex bade defiance to the Middlesex County Council by opening the picture palaces on Sunday. The Council has not taken any steps in the matter up to the present, probably not feeling quite sure of their ground. The matter came up for discussion at the Council's meeting on April 30, and there was a motion that the Council's solicitor be instructed to take proceedings if there were sufficient grounds to secure a conviction. The matter was finally adjourned for another month. The Union of Picture Palace Proprietors had already announced that if one of their number were attacked the matter would be fought to a finish, and we expect this has given the Council pause. For our part, we should not be at all sorry to see a good fight over the matter. It might lead to a wiping away of some idiotic laws that ought to have been repealed long since.

The Bishop of New Guinea, quite unconsciously, let in a little light the other day on the effects of missionary activity. "If a New Guinea lad," he said, "started to buy singlets, coats, and trousers, and to wear them, he degenerated physically and morally." This was only another way of saying that when we separated the native from his tribal customs we invariably succeeded in turning a decent man into a blackguard.

Rev. William Corkey, of Belfast, speaking in London at the meeting of the World's Evangelical Alliance, said that in Ulster we were only "at the beginning of the struggle against Rome.....We feel we are placed by God's will in the front rank of this great struggle to maintain our religious freedom against the efforts of the Church of Rome." The idea of Ulster Protestants in the front rank of fighters for religious freedom is delicious. It reminds one of the old expression about Satan rebuking sin.

A wealthy Swedish merchant has committed the heinous offence of working in his garden clad only in shirt and trousers on Easter Sunday. Two constables saw him at work during divine service and ordered him to desist. The hardened sinner refused and said that he was fully occupied with his business all the week and Sunday was the only time he had for gardening. So the Commissioner of the Police summoned the merchant, and the case is to be heard shortly. The papers report that the matter is exciting indignation all over Sweden. It looks as though the police are converting themselves into theological experts in Sweden as well as in England.

Popular ideas on theology are very vague. Here is a London weekly paper trying to be smart, and saying, "Through the churchyard to the flying," runs a notice at

Hendon. "Or the frying, according to the life you've led." If that assumption were correct, all Freethinkers would have gone to heaven and most Christians to the other place.

A society paper contains an article on "Eve's Dress." It should not be a lengthy one.

Mr. Bernard Lucas, who has had a quarter of a century's experience of the Indian mission field, says that proselytism has had its day, and has failed. His remarks will not be quoted in future appeals for money on behalf of the missionary societies.

"Ministers have won from Ananias and Sapphira the record held for nineteen hundred years," said the Rev. T. Kingsborough at a Volunteer Church Parade at Kildarton. He was referring to the King's Ministers, but it applies more aptly to the ministers of the King of Kings.

Christians are getting afraid of their religion, and the old Freethought jest that Christ was the first and last Christian will soon be brought home to the man in the street. At the Spring Assembly of the Baptist Union the president, the Rev. C. Joseph made lengthy reference to the Old Age Pensions and the Insurance Acts, and the Back to the Land propaganda. There is not much Baptist doctrine in those three items.

Father Vaughan confesses to having a "tremendous belief" in advertising. He also said that he belongs "to the oldest and biggest advertising firm on this planet—the Roman Catholic Church." We quite agree; and if ever a business in modern times was built up by advertising the Christian business has been. And the curious thing is, that all this advertising has not made it self-supporting. If it were to stop advertising, in a generation the firm would have to close. It cannot rely upon the value of the goods supplied to keep the business up to the mark. Father Vaughan says the Catholic Church "delivers the goods all the time." It is a pity he does not tell us how often they are returned as "not up to specifications."

We have pointed out many times that what the Churches have to fight is neither a man nor an association of men—but life. We are glad to see the *Methodist Times* endorsing this opinion. It says, in discussing the decrease of membership, for the eighth year in succession, "We are living in a secular age.....And the main currents of life at present run strongly against the growth of all the Churches, Methodism included." Quite so; the currents of life not only run strongly against the Churches now, but they will gain in strength with each generation. There may still be, as there has been, set-backs here and there, but the main drift is undeniable. Naturally, the *Methodist Times* qualifies its admission with the remark that "the manifold influences of life tend to obscure its supreme ends and to shut out its highest influence"; but that is pure bunkum. The world is more generally alive to "supreme ends" and "highest influences" than it has ever been before. People were never more ready to spend themselves for an ideal than to-day. And the significant thing is that this sensitiveness to higher ideals and influences has been increasing side by side with the declining power of religious belief.

The modern method of filming scenes from the Bible at picture theatres would seem tame to our ancestors, who preferred greater realism. From the accounts of a City Company in the Middle Ages we learn that 4d. was paid for "hanging Judas; "cock crowing, 4d."; and "setting the world on fire, 5d." The last item seems remarkably cheap.

Mr. Hilaire Belloc, writing in the *Daily Herald*, boasts that he is a Catholic, a creed not common to the writers or the readers of the *Herald*. Does he imagine that Messrs. Chesterton and Lansbury are Mohammedans?

There were three persons before the magistrates at Acton recently, and each individual had a cast in one eye. This fact may be of service to the defenders of the design argument.

"I call it a blessed insult," said the burglar-convert angrily. "Why, what's wrong," asked a fellow worshiper. "Did you see what that d—d old revivalist did?" roared the convert. "He counted his fingers after I shook hands with him."

The *Daily Mirror* quotes a saying that "The first fruit of a life in Christ is love, the love of God and of our neighbor." There are other fruits, such as the Christian Evidence variety, which burlesques its God and insults its neighbors.

The *Times* tells us that "it is plain that at the present time very many devout Church people find the repetition of the Athanasian creed almost intolerable." Translated into simple English this means that the Christian superstition is in the melting-pot.

A correspondent in the *Catholic Tablet* protests against the use of the term "offertory" as a synonym for the word "collection." The clergy are indifferent as to the choice of terms so long as the shekels roll in.

Christians, by the mere force of custom, have acquired the right to do things that in other people would rightly be considered to show want of taste, if not actual impertinence. Some years ago, an East End Mission, by working upon a mentally afflicted son whose parents are Freethinkers, at Stratford, managed to secure his conversion. Both the mother and father are convinced Atheists and members of the N. S. S. Their opinions are fairly well known, and they are both advanced in years, but neither consideration prevented some impertinent busybody belonging to the mission leaving their stupid tracts at the house of the old people. Good taste would certainly have chosen some other occasion for propagandist efforts; ordinary humanity should have left two old people alone in their grief. If Freethought had nothing else to commend it, its lifting people above this kind of thing would speak in its favor. We sympathise with Mr. and Mrs. High in their bereavement, and we trust they will meet with no further annoyance from this quarter.

The congregation of St. Mark's Church, Tunbridge Wells, has been shut out from "divine service" owing to a plague of flies. It is thought that the flies made their home under the slates of the roof last winter, and have been kept alive during the winter by the heating apparatus. A couple of centuries ago there were some poor old women burned for witchcraft over such a matter. The presence of flies was deemed by the famous Matthew Hopkins a sure proof of the presence of familiar imps. In the present case there was no one who saw the hand of the Lord or the tail of the Devil in the occurrence. Simple fumigation did the trick.

The educational value of the press is frequently the subject of after-dinner speeches. The *Daily Mirror* recently contained a number of illustrations showing how to foretell the future by tea-leaves in cups. The editor knows his readers.

In a column notice of that industrious novelist, Mr. Charles Garvice, the *Daily Chronicle* says his works are read by bishops. This seems a left-handed sort of compliment.

"The whole world of humanity is crushed just now by the dead weight of Materialism," writes George Lansbury in the *Daily Herald*. George bears all he can of the burden with "a tolerable grace"—as Lady Teazle says.

According to the newspapers, the number of rifles landed in Ulster varied from 20,000 to 70,000, and the accounts of what happened varied as much in detail. Yet some credulous people imagine that the "Gospels" are more reliable than newspapers, although they deal with far more marvellous events than gun-running.

The *Daily News*, reviewing a new book on missionary work in India, says that "the ultimate evolution of Hinduism may not be to Christianity, but an amalgamation of all that is best in both." It is startling to think of statues of Christ and his disciples squatting, with crossed legs, and contemplating the lotus.

"I have shot myself," says Charles John Leigh after taking his life with a gun," runs a heading in the *Saturday Post*. The Psychological Research Society should get into touch with the late Mr. Leigh.

The ancient and picturesque church of Madonna del Sasso, near Locarno, has been entered by burglars, who stole the church plate and also the Madonna's gold crown and jewels. The indignant priests are relying on the help of the police, and not on prayer.

### To Correspondents.

**PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1914.**—Previously acknowledged, £138 17s. 5d. Received since:—W. H. Deakin, £5 5s.; J. G. Finlay, 5s.; R. Stirton, £1 7s. 6d.

**MISS VANCE, General Secretary N. S. S., acknowledges:** Benevolent Fund—Huddersfield Branch, 5s.; Edmonton Branch, 5s.; St. Helens Branch, 2s. 6d.; Newcastle Branch, 10s.; Manchester Branch, £1 1s. 6d. General Fund—Edmonton Branch, 5s.; Newcastle Branch, 10s.; Manchester Branch, 18s. 6d.

**H. R. WRIGHT.**—There is an American edition of Voltaire's works, in English, running to about forty volumes. There was an English translation, published during the eighteenth century, running to some sixty or seventy volumes; but in more recent times only very few of Voltaire's works have been issued in English—*The Philosophical Dictionary*, *Candide*, and two or three others. A collection of his philosophical stories, under the title of *Tales and Romances*, was issued early in the last century and was re-issued either by Edward Truelove or by the old Freethought Publishing Company.

**J. G. FINLAY.**—Our "work" has always been heavy but never a burden. We have had our heart in it.

**D. C.**—A blunder, evidently; but not very blameable in an Englishman, to whom "Church" is familiar and "Kirk" almost foreign. Not to our own ears, though; for we have known Burns intimately more than forty years; and we admire and love him (yes, *love* him) as much as ever. It was an adventurous thing to do, but, as a matter of fact, we have even read "Holy Willie's Prayer" to Scottish audiences, not without applause. And we were born in Devonshire! A county once, at any rate, celebrated for the bravery of its men as well as the lovely complexions of its women. Richard Carlile himself was a Devonshire man, but he never dared the risk of reading Burns to a public audience north of the Tweed.

**JOSEPH PEARSON.**—We have read your letter carefully, but you ignore the fact that goats cannot be organised like sheep. Freethinkers have more individuality than Christians. This is a fact, though it is not always an advantage. Pleased to see your letter in the *Wisbeach Chronicle*. We have often urged the "saints" to pursue that sort of propaganda.

**GEORGE PORTER.**—We have ordered its continuance as desired. It was not Holyoake but Hetherington who started the prosecution you refer to. Strictly speaking, it was a public committee. They went for "tolerated" blasphemy. Moxon, the publisher, was prosecuted on account of Shelley's *Queen Mab*. A verdict of "guilty" was obtained, but nothing ever happened in the way of a sentence. Judges know how to help "respectable" sinners. Not that Shelley was "respectable." The mere suggestion is worse than blasphemy. But he belonged by blood to the upper classes, although his head and heart were with the people.

**W. H. DEAKIN.**—Thanks for the generous subscription and pleasant letter.

**A. MILLAR.**—Pleased to have your appreciation of the *Freethinker*. We can only keep pegging away, and in the long run it is pretty sure to tell.

**J. KING.**—(1) We note your appreciation of Mr. Mann's articles, in which we concur. (2) Tielé's opinion would turn upon the precise meaning attaching to "gods." If in the more modern sense, he is decidedly wrong. If the term is used to cover the belief in ghostly agencies, he is right. And the ghost is the raw material of the god. (3) We hardly think we should care to print one of the rev. gentleman's sermons as a sample of his style, but our columns are always open to him for a reply to anything we print, and to which he takes exception.

**T. MORLEY.**—Mr. Foote is rapidly regaining his old form. Mr. Cohen's last debate with Rev. A. J. Waldron was in the Morley Hall, S. Hackney. There was no report of the discussion—save those that appeared in the newspapers at the time. We cannot reply, at the moment, to your last question.

**J. TASSAGNI.**—Charles Bradlaugh never refused to take the oath in the House of Commons. He merely claimed to affirm, and believed he was exercising a constitutional right in making the claim. The story of his challenging the Deity to strike him dead in the House of Commons is ridiculously false.

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

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

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Shop Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.

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.

### Sugar Plums.

The North London Branch, which was last year responsible for the open-air meetings at Wood Green, has now transferred part of its energies to Regent's Park. Wood Green is already well looked after from a Freethought point of view, and the new move was quite justified by the first

meeting on Sunday last. The audience was a good one, and the lecture appeared to give complete satisfaction. Regent's Park has been without regular Freethought meetings for many years, and the new station ought to prove in every way successful.

We believe that the Ramsey Testimonial Committee has completed its arrangements, although we have, by an oversight probably, not received a copy of the official circular which, we believe, is going round. The treasurer of the Fund is Mr. B. T. Hall, Club Union Buildings, Clerkenwell, London, E.C. The subscriptions that have been sent to this office have been forwarded to Mr. Hall, and any other subscriptions that may arrive will be forwarded also. All subscriptions will be acknowledged by Mr. B. T. Hall. We are not aware as to how the Fund is progressing, but, we trust, well.

Both the business and the public meeting of this year's N. S. S. Conference will be held in the Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, W. Visitors from the provinces will have no difficulty in finding their way there, as it is one of the best known halls in London, and it is well served by motor-bus service from all parts of London. We must again advise those provincial friends who require accommodation to write as soon as possible to the N. S. S. Secretary, saying what accommodation they require and for how long. The matter of a Conference luncheon is under arrangement, and details will be given in good time. The Conference Agenda will be published in next week's *Freethinker*. We hope to see a good muster of provincial friends. As the Conference is held on Whit-Sunday, there is no difficulty about finding suitable excursion trains.

### More Notes.

Very early in my career George Meredith wrote that I was "fighting for the best of causes." He wrote the same thing, although in slightly different language, only a short while before his death. And he added that this cause was destined to victory. These words sank deep into my heart. They gave me inspiration for more than thirty years; they will afford me consolation in what may look like disillusionment or defeat to the very end. For I have a notion that when I cease to work I shall soon cease to live.

Well, if I have been fighting for the best of causes, I have been fighting against the worst of religions. I have often called Christianity the worst religion in the world. Not only has it been false and fraudulent, it has been wicked and cruel, and it has caused endless tears and bloodshed. Perhaps its worst vice is hypocrisy. No other religion approaches it in this odious and detestable offence.

Let us take what may be called the hypocrisy of color. Christians pretend that one God is the father of all men,—brown and yellow, and even black and white. They preach that all are brothers in Christ. They carry the Gospel to the "heathen." They declare that the Creator "hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts xvii. 26). That is the text. But what is the sermon? Or rather how does the doctrine work out in practice? In America, where the negroes number millions, and largely live amongst the whites, and where the color problem is a really serious one—too serious for Americans' political capacity—the "black brother" is brutally ill-treated, and "lynched" in all sorts of ways, from burning alive to being leisurely riddled with bullets. Blacks and whites, in the bulk, are both good Christians. But the white will not let the black worship in the same church with him, or attend the same Sunday-school, or belong to the same Young Men's Christian Association, or join with him in any religious function whatever. That is how the "common Creator" and "one blood" doctrine realises itself in daily life in America. And how is it realised over here? A black man in England is not a common sight; he is rather a curiosity; he does not excite anger and hatred; so there is no lynching of black Christians

by white Christians on this side of the Atlantic. But when the black brother in Christ is not being exhibited at missionary meetings, as an ebony brand from the burning (in Hell), he is kept in his proper place and not allowed to participate in all the privileges of "God's Englishmen." Jack Johnson's only crime was his color—and the certainty of his beating any white pugilist who stood up to him. This dread of the black man's prowess is now openly avowed. The Home Office has just interfered with another match between a white and a black boxer in London. The illegality of the fight is not alleged, but if the black man won, as was most probable, it would cause great unrest throughout the British empire. The glamor of the white man would be gone. The colored populations would see that white men could be beaten. Nobody knows what might happen if this were plainly demonstrated. The British empire, therefore, rests upon a basis of bounce and brag. This is a fact if we are to believe the Home Office. What a mean and miserable confession for a Christian nation to make! \* \* \*

When Noah awoke from his drunken sleep, he cursed the descendants of Ham for ever and ever. By some peculiar biological law, Ham's descendants are the negro section of the human race, and it is their function to slave for the rest of their species, in consequence of Noah's blind anger, backed up by the omnipotence of his God.

\* \* \*

The space still left me suffices for a paragraph on two other matters. For myself, my health is still returning, though it doesn't gallop back. I am looking forward to seeing many of my friends at the National Secular Society's Conference, and more, of course, at the evening public meeting in the Queen's (Minor) Hall. There will be plenty of good speakers—including Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd—at the evening meeting. I shall be present as Chairman, and I believe I shall be in good fighting form by then. There ought to be some good weather in May. The weather is a thing I cannot control. In all other respects I am more and more approaching my normal condition. If I could only sleep well I think I should live for ever. Not that I want a stern discussion on the scientific accuracy of this bold statement.

G. W. FOOTE.

## The Phenomena of Procreation.—II.

(Continued from p. 277.)

RELINQUISHING the plant world, we will now review those laws of development which relate to the reproductive phenomena of higher animal life. For the purpose in view, this survey of the processes of generation may well be restricted to the vertebrate classes, and these will best be dealt with in evolutionary order.

Broadly speaking, the fish family may be regarded as representing the lowest order of backboneed life. The sexes are almost invariably separate, although traces of an ancestral bisexual stage are sometimes in evidence. In the ovary wall of two species of bony fishes, vestiges of the male generative organs are sometimes found embedded, and one of these fishes is apparently capable of self-impregnation. "As in most other vertebrates," writes Professor J. A. Thomson, "occasional hermaphroditism occurs as an abnormality—e.g., in mackerel and herring. The males of bony fishes are usually smaller than their mates, and sometimes very markedly so." The majority of fishes are oviparous and discharge their eggs broadcast in the water or deposit them in the sand or gravel below the liquid medium in which they dwell. The salmon and the sturgeon ascend the rivers for spawning, while the eel goes down to the sea. Many of the sharks and some of the teleostean fish give birth to living young. In the case of the viviparous teleosteans, which are a later product of evolution than the sharks, the eggs hatch out in the

ovary; in the sharks the young develop in the posterior portion of the oviduct.

Various of these facts possess striking evolutionary significance, as they serve to link up the fishes with the reptilia, and, in consequence, with the mammals. Two of the viviparous sharks possess reproductive structures which are almost identical with those of certain lizards. Another remarkable approximation towards more advanced living forms is indicated by their reproductive methods. With the fish world in general, the male deposits the milt upon the spawn or eggs, but it becomes evident that the fertilising process is internal when fish produce their young in a living state. As Principal Starr Jordan says:—

"In the case of viviparous fishes, actual copulation takes place, and there is usually a modification of some organ to effect transfer of the sperm-cells. This may be the sword-shaped form of the anal fin, as in many top-minnows, the fin itself being placed in advance of its usual position."

Parental care is seldom shown by fishes, nor would it be of much service if it were. The eggs laid by fishes are of so vast a number that to guard them from danger is practically impossible. They are therefore left to the care of Providence, with the result that the tiniest percentage ever succeed in reaching maturity. With the viviparous sharks, on the other hand, the young are comparatively strong at birth, and quite able to shift for themselves.

The foregoing considerations are strengthened by the following passage from Dr. Bigelow:—

"Codfish spawn near the shores of New England between December and April. The hatcheries liberate annually more than 75,000,000 young fry. It is easy to collect the cod eggs for hatching, for in a 20 lb. female the two ovaries (popularly called 'roes') contain more than 2,500,000 eggs, which are so small that a quart bottle will hold about 335,000. Think how abundant codfishes would be if all the eggs of a thousand females were to hatch and grow to maturity, and one-half of these were to be equally prolific females. However, since cods do not appear to be increasing or decreasing rapidly, we are justified in concluding that, on the average, two eggs from each female produce mature individuals. The others are destroyed by enemies or die from diseases."

The amphibia stand next in evolutionary succession to the fishes, and the frog is a typical amphibian. Its embryology has been more thoroughly and systematically studied than that of any other organism. In the adult frog, ovaries and spermaries distinguish the separate sexes. The egg-cells are discharged by the female into the water which the frogs select for their breeding spot in early spring. At the same time the sperm-cells discharged by the male move briskly through the water to meet the egg-cells which they enter and impregnate. The eggs now develop and hatch out into tadpoles. Then, in the course of a few or many weeks, the differences of time varying with the species, they develop legs, lose their tails through absorption and grow into small frogs.

The ovaries of a young female frog contain numerous tiny egg-cells:—

"Each egg-cell is a spherical mass of protoplasm with a nucleus near its centre. As the eggs grow larger, each one accumulates granules of a material known as yolk; and after a time the yolk comes to occupy one hemisphere of the egg, while the protoplasm is concentrated at the other. Frogs' eggs, examined soon after they are laid in water, are seen to be black (with pigment) in one hemisphere, and whitish (due to yolk) in the other. The black hemisphere contains most of the protoplasm. Each egg is surrounded by an envelope of transparent jelly, which was secreted by the walls of the oviduct as the eggs passed from the ovaries to the exterior."

As soon as the egg-cell has been impregnated by the male element, it prepares for division into two cells. In genial spring weather this process has usually taken place within two hours of its discharge from the parent body. An hour later the four-cell stage is reached, and the cell mass continues to multiply by repeated division until on the second or

third day a sphere of several hundred cells has been evolved, and from this aggregation of cells the tadpole is slowly developed. When the critical moment arrives, the tadpole emerges from the jelly which encircles the egg and moves through the water. The tadpole, on emerging, appears larger than the egg itself, but this seeming discrepancy is explained by the fact that the tadpole is swollen by the water it has absorbed during development, as may easily be proved by drying the tadpole, when the organism shrinks very materially in size. The time occupied in the evolution of free-swimming tadpoles from the fertilised egg varies with the warmth of the water. Some species hatch out sooner than others; toads' eggs hatch in three or four days, and the same may be said of those of tree-frogs.

Differences of duration in the succeeding stages of metamorphosis are also to be observed. Toad and tree-frog tadpoles, in a high temperature and provided with abundant food, will reach the adult condition a month or two from the period of hatching. This speedy development possesses a survival-value to these amphibians, as their eggs are frequently deposited in temporary ponds which evaporate in late spring or early summer. On the other hand, where water is abundant and a genial climate prevails through the year, the metamorphosis of frogs is prolonged for over twelve months.

It is generally supposed that the tails of tadpoles are cast away in the course of development. This is completely erroneous; for, as a matter of fact, one has only to examine a net full of tadpoles taken at random from the nearest pool to see very plainly that these creatures exist in all stages of development. Some of the specimens have stumpy tails and long legs, while others exhibit intermediate stages between these and tadpoles with long tails and no legs. These varying phases find their explanation in the truth that as the legs develop, the tail dwindles. The disappearance of the tail is due to the activities of the phagocytes (white blood corpuscles) which absorb the tissues of the caudal organ and transfer them to the tadpole's body. The tip of the tail commences to wither a short time after the white blood-cells begin their operations, and this disintegrating process continues until the caudal organ has completely disappeared. Its substance being thus restored to the body, it is forthwith utilised in building up other tissues.

All the higher vertebrates, including man, pass through similar phases to those of the frog, but their tadpole or larval stage, unlike that of insects and amphibia, takes place in the womb, and not in the form of an external metamorphosis. Internal development is universal among mammals. The duck-bill platypus of Australia, which links up reptiles with mammals, is oviparous; but some reptiles, and, as we have seen, some fishes, bring forth living young. The advantages bound up with the lessening of the number of eggs produced are further illustrated by the salamanders, organisms closely related to toads and frogs. The common salamanders deposit an immense number of eggs, but a species which abounds in the mountainous districts of Europe produces two eggs only for each female, and these are retained in the oviducts until they are fully developed, so that at birth they are quite able to face the ordeals of life. In this instance the small number produced in an advanced stage, which guarantees their survival, is amply sufficient to maintain the species.

The early embryological phases of mammalian development, and also those of birds and reptiles, are suggestively similar to those of the frog, and they meet their only rational explanation in the theory of their common origin. In each case the fertilised egg-cell splits up into innumerable cells, which afterwards evolve into the embryo and its wrappings. The resemblances between the embryos of fish, reptiles, birds, cats, monkeys, and men are in their early stages so close that only the expert biologist can distinguish one from the other, although in the course of their later development each

embryo evolves into the specific form which characterises its progenitors.

With birds the main processes of development are external, and the eggs require incubation. If the eggs are to hatch out successfully, they must be maintained at a high temperature, somewhat above blood heat, about 104° F. being necessary for those of the ordinary hen. The cock bird fertilises the female at a period when the eggs emerge from the ovary and enter the oviduct, and early cell multiplication proceeds during the twenty-four hours which elapse before the eggs are laid. When the egg is laid, however, it cools rapidly, and all development is suspended. With birds in a wild state, one egg is usually deposited daily in the nest, and the hen bird rarely covers her eggs except at night. After the blackbird, thrush, linnet, starling, etc., has laid her full complement of eggs, she commences her patient brooding over her treasures, and is rarely found absent until she leaves them in search for food for her never-satisfied family.

The majority of birds in a state of nature breed once or twice in a season, and the parent birds are fully occupied in building their nests and feeding and training their defenceless offspring until such time as they may fight the battle of life alone. In poultry farming—particularly that of an intensive character—all this is changed. Fowls are carefully chosen for their egg-producing powers, and many hens will lay over two hundred eggs per year. Needless to say, these birds are not permitted to waste time and energy in hatching out eggs and attending to the wants of chickens.

The eggs of insects and amphibia are usually very minute, and the nutriment necessary to the evolving butterfly or frog is mainly derived from its surroundings. The eggs of birds, on the other hand, are relatively large, and richly stored with food materials for the use of the embryo during the period of incubation. Eggs that have been observed in the ovaries of young birds assume the appearance of small spherical cells, which, as they advance towards maturity, absorb food and grow. In an average-sized fowl's egg the yolk, with its enclosing membrane, is about one inch in diameter, but in a young hen's ovary it is a microscopic cell. The white or albumen which environs the yoke, as well as the shell, are built up around the egg as it passes through the oviduct on its way to the nest. The yolk is the all-essential constituent of the egg; the albumen and hard coverings are additions evolved for the purpose of protecting the egg from injury, and thus fulfil the same function as the jelly which shields the spawn of the frog.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be concluded.)

### Bitter Fruit.

"NOTWITHSTANDING the abounding evidences of the fact that the people are becoming more materialistic," the pastor is reported to have said, "and notwithstanding the amount of spiritless Materialist literature produced to-day, we Christians have no cause to be dejected." He continued in the usual spiritual strain, of which, seemingly, he was so proud, to speak about an unvanquishable soul, whose abiding place in the heart of man could never be shattered. This soul, this God's gift, was the only hope of the individual, the only hope of the world. It was the central fact of Christianity, he said; it was brought to us by Jesus Christ; consecrated by his life and death; and so long as our hearts possessed the treasure there would be no need for complaint. Against the consciousness that there lived in us this soulful spark of divine love all the materialistic influences of our lives were futile. The soul, which was God's love manifesting itself in our consciousness, would never perish; and Christianity, being warmed by this wonderful spark, would never grow cold.

Christians, the majority of them, are not deliberately blind; they are not deliberately untruthful; but there are moments when I think they come pretty near the latter. Perhaps it cannot honestly be named lying. We do not like to accuse our friends of being consistently in support of falsehood. We are not very inclined to call them children, and well-bred children of the father of lies. The accusation is too hard. And yet, their attitude often forces to our lips the word we dislike to utter, even while our minds are busy with extenuations. Custom, ignorance, prejudice, weakness, the demands of human affection, and many other things, crop up to bear the burden of blame. We make excuses for our friends, although impulse would have us brand them. Knowing them well, we feel compelled to question the righteousness of the accusation; but we cannot rid ourselves of the idea that their toleration is tantamount to lying.

They know that all this religious stuff is absurd; that the soul has no more redemptive influence upon the ordinary life of humanity than a politician's prayers; that the spark of divine love vitalising Christianity is blarney. They know that the belauded importance of religion to the people who work beside them in mine, factory, workshop, or field, is moonshine, without moonshine's beauty. And they know that the value of religion, gauged by the results of its activities, the benefits it gives them, is a fantastic idea, meriting contempt and ridicule.

The ordinary Christian fully recognises that the important things of his life must be considered. They must be discussed, and carefully weighed in the balance of good and evil. Things that matter most in the daily round receive the greatest attention, and naturally so; but religion, the soul, the divine spark, and all the rest of the heavenly pyrotechnics, where do they come in? The average Christian is strangely unconcerned.

It is not that the average Christian thinks he need not trouble about the welfare of his faith; nor that it was never meant for practice. It is not that he thinks the pastor's salary releases him from all responsibility. He does not even imagine that the creeds he tolerates are sufficiently strong in their social crystallisation, in customs, in churches, in funds, in membership, to justify his neglect. He does not think that the defenders of his faith are, in themselves, powerful enough of intellect and belief to frustrate any attempts to demolish them. It is not because his mental attitude towards sacred things would be openly flouted by his fellow Christians if he were to use it amongst them in the daily toil, that he gives his religion the cold shoulder. Perhaps it is because of its very obvious individual and social uselessness.

Pastors may pour forth their million platitudes for all the average Christian cares. What matters it? He knows that his church-going is a mere custom. He knows that to take the church environment into his common life would be like taking a sloppy vegetarian dish to a man who relished roast beef. He knows that his religious observances must be indulged in the only environment for which they are suitable, surroundings pre-eminently famous for bringing utter weariness of mind or red-hot resentfulness to those unaccustomed to them.

Moreover, he is perfectly conscious, when he enters the church doors, of the distance he has travelled from the realities of life. He feels it when the minister introduces the common affairs into his remarks. The ordinary Christian's mind, at these times, is retrospective. He looks back upon the things of the past week. He sees them in the colored lights of religion. They have lost their real significance of actuality. They are more dream-pictures than happenings. It is as if they were mere memories drawn from a dream-life than facts remembered in a real life. And when he leaves church he renounces the dreams for the actualities. He forgets the former. The latter crowd them out from his mind.

The little circle of our acquaintances may, I suppose, be taken as the epitome of the larger life of humanity. Coming into contact with the commonplace but interesting characteristics of our friends, having the opportunity to observe the sweep of their minds upon their lives, we draw near, in our thoughts, to the greater humanity. Our deductions may serve as reliable generalisations. We need not fear for the truth of them. We may trace trends of thought; study mental development; observe the influence of a quietly operating sense of freedom, in the lives of our friends, as revealed by the activities of their intelligence; and our conclusions may serve to prove or disprove assertions like those embodied in the quotation.

If it is true that the social mind is changing in outlook towards certain long established opinions, we need not go far from home for evidence to substantiate the statement. We will find it in our own little human circle. Readiness to entertain a once despised idea, willingness to discuss subjects once rigorously excluded from conversation, the lowering of the degree of personal animosity, a more spontaneous inclination to laugh at sacred things, all go to give the lie to the hieroglyphics of the pulpit. We see the change operating in the lives of our friends. They are not unconscious of this different attitude of theirs; nor are the priests; for the webs woven by religionists are never heavy enough, nor thick enough, to hide the commonplace life; and the bitter fruit of reality is always seen through the diaphanous veil of religious mysticism.

Bitter fruit most assuredly it must be, else why so many "unchristian" invectives on Freethought literature? Why so much unbrotherly anger over our vitality? Why so much unJesuslike enmity because we are successful in reaching the young mind? And we, surely we need more love, more kindness, more of that wonderful fraternal consideration, more of the soft laying on of hands than the laying on of knotted verbal whips, from those who are inspired by God; for are we not the greatest of sinners?

Naturally, this is not an appeal for that sort of treatment; but if Christians would only endeavor, for once, to be logical, we would certainly receive more of this attention than we get at present. However, perhaps the whips are better for us and our movement.

So long as the average Christian continues to object to ministerial interference, for this is another characteristic of the times, there will always be the possibility of mental development, necessarily slow, but along secular lines. The bitter fruit will become abundant and more bitter for priests, and less abundant and less bitter for the average Christian. His quiet toleration of Christian customs will disappear. He will hate sham and artificiality; and perhaps he will recognise how closely, in the days past, when the ordinary happenings of his life mocked the ideas his forefathers worshiped, and his priests and ministers served, his toleration approached the category of "lying."

ROBERT MORELAND.

### "The Challenge."

THE above is not the name of a special make of sewing machine, and it is not meant to denote the extraordinary qualities of a new brand of pickle. It is simply the title of a weekly religious journal that has just been launched. A company has been formed, and the meagre sum of £25,000 (merely the combination of the annual salaries of two archbishops) is required for capital. In all probability this is a matter of form, for when a balance sheet is issued no doubt "prayer" will occupy a prominent position among the assets. A comparison of the prospectus of this concern and that of an ordinary company proves Mr. Cohen's assertion that commercialism is more honest than clericalism. The introduction to the prospectus states that "the paper will deal with matters relating to the Church of England," but "it will put in the forefront the need of the reduction of sectarian strife." This sounds remarkably like a Chester-tonian paradox.

The paragraph headed "The Fight Against Secularism," will afford some amusement to our readers, so the whole of it is quoted:—

"Both at home and in the Dominions beyond the Seas there is need for a journal to fight in the front rank against shallow Secularism and subversive teaching on morals. Rationalistic pamphlets are read by the masses to an extent hardly realised by the leaders of the Church. Not only the authority of the Bible, but the value of religion, is freely disputed in park, club, and workshop, while little is done to stem the tide of doubt. A weekly penny paper might do good service in spreading light, and so rescuing many who, for lack of information, fall victims to a plausible but superficial scepticism. It would be of assistance, moreover, in conducting a crusade against the propaganda which attacks the Christian basis of morals, and threatens the foundations of society."

For sheer audacity and cheap bombast these sentiments would be difficult to beat; but, after all, they are only characteristic of bigoted Christians whose sole argument is force. The latter used to take the form of the stake and instruments of torture too numerous to mention, but to-day it is composed of money, misrepresentation, and calumny, all of which have no effect whatever against the forces of intellectualism.

The passage quoted invites amusement. It simply expresses the tricks of a very loathsome trade. At the eleventh hour the merchants themselves are losing their heads, and, consequently, the wildest of assertions are made and the vilest of slanders are circulated. But it is all of little avail, for money and mud are poor opponents of common sense and truth.

THE MAN IN THE STREET.

## Correspondence.

### "ORGANISMS ANTAGONISTIC TO HEALTH."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

Sir,—About a fortnight ago I was present at what was probably the last lecture delivered by the late Sir E. Durning-Lawrence on "Bacon is Shakespeare," at Stanley Hall, Tufnell Park. The lecturer roundly abused the memory of "the vulgar and illiterate clown," whom Bacon employed as a mask for his own deathless dramatic masterpieces, and denounced in unmeasured language the orthodox Shakespeareans in general. Sir Durning-Lawrence claimed, in a style somewhat similar to that adopted by Miss Kidd, that Bacon founded the English language, translated the Bible, wrote the works of Spenser, and created the whole literature falsely attributed to Shakespeare. The address was unfortunately brought to an untimely end by the collapse of the lecturer, who fainted on the platform. But the same impression was made on at least one of the audience as that conveyed by Miss Kidd's truculent epistle. In each instance the doctrines advanced were buttressed by false reasoning, inconsequential comment, and sinister suggestion; and in each case the result is one of utter inconclusiveness.

It is quite unnecessary to traverse the farcical statements of your correspondent in detail. The germ theory of disease is as firmly established as the doctrine of evolution, and will easily outlive the animadversions of its enemies.

That the conditions imposed by Koch are not now supplied is admitted. Every department of science, including that of bacteriology, is progressive. As science advances its concepts undergo modification in the light of later discovery. With reference to the purity of the bloodstream, I, as a matter of fact, emphasised the importance of sound physiological conditions in the interests of mental and bodily health.

The passage quoted by your correspondent from Wallace is very significant, as it represents the Wallace of superstition rather than the Wallace of science. It contains a lame attempt to bolster up the theory that disease germs are part of a providential scheme of things. The view set forth by me—which is unquestionably the view of the overwhelming majority of men qualified to speak on the subject—did not commend itself to Wallace "because it does not show us any use for such microbes in the scheme of life." Very pretty, no doubt; but there speaks the Wallace of Spiritualism, the amazing doctrine of angel supervision, and the quite chimerical theory that our insignificant earth, with its favored inhabitants, has been specially set in the centre of the universe by some supernatural power.

Miss Kidd's sneers at the mighty Pasteur, the man who saved the silk industry of France and made Lister's magnificent achievements possible, make mournful reading and stand self-condemned. Her gibes at Jenner are also to be reprobated rather than condoned.

If Miss Kidd were to study, and strive to understand, some standard work on immunity in disease, she would

cease to wonder why confectioners are not decimated by disease as they should be from the number of flies that swarm in their neighborhood.

Miss Kidd is mistaken in surmising that I am not acquainted with what the poverty of the language compels me to term the "case" for the other side. In my callow days much time did I innocently waste in perusing the perverse productions of the enemies of medical progress. But that, thank heaven, is of the past; my time is now otherwise employed, Mr. Boffin.

That the stable-fly may carry the germ of infantile paralysis where the stable-fly abounds, is not to contend that the disease is disseminated by that organism alone. This quite simply explains the fact that the disease may be present where the stable-fly is absent, as the meanest tyro in these matters is perfectly well aware.

I hope to return to these important phenomena, and put them to the proof in the columns of the *Freethinker* at no distant date. It seems a pity that no medical authority will deign to discuss with Dr. Hadwen; but if Miss Kidd will supply the platform I could furnish one layman who would be prepared to cross swords with Dr. Hadwen or any other debater she or her friends may choose to appoint.

Miss Kidd's reference to the anti-toxins reminds one of the belated theologians who pitted their puny prejudices against the majestic mind of Galileo. They flatly refused to look through Galileo's telescope at the newly discovered satellites of Jupiter. One of these obscurantists died shortly afterwards and Galileo comforted himself with the reflection that his antagonist probably saw them on his way to heaven.

The introduction into this controversy of the modest and retiring author of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* provides the crowning absurdity of Miss Kidd's stream of invective. The conservation of energy not only operates in human credulity but in the realms of the merry andrew, the purveyor of paradoxes, and the prophet of chronic insincerity. In another and a better world than ours one might have aspired to hope that the man who conserved so little truth or even common honesty in dealing with Darwin, "the mere pigeon fancier," the immaculate conception, spontaneous generation, and the manhood, or was in the godhood of Mahomet, might very fitly be left out from any matter to which science and rationality are essential ingredients.

T. F. PALMER.

## National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON APRIL 30.

The President, Mr. G. W. Foote, happily recovered largely from his recent severe illness, occupied the chair. Other members present were: Messrs. Baker, Berry, Bowman, Brandes, Cohen, Cowell, Cunningham, Davey, Heaford, Judge, Lloyd, Neate, Nichols, Roger, Rosetti, Samuels, Silverstein, Schindle, Thurlow, and Wood.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed. New members were admitted for the Parent Society. Correspondence was also read.

This being the final meeting of the year, the President addressed the meeting at some length upon the general situation, and pointed out that for various reasons it was deemed advisable to hold the Annual Conference in London this year. The Queen's Minor Hall had been engaged for the business and public meetings.

Notices of Motion for the Agenda were reported, and resolutions moved by the Executive were ordered to be referred to the Agenda Committee, Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd being elected for that purpose.

Mr. Davey reported his attendance at meetings called to further the W. J. Ramsey Testimonial Fund, and that an appeal by circular was about to be made.

Other matters of routine business were dealt with.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary*.

## Obituary.

With deep regret I have to record the death of Mrs. Edward Moorhouse, one of the kindest and gentlest of women, a true Secularist, who, with her husband, worked for the "best of causes"—especially so during the stormy period of the Bradlaugh and our President's struggles thirty years ago. She had been suffering from a very painful malady for two years, but she lived and died fortified in the principles of the Secularist "faith." Her remains were cremated at the Leeds Crematorium, on the 2nd inst., and our good friend Mr. R. Tabrum read the beautiful Secular Service.—W. H. SPIVY (Huddersfield).

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

### LONDON.

#### OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 3.15 and 6.15, Mr. Gallagher, Lectures.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 5.45, M. Hope, a Lecture.

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