

THE Freethinker

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We breathe but the air of books : we owe everything to their authors, on this side barbarism ; and we pay them easily with contempt while living, and with an epitaph when dead.—WILLIAM HAZLITT.

The Word of God.—II.

An Open Letter to the

MINISTERS OF ALL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

MOST of you, gentlemen, teach that Moses (for instance) wrote the Pentateuch, and that he lived, roughly speaking, 1,500 years before Christ. But what is the age of your oldest Hebrew manuscripts? The editors of the Revised Version admit, in a footnote to their Preface, that "the earliest MS. of which the age is certainly known bears date A. D. 916." Now this is 2,400 years after the time of Moses; and let me ask you, plainly, Is not this long enough for any amount of accident and vicissitude? And, unless you fall back on a miracle, have you the slightest reason for supposing that Moses himself would recognise the A. D. 916 document as his own production?

Besides the difficulty and obscurity of Hebrew, is it not the case that the existing Manuscripts are full of different readings? I gather from scholars on your own side, to say nothing of sceptical investigators, that the number of different readings amount to many thousands, indeed to many myriads. Will you kindly explain, then, how any man, even if he be a perfect master of Hebrew, can be sure of having the exact Word of God? You are also aware, or should be, that the more ancient versions of the Old Testament—such as the Greek *Septuagint* and the Roman *Vulgate*—differ very considerably from the Masoretic text.

Thus we have Version differing from Version, and a vast quantity of variations in the current Hebrew manuscripts; that is, collection differs from collection, and, in the same collection, document differs from document. It is evident, therefore, that the Hebrew Old Testament is no more the *real* Word of God than the English Old Testament. I may be told, of course, that the variations are *unimportant*, and do not affect the *substance* of the volume; but I deny this, and I add that no variation can be unimportant when we are dealing with a communication from God to mankind. You may think it unimportant, but how do you know that God does?

Supposing that God, for some reason which passes human comprehension, chose that the first part of his revelation to all men should be given in a language only known to a small section of them: even then, would it not be reasonable to suppose that he would take care to preserve it in its integrity, so that we might not be burdened with the difficulty of finding out its words as well as its meaning? You admit that the manuscripts have suffered the common fate of ancient writings, in the hands of custodians and copyists; and, to my mind, this is an evidence of their human origin. I believe that, if God wrote a message for us, personally or by proxy, he would take the trouble to preserve it as he wrote it.

The New Testament manuscripts are older than those of the Old Testament. None of them, however, go beyond the fourth century; that is, the oldest copy we have of any book in the New Testament, including the Gospels, was written at least three hundred years after the death of Christ. Why is this? Why are there no *earlier* manuscripts? Surely, if God inspired the writers of them, he would not neglect their safety for three centuries after their composition, and then begin to take care of them. Had he preserved them until the days of Constantine, the Church could have preserved them afterwards. I daresay you will tell me that God did not work *miracles* to preserve the autographs of the New Testament; but he worked miracles to be recorded in them, and miracles to inspire the *writers* of them, and I cannot see why he should not work another miracle to preserve what they wrote.

So much for the documents themselves; and now let me ask you whether, in the Greek documents as we have them, there are not hundreds and thousands of different readings? If this be so (and you cannot deny it), the Greek Testament itself, in a multitude of cases, must contain what the Apostles and Evangelists did *not* write, besides omitting, perhaps, many things which they *did* write; so that, here, again, your very New Testament, even in the original Greek, is not, and cannot be, the *real, exact, authentic* Word of God.

The Gospels are four in number, and there were many others. The Church selected the four and stamped them as *canonical*; it rejected the others, to the number of dozens, and branded them as *apocryphal*. To a Catholic, of course, this is quite satisfactory, for he holds the Church to be infallible; but the Protestant does not, and what is his guarantee? You, gentlemen, who belong to Protestant Churches, take the four Gospels on trust from the Catholic Church, which you so often describe as idolatrous and fraudulent; but I want you to give me a reason for accepting these four Gospels, and no others, as the inspired Word of God. What suits your *convenience* does not satisfy my *intelligence*. I want a *reason*; something different from custom and tradition, something founded on logic and evidence.

Let me now draw your attention to another aspect of your Word of God. Over the heads of the various documents it contains, you have their authors' names printed. Thus you announce that the first five books, the Pentateuch, were written by Moses; that most of the Psalms were written by David; that Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Canticles were written by Solomon; that the very curious story of a prophet and a whale was written by Jonah; that a certain prophetic book, referred to by Jesus Christ, was written by Daniel; that fourteen epistles were written by Paul, one by James, two by Peter, and three by John, who also wrote the Revelation; and that the four Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

These announcements of yours, as to the authorship of the books of the Bible, are most of them *false*. You were told so, long ago, by sceptics like Spinoza, Voltaire, and Thomas Paine; but now the fact is not only admitted, but proclaimed, by scholars and professors within your own Churches.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded)

Do We Survive Death?

AMONG the writers who have been contributing articles to *Cassell's Saturday Journal* on the question "What Happens to Us When We Die?" it has been left for a lady—Lady Groves—to hit the right nail on the head in the form of a question. Lady Groves commences her *very* brief contribution with what one may say is a too modest disclaimer. She says:—

"When so many learned divines and distinguished philosophers have written on the subject of what happens to the human personality after death, I can hardly think that my opinion, even if I had one—which I have not—can be of great value."

This disclaimer seems quite needless. If the "learned divines and distinguished philosophers" were writing concerning anything they *knew*, Lady Grove's hesitancy would be highly commendable. But they are not. None of them know any more about the other side of death than she does. And when none of the participants in a discussion possess knowledge none of them can claim superiority. Under such conditions, cleric and layman, philosopher and fool are upon an absolute equality. Ignorance, like death, makes all equal.

Having disarmed antagonism by her modesty, Lady Groves next proceeds to pull these same "learned divines and philosophers" up to the mark by reminding them that they have forgotten to, so to speak, verify their quotations. They assume that something survives death, that they know what that something is, and then proceed to inquire what becomes of it. So says Lady Grove:—

"It is futile to inquire into the unknowable, and also that, as each individual varies during his lifetime to such an extent as hardly to retain the same individuality manifested at one time or the other of his existence, it may be worth while to inquire *what* it is that is supposed to survive after death of all the complex phases and characteristics and characters even that go to make up one single human organism."

That, I repeat, hits the nail on the head. What is it that survives death? Something survives, certainly—the indestructibility of matter, or the persistence of force, guarantees that. But what? Everything turns upon that point. And it is one that believers seldom, if ever, face. They tell us of their faith in a future life, the comfort this belief gives them—both interesting enough as revelations of their own mental states, but absolutely valueless from any other point of view. They declare *I* shall survive, or *you* will survive, but never face the crucial question of What is the *I* that is going to survive?

What they *ought* to mean is plain enough. What much earlier generations meant is plain enough. Every person is made up to every other person, primarily, of a body possessing a certain shape, size, and color, with their varying peculiarities. Associated with these physical peculiarities are certain mental ones summed up under the heading of temperament, disposition, or character. Thus, I recognise John Smith because he is six feet high, instead of seven, white and not black, cheerful and not morose, sensible and not stupid, honest and not a thief. Reverse all these distinguishing marks, and he ceases to be *my* John Smith. I do not know him. More, if you could suddenly change a white, six foot, honest, sensible, cheerful John Smith, into a black, seven foot, dishonest, morose John Smith, he would not know himself. For all practical purposes he would be a different individual.

What people *ought* to mean, then, by surviving death is that each one of us, with all our physical and mental peculiarities, will persist unchanged; or, at least, with no more than the gradual change to which we are subject here. To say that we shall *not* possess the same kind of body, that people will not be short and tall, fair and dark, well-shaped and ill-shaped, is to deny the existence of the principal and primary marks by which we recognise each other. If in the next world *I* do not

look or feel or think as I do here, it is a sheer abuse of language to say that my personality survives. It does not. Some other personality may, but it is no more *me* than I am a Central African now. All the talk of meeting again husband, or wife, or children, or friends, implies this. The belief is really based upon the persistence—unchanged—of the whole individual, physical and mental, that we now know. That is what the belief in a future life originally implied. And it implied that because the "soul" was originally the double of the living person, although a finer or more etherealised copy.

It is the persistence of the unchanged individual that is required, not the transformation of a "material" into a "spiritual" body—that is mere theological gibberish; nor yet the persistence of the elements of the body in some unindividualised form. And the moment the question is raised in this form we begin to realise, not merely the difficulty of believing, but the positive unintelligibility of the doctrine. The body we know does not survive. With death, decay and disintegration sets in, and is complete within a comparatively brief period. And the actual resurrection is not to-day a matter of mere disbelief; it is a physical impossibility. The resurrection of the body belongs to a pre-scientific age, to a time when almost anything was possible because very little was certain.

Under various forms, the reply to the question raised by Lady Grove is that man is a duality. He is made up of body and mind, or body and soul; and while the latter uses the former, it is independent of it, and survives it. But this is pure assumption; and when the disbeliever is asked to prove in what way mind can be shown to be dependent upon nervous action, the proper reply is to point to the fact, and leave it. The connection between mental phenomena and nervous processes is a fact. It is not the Freethinker's place to prove a fact that is as plain as daylight. We are not called upon to prove how they can be connected; it is the believer's duty to point out how they can be separated. We *know* they exist together; the question is, How can they exist apart? Can we even conceive of them existing apart? For man as we know him is not a duality. Man as we know him is a unity. He is not two, but one; and it is for those who hold that he is more than one to produce evidence for it.

It seems attractive to those people who habitually think in a fog, and to whom, consequently, words appear to have an inherent value, to speak of the mind as using the body, and that the differentiating peculiarities of mind are due to the body conditioning the mind. But grant that this were so, how does that help the theory of survival? No matter how caused, my personality is made up of the sum-total of my motives, thoughts, emotions, etc. If these are what they are because, having a peculiar bodily structure, they can only find expression in one way, they still remain the constituents of *me*. Remove this assumed conditioning body, and what becomes of me? Again, it cannot be my personality that survives, because, the body being no longer there, the conditions which created that personality have disappeared. You might have the survival of a "spiritual substance," but it would certainly not be me. I am annihilated as thoroughly on this hypothesis as on that of the most thoroughgoing Materialism.

There is really no evidence whatever that mind is independent of, or separate from, the body. A century and a half of scientific labor and research has furnished a host of presumptions against any such theory, and there is not a single spark of evidence in its favor. There exists a host of assumptions, a number of ingenious theories, forced interpretations of obscure and little understood mental phenomena, but of reliable evidence not a shred. And if it is without evidence in fact, the "soul" theory is absolutely useless as an explanation of anything. It cannot explain the phenomena of consciousness, it gives us no clearer conception of the nature of mental life. It only adds to the diffi-

culties already existing that of assuming the existence of an unknown substance. Even the late Professor William James was forced to admit that "The soul-theory is a complete superficiality" so far as accounting for the actually verified facts of consciousness goes, and adds, "Altogether the 'soul' is an outbirth of that sort of philosophising whose great maxim, according to Dr. Hodgson, is, 'Whatever you are *totally* ignorant of, assert to be the explanation of everything else.'" So also another writer, Dr. Mellone, in the course of an argument for a future life, is forced to admit that "Modern psychology has nothing to contribute in favor of a belief in survival.....Psychology has effectually disposed of the conception of the soul and body as two separate things." Finally, we have Professor Munsterberg declaring, "The philosopher who bases the hope of immortality on a theory of brain functions.....seems to me on the same ground with the astronomer who seeks with his telescope for a place in the universe where no space exists, and where there would be thus undisturbed room for God and the eternal bodiless souls."

The truth is, that we do not know mind as an independent force, and it would never have been assumed to be so but for the need to bolster up a theory that rests upon no better foundation than that of primitive animism. "Mind"—if we must exalt an abstraction into an entity—is one of the most dependent of forces known to us. It is affected by most, if not all, bodily states, by degrees of temperature, by food, by air, by the secretory efficiency of various organs. We know nothing and can conceive nothing of "mind" apart from the activity of the central nervous system. Consciousness is not indeed co-extensive with nervous action, but nervous action is co-extensive with consciousness, and the correlation of the two is such that "no psychosis without neurosis" is now an accepted scientific axiom. The theory that mind has an existence apart from the body is a theological necessity, it may be a metaphysical speculation, but it is absolutely without evidence, and has no place in modern science.

In this science is only endorsing everyday experience. We all know how seriously affections of such organs as the liver or the kidneys affect frames of mind. We are all aware, in the same connection, of the importance of diet and of pure air. We see changes of mental disposition consequent on injury. We see mental character modified by alcohol or drugs. We see this "independent" force made quarrelsome or maudlin by an overdose of whisky or helpless by an inhalation of chloroform. Science only carries common observation a little farther in showing that a certain quantity and quality of the grey matter of the brain are indispensable to particular mental phenomena. It also shows that while this correspondence has grown more complex in the course of natural development, it has yet remained constant throughout. In health and disease the connection between nervous states and mental phenomena remain. It is admitted by all in practice—and by nearly all in theory. C. COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

Positive Freethought.

As a rule, especially in believing circles, a Freethinker is supposed to be a most miserable person who goes through life mourning the loss of something of incalculable value which he is powerless to recover. He would give the world to be able to hold once more the simple beliefs he was taught to cherish in his childhood. The Rev. A. C. Hill, a popular London preacher, informs us that all sensible men must take their unbelief "as a matter for regret rather than delight." The dream has vanished, it is true, but they "cannot refrain from casting a wistful glance on what was once to them a veridical

reality." There is no doubt but that a dream *seems* real while it lasts, but there is absolutely no evidence of its reality save merely this *seeming*. When it is over the intellect is positive that it was a pure hallucination, and surely unbelief in the truth of a hallucination cannot reasonably be "a matter for regret." But Mr. Hill, failing back upon the great Bergsonian fallacy, declares that "fortunately for us all, the world is not governed by the scholar," and that the intellect is an inadequate and often misleading guide. He tells us that one of the most pathetic figures of the last generation is that of Goldwin Smith, who failed, not because his intellect was defective, but because he lacked faith—"the faith that can move mountains and make weak men and erring men into captains of the hosts of the Lord." Listen to the following strange estimate of Goldwin Smith:—

"With intellect sufficient to set up a dozen ordinary men he had been denied, or else had lost, that buoyant gladness of the soul, that power to hold on to the few things that men may prove in their own heart-beats, such as the worth of man and the exceeding goodness of the Most High God. Here lies the secret of his non-success. And the moral of it all is the old and trite one, that the saving forces of the world are not intellectual alone. They have their genesis in a certain majestic faith towards God and man—a faith which once and for ever was verified when the Lord of men bought his crown by the acceptance of the Cross" (*British Congregationalist*, June 4).

Now, we shall expose the inaccuracy of that verdict by means of the very article in which it occurs. Mr. Hill traces the failure of Goldwin Smith to the fact that "the cloister had left its mark upon him," to the fastidiousness which put it beyond the power of this stern but genuine lover of the right and true "to feel that the drunken boor who goes rolling along the road shouting his song of delight to the watching moon, and thanking the kind fates that still permit a man to get drunk when he likes, was made of the same flesh and blood as himself," in short, not to the absence of faith in God, but to an icy wall that "encompassed him, through which not even his dearest friends could penetrate." Then he naively adds:—

"He had not that diabolic gift of familiarity that made Mirabeau a terror to his foes and a perennial joy to his friends. In the midst of a crowd and at his own fireside he was always lamentably alone."

In reality, then, the one thing lacking in the case of Goldwin Smith was not "a certain majestic faith towards God," but that greatness and charm of personality which is always the dominating factor in an efficient life. Mr. Hill might remind us that a great and charming personality is the outcome of intimate commerce with God, but his allusion to Mirabeau forbids him to make that retort, because Mirabeau was at once one of the most distinguished statesmen and orators France has ever seen and a most uncompromising unbeliever. He had numerous faults, and who has not? but he was a most commanding and lovable personality, and his power with the people was immense. It is the opinion of historical critics, among whom is Carlyle, that had he lived a little longer the Reign of Terror would probably never have taken place. Though he lacked faith in God and immortality, he was yet, according to Carlyle, the one man in France in whom the light of genius itself brightly shone, "which was never yet base and hateful," simply "the one man in France who could have done any good as Minister." Thus, Mr. Hill's case for the impossibility of achieving the highest success in life apart from religious beliefs collapses the moment we seriously consider it, and it is he himself who shows how utterly fragile a case it is.

It seems that a believer is wholly incapable of furnishing an accurate description of an unbeliever. Because we do not believe in God it is taken for granted that we disbelieve in man and cannot appreciate him at his true value. At every point Freethought is regarded as a system of negation. One of the chief characters in Tolstoy's great novel,

Anna Karenina, is called Levin, who is described by his friends as a Freethinker. Tolstoy says of him: "He could not believe; he was also equally unable absolutely to disbelieve. This confusion of feelings caused him extreme pain and annoyance during the time allotted to his devotions." He fell in love with a beautiful young princess who was a Christian, and arrangements were being made for the marriage. Someone asked him if had his certificate of confession, as without it he could not be married. He had not been to confession for nine years. He was told that he must go to communion and obtain the certificate. Everybody assured him that it was only a matter of form, the priests being exceedingly accommodating. At this point Tolstoy gives us a vivid picture of the odious hypocrisy prevalent in the Greek Church. Levin appeared before several priests, and last of all before a little old man, who, crossing his hands under his stole, asked him:—

"Do you believe all that the Holy Apostolic Church teaches us?"

"I have doubted, I still doubt, everything," said Levin, in a voice which sounded disagreeable to his own ears, and he was silent.

The priest waited a few moments, then closing his eyes and speaking very rapidly,—

"To doubt is characteristic of human weakness; we must pray the Lord Almighty to strengthen us. What are your principal sins?" The priest spoke without the least interruption, and as though he were afraid of losing time.

"My principal sin is doubt, which I cannot get rid of; I am nearly always in doubt, and I doubt everything" (vol. ii., p. 81).

Throughout the empty ceremony Levin persisted in representing himself as one who doubted everything; but he returned to his friends with the certificate of confession in his pocket, and was duly married with all the formalities of the Greek Church.

Tolstoy, like Mr. Hill, is incapable of portraying a genuine Freethinker. According to him, the Freethinkers of his own day in Russia were "new-fashioned savages who rushed headlong into Atheism, Materialism, universal negation." Levin's wife "continued to go to church and to say her prayers with the calm conviction that she was fulfilling a duty," while her husband "amused himself, possibly, by calling himself an unbeliever, just as he did when he jested about her *broderie anglaise*." Our contention is that Tolstoy was totally unacquainted with the fundamental principles of Freethought, and that, in consequence, his portrait of a Freethinker is a miserable caricature. He makes Kitty, Levin's wife, say of him:—

"Why does he spend all his time reading those philosophical books, which do not help him at all? He himself says that he longs for faith. Why doesn't he believe? Probably he thinks too much.....How can he be without faith, when he has such a warm heart, and is afraid to grieve even a child? He never thinks of himself—always of others" (vol. ii., pp. 443 4).

No, Levin was never a convinced Freethinker; he stopped at the half-way house known as Doubt. It was not in him, he had not the intellectual resourcefulness requisite, to complete the journey. Of course, he was profoundly miserable, yearning to return to the position he had abandoned. He could not live without knowing what he was, and why he existed, and so, devoid of pluck to go forward towards the land of complete emancipation, he went back to the region of intellectually blinding superstition and credulity, and accepted once more the answers of theology to his perplexing questions on the sole authority of the Church of his fathers. Had he completed his mental emancipation he would never have returned into the house of bondage. Once a man has tasted realities, he will never be able to subsist on dreams again. We often hear of conversions from Atheism to Christianity, but not one of them can be substantiated. If a so-called Atheist embraces Theism, it follows that his profession of Atheism must have been false. Once an American slave made his escape into Canada, he never voluntarily went back. The love of freedom is instinctive,

while slavery of every kind is unnatural. To us, a return from Atheism to Theism is unthinkable. When a Theist becomes an Atheist, he merely reverts to the state wherein he was born—from Unnature to Nature, from dream-life to real life. And Atheism is not equivalent to universal negation, its negations being simply in order to affirmations. It negates the supernatural that it may affirm the natural, and give it the place and importance it demands and deserves. Freethought is negative merely in order to be positive, just as the builder is destructive in order to make clear the way for construction. And we aver that in Freethought alone is perfect mental peace to be acquired; and the truth, whenever clearly seen, maketh free, and is dearer than life.

J. T. LLOYD.

Yankee Claims for Christianity.

"John P. Robinson, he
Sez they didn't know everything down in Judee."
—LOWELL, *Biglow Papers*.

A FEW years ago the shadow cast by the American theologian was small; but to-day, when the revivalists of the strenuous republic are occupying some of the most prominent pulpits of London, and their works are reprinted in England by tens of thousands, the situation is changed. Cocksure Americanism is no longer confined to the land of tall buildings and tall statements, and the weaker English Nonconformists are rapidly following in the footsteps of the imported theologians.

Dr. W. E. Barton, a distinguished American Congregationalist minister, has voiced the "spread-eagle" claims of his countrymen, and he has written an unconsciously entertaining article to that end in the American periodical, *Faith and Doubt*. Such is his transparent sense of humor that he has incorporated a manifesto of belief drawn up by some English Nonconformist scholars as embodying the essential truths of orthodox theology. As Dr. Barton has made a profound study of theological matters, he must be perfectly aware that such statements would be instantly repudiated by the Greek, English, and Roman Churches, and by many Nonconformist bodies, such as the Presbyterians and Unitarians.

Nonconformist though he be, Dr. Barton has the true priestly dislike of science, which he assumes quaintly, to be "brand new." "Evolution," he says calmly, "is only fifty years old." Has he never heard of Lucretius, who before the Christian era suggested the theory of Evolution in his great poem, "De Rerum Natura"? Other branches of study, such as Comparative Religion, Dr. Barton says, are still more novel. We may grant this; but gratefully remember that this science, young as it is, has sapped the very foundations of the Christian belief. Moreover, Dr. Barton ignores the age-long conflict between religion and science, which keener eyes than his have perceived. Scientific teaching and investigation, or, indeed, any form of intellectual liberty, have always been incompatible with assent to the dogmas of religion. The entire organization of priestcraft has invariably been brought to bear against science on the ground that it is a most powerful solvent of religious faith. This resistance of the Church of Christ to the prevalent opinions of scientists has no indisputable claim to respect. When we remember that the system of Copernicus, the discoveries of Galileo, the law of gravitation of Newton, the Darwinian theory, and the Spencerean philosophy were all in turn received in the same venerable quarter with equal disfavor and derision, we attribute that resistance, not to the invariable weakness of the scientists' arguments, but to the general clerical dislike of knowledge. Chemistry was opposed as an impious prying into the secrets of "God," and the early chemists were charitably regarded as agents of "the Devil." Physiology and medicine were opposed on similar grounds. Chloroform, one of the greatest blessings ever conferred

on the human race, was resented as an infidel attempt to alleviate the pains "God" meant to be associated with childbirth. Geology was also opposed by "the Bride of Christ" because it made the chronology of the Bible look ridiculous. Biology was antagonised because it turned the Adam and Eve story into a myth. The Church always bitterly resented inquiry, and preferred explaining natural phenomena by mythological invention and revelation. Even Mrs. Eddy's attempt to erect a purely "Christian" science is disfavored by the orthodox.

Dr. Barton's delightful assumption that theologic dogma is necessary to morality needs direct contradiction. This inaccuracy of speech is simply the result of clerical bias. It is asserted by priests and clergymen who are attacking secular education for children, that without religious teaching morality is impossible. The "supernatural" view is that every act is moral which is in obedience to the commands of Deity; that these commands are known by direct revelation from "God," or through the conscience, which it is alleged is implanted by "God" in each person, and which decides for each individual what acts are right and what are wrong.

The Freethought objection is that the commands of Deity must be expressed either to individuals or to the whole race. In the first case, the sceptics ask, "How is it to be determined when any person is reliable who professes to be the recipient and interpreter of 'God's' commands?" In the second case it is asked, "Is it likely that any such command would have been given by 'God' without its most complete recognition by the whole human race?" The Mahdi claimed to be God-sent; Joanna Southcott declared herself charged with a special revelation; Joseph Smith professed to have a direct message from heaven; so did Mahomet; so did Jesus. How is it to be decided which prophet is sane and truthful? Is it to be determined by the numbers who accept, or reject, the message? If so, at what date or within what limits does the numerical strength become material? There are more Mormons now than there were Christians within a similar period. Mohammedanism in some countries would poll an overwhelming majority. Buddhism counts to-day more followers than can be claimed for Christianity. There is no single divine revelation universally admitted to be the command of "God." As for the Bible, the large majority of the world's inhabitants do not accept it. The greater number of the human family have never accepted it, and even of the minority who nominally take the Bible for their guide, Christians think the Old Testament imperfect, while the Jews reject the New Testament. Conscience, so called, varies in the same individual at different periods of his life and alters under different conditions of health. Three centuries ago it was moral in England and America to believe in witches, and it was moral to kill a witch. To-day it is immoral to believe in witchcraft; and to kill a witch would be regarded as murder. One hundred years ago it was moral to trade in slaves, to own slaves, and to breed slaves. Within living recollection it was moral to own and breed slaves in the United States. Why did Christians for centuries trade in slaves if morality is dependent on the immutable judgments of a God-implanted conscience? How is it that slavery, which was defended by clerical moralists only a few years ago, has now become utterly indefensible?

In England, until recently, it was immoral to marry the sister of a deceased wife, and the immorality was so clear that the children born of such union were illegitimate and legally treated as such. At the same time, in Canada and Australia, it was moral to make such marriages, and the children were legitimate. Since then the English conscience has fallen into line with the Colonial conscience, and these marriages are now recognised as being moral. The Freethinker asks how this is explicable from the supernatural standpoint?

One cannot always tell the condition of a man's mind from his writings. The most vehement asser-

tions of the truth of a principle may be accompanied by a feeling not expressed in type, that certainty is lacking. Some such feeling was not absent in Dr. Barton, or he would not have penned the following remarkable admission, remarkable because it is preceded by such strenuous effort to prove Christianity unassailable. Says Dr. Barton, referring to the "essential truths" of the Christian religion, these "must express themselves in every generation, not merely in the language which men are speaking, but also with such imagery and unconscious figures of speech as are current and form the necessary background of men's thought." Such quibbling is only the beginning of the end. If we re-examine the Gospels in the light of the twentieth century, we shall find them anything but unassailable truths. "Miracles," said Matthew Arnold, in a celebrated passage, "do not happen." The newest of new theologians echo the same cry. Yet one thing must be evident to every unprejudiced observer. Christianity is based upon miracle. It is on the truth or falsehood of miracles that the personality of Christ must stand or fall. According to the Gospels, it was by miracles that he attested his divine sovereignty. It was by miracles that he won his first following. It was by miracles that he proclaimed himself the "Son of God," and without the credulous belief in the miracles Christianity would have died in its infancy. It is not, indeed, a creed of love and human brotherhood which has fascinated so many millions through so many centuries. Christ claimed that he was "God," and his "proofs" were that he multiplied loaves and fishes, healed the sick, and restored the dead to life. The whole question is reduced to one of facts. If we can believe that Christ was really born of a virgin, that he performed many prodigies, and that he actually and finally left the earth by ascension, then we need not hesitate to accept the pretensions of Christianity. If, on the other hand, we believe that the proofs for the miracles are inadequate, or that natural law is never broken, no amount of restatement in terms of twentieth-century enlightenment will make believable the miraculous events upon which the dogmas of Christianity are based.

The most important Christian body—the Roman Catholic Church—recognises this, and affirms that its own miracles are a continuation of those wrought by Christ, his disciples, and the saints. They tell us that the cures at Lourdes and elsewhere are precisely such as those mentioned in the Bible, and that the apparition of the Virgin to peasant children at La Salette is as genuine as the recorded appearance of Moses and Elias to a small company at Galilee. The ecclesiastics of the Greek Church take the same attitude, and contend that the annual revelation of the Holy Fire which takes place in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem is simply the latest link in a great chain that extends back to the commencement of the history of God's chosen people.

Dr. Barton admits that the present is a time of transition; but he does not appear to realise the effect of his own statement. The religion of otherworldliness is dead, or practically dead. The power of the Church has waned, and to-day exercises little influence except low down in the intellectual scale. The freethinking pioneers have sounded the march of humanity towards broader pastures and freer air. Honest human laughter has been heard in the place of the sobs of the religious, while the newer evangel of freedom and equality has been spreading over the earth. But suddenly, just as poor human nature has begun to breathe freely, this whisper of the ghosts of the Middle Ages is heard again, and the Nonconformist bodies, the youngest and rawest recruits of the Army of Superstition, are appealed to for corroboration of the fiendish formula that the human heart is evil, happiness a temptation, and the flesh a snare.

Granting that Dr. Barton and those who think with him are honest, so were their prototypes; so were the old priests and parsons who preached for century after century the doctrine of "original sin,"

the corruption of man's heart, and eternal damnation. What Calvin and Knox said we now smile at; what Dr. Barton and his friends say we also smile at. It must be so, unless we are to accept an interpretation of Life's riddle which leaves Humanity for ever within the gloomy portals of Superstition. The latest Yankee Nonconformist statement of the claims of Christianity is in reality an indictment of orthodoxy. It explains nothing and adds nothing, but leaves the world where Calvin and Knox found it, a world given over to devilry, darkness, and despair.

MIMNERMUS.

Acid Drops.

Monsignor Benson, novelist and Roman Catholic priest, has been lecturing at Caxton Hall on "Modern Miracles." This consecrated gentleman is not a fool, but he can play the fool, which, as the proverb says, takes a good deal of ability. "I know that miracles can happen," he said, "because they do." But this is not an argument; it is a repetition of the same thing in different words. That miracles can happen, and that they do happen, are really the same statement. They can happen because they do happen, and they do happen because they can happen. This is simply turning round a wheel, one half painted (say) red and the other half blue. The red doesn't prove the blue; the blue doesn't prove the red; they are arbitrarily indicated halves of one and the same thing. As for what Monsignor Benson calls *modern* miracles, he can only refer us to Lourdes, where some nervous cures, mostly temporary, undoubtedly occur, and where, for the rest, imposture is carried on as a fine art. Nobody ever goes to Lourdes with one leg and comes away with two. When that happens it will be time enough to talk about miracles.

It must have been the ignorance of his audience that tempted Monsignor Benson to refer to the miracles said to have been wrought at the tomb of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. A drop of the saint's blood put into a bottle multiplied itself, and the bottle became full; even then it could be diluted again and again, and sold by monks for money in opposition to the doctors' medicine. This is the least gross of the stories connected with Thomas à Becket's corpse. A lively account of some of the others may be found in Froude's fourth volume of *Short Studies*. They are enough to make a cat laugh or a dog vomit.

A test is applied to the miracles at Lourdes, says Monsignor Benson. Yes, and a committee of monks was appointed to examine each story in detail at the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury. "Their duty," Froude says, "was to assure themselves that the alleged miracle was reality and not imagination. Yet thousands were allowed to pass as adequately and clearly proved. Every day under their own eyes the laws of nature were set aside." The miracles became more and more wonderful. At first weak eyes were made strong; then sight wholly lost was restored. At first sick men were healed; then dead men were brought back to life. A test indeed! Monsignor Benson is a true priest. He belongs to a Church that has always lied as much as the people would stand it. And there has never been very much limitation in that. "The prophets," says an old book, "prophesy falsely, and my people love to have it so."

Monsignor Benson related how a woman at Lourdes, with "great wounds" in her back, was "entirely and permanently" cured in a day or two. We should much like to know the name and address of that woman, and also whether any reliable person saw her before and after her alleged cure. We are quite ready to accept the stories of *some* cures at Lourdes. It all depends upon the complaint. But "great wounds" entirely cured in a day or two by prayers to the Virgin! It makes Jonah's whale look trivial. Anyway, while there can be found people who believe that, there is small reason for wondering at their believing the Biblical miracles.

"Providence" doesn't seem to help people anywhere else in the world but at Lourdes, and Monsignor Benson might remind it of the fact. Devastating floods have occurred in China. There has been immense destruction of property, and the loss of thousands of lives. Yet the Scripture says "He doeth all things well." *Very well.*

Rev. Everard Digby, vicar of St. Agatha's, Shoreditch, acted as referee at the prize-fight between Bombardier Wells and Colin Bell on Tuesday evening. Some good Christians objected to this. But did not Jesus himself attend such a match, perhaps with a "bit on" one of the combatants. "It is I, Peter, be not afraid" used to be quoted in a common joke in our younger days as—"Hit his eye, Peter, be not afraid."

Despite the formation of the League of Worshipping Children, the youngsters show no increasing anxiety to worship. Quite the other way, in fact. The *Methodist Recorder* publishes the figures for Sunday-school attendance for 1913-14 among the Wesleyan Methodists, and there is a decrease of over 11,000 scholars. Last year the decrease was over 12,000. This, it must be remembered, does not allow for any growth in population. That would make the decrease much greater. During the last five years there has been an average loss of ten schools per year.

The *Recorder* asks, "What can we expect for the future of the Church so long as this sinister sign hangs in front of us?" What, indeed! The only chance of keeping people Christian is to make them so while they are young. Christianity, nowadays, is not a religion that appeals to the uncorrupted adult intelligence, and the loss of the children means cutting off the only genuine source of supply. That is a peculiarity of modern Christianity. Art, or science, or literature, or politics makes its appeal to the adult, and no matter what his childhood may have been, he may still be won to these in his maturity. But with Christianity, unless the seeds are sown in the young and impressionable mind, the case is hopeless. We know it, and all the clergy feel it.

The following is from the *Daily Chronicle* (June 26) report of the Salvation Army International Congress:—

"In between the meetings the Overseas delegates have been exploring London. Nearly all made a pilgrimage to Mile-end, to see where the Salvation Army was born, and an American officer was seen to kneel and kiss the stone which marks the spot where the old General held his first open-air services. Many also went to the General's grave at Abney Park.

"At the Congress Hall, Clapton, one delegate picked up some pebbles from the path, saying, 'I shall take these home. The old General may have trodden on them.' Another place of pilgrimage was a room in a house in Gorse-road, Hackney, where relics of the General have been preserved—his desk, his table, a chair, and the bed on which he died. In this house the General lived in the early days of the Army, and after serving as the first training home it is now a home of rest for officers."

This is what the old Reformation Protestants used to call relic-mongering and Roman idolatry. It seems to come easy to all sorts of superstitionists.

The publication of the *Life of Walter Bagehot* by his sister-in-law, Mrs. Barrington, reminds us of Bagehot's sardonic humor. A friend of his had a church in the grounds near his house. "I like that," said Bagehot; "it's well the tenants should not be quite sure that the landlord's power stops with this world."

An account of the work of the Rev. S. F. Collier, of Manchester, which appears in *T. P.'s Weekly*, mentions that he has organised labor yards, women's refuges, training homes, labor bureaux, and lodging-house visitations. What Secularists these Christians are!

A writer in *T. P.'s Weekly*, referring to the stories told by Christians concerning Colonel Ingersoll and Charles Bradlaugh, that both these gentlemen took out their watches and challenged "God" to prove his existence by striking them dead in three minutes, says that "the persistence of tales of this kind proves the underlying mysticism of life even in a materialistic age." It does nothing of the kind; it proves the existence and popularity of Christian liars.

"Men need religion to prevent them from worshipping idols," says Mr. G. K. Chesterton. The Roman Catholic Church, to which G. K. C. belongs, supplies both for the same fee.

The old midsummer Fire festival, of Druidical origin, is still celebrated in remote districts, particularly at Tarbolton, Ayrshire. The Christian superstition has only one fire festival, and that lasts for ever, and the bulk of the human race will be participants in it.

The *Methodist Times* is nibbling at the bait recently thrown out by the Archbishops of York and Canterbury. It will be remembered that the Archbishops repudiated any desire for exclusive privileges, and said they would welcome in any reconstructed Second Chamber representatives of Churches other than their own. The *Methodist Times* does not decline the suggestion; it guards itself by saying that Free Churches are not anxious to be represented there, and thinks such representation would be extremely difficult. We think so too. A House of Lords as it is, is bad enough; but a Second Chamber partly filled with representatives of the Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, Salvation Army, and all the other odds and ends of the Christian world, would be an institution that only a Swift could adequately describe. One can understand a State teaching, or providing for the teaching, of a religion. That is a logical and an intelligible proposition. But a State endowing and teaching all forms of the Christian religion—some of which quite negative others—would be indeed Bedlam let loose.

The suggestion is, however, rather an astute one; and the Archbishops take the Nonconformist opposition to the Establishment at its proper value. They know, as we have often pointed out, that the bulk of Nonconformists are not objecting to the State establishment of religion, but only to the State establishment of a Church. And it is quite within the sphere of probability that some such plan as suggested may be seriously put forward as a means of perpetuating the State endowment of religion. If this were done, it would only be the policy of the Education Act over again. Neither the Church of England nor the Nonconformists ever seriously consider the presence of others in the State, or face the simple issue that the proper policy for the modern State is to stand aloof from all religions, protecting all in the expression of their opinions and favoring none. The Bishops are in the present House of Lords because they happen to be a relic of the Dark Ages. And it is to be hoped that, with the abolition of the hereditary principle in legislation, they will be abolished also. There is really no greater justification for the representatives of religion to be in the Legislature than the representatives of anything else. All who are there should be there by the vote of the people. There is no other sensible justification for their presence.

Mrs. Besant has discovered what will be to many a new cause of criminality, but which others will recognise as a very old spiritualistic theory served up afresh with a dressing of theosophic jargon. When a person commits murder, she told a Queen's Hall audience, it is because someone who has previously committed murder, and who are on "the other side of death," prompts them to do so. That, she says, is one of the reasons against capital punishment, and why in countries where capital punishment is common murders tend to increase. It seems we are all the time packing the next world with murderous spirits, who compel those still living to murder also. Their frequency is "due to the prompting which came from those miserable people who went into another world on the other side of death careless of what became of them." And with the abolition of capital punishment there comes a decrease in the number of murders, because there "is a diminution in the number of people who are forced hurriedly into the world on the other side of death." It is all so simple—and so stupid.

Stupid is really the only name for a theory of this kind. It has not even the merit of offering an explanation of what is otherwise unexplainable. For the facts of the case are adequately covered by what we know to be true. This is the connection between the culture of a people and their criminal code. Where one is low the other is brutal. People accustomed to witness pain, and inflict pain on each other in daily life will, naturally, not hesitate to inflict pain by way of punishment. Familiarity breeds, if not contempt, at least, carelessness, here as elsewhere. When people were hanged for sheep-stealing, as Mrs. Besant says, sheep-stealing was common. But this particular crime diminished, not because we ceased to send sheep-stealers to the other world, but owing principally to commercial and industrial developments in other directions. Of course, the hanging did not stop the sheep-stealing. People were so familiar with it that it lost its terrors. Punishment, as Beccaria said, to be effective must be certain, and it must not become common. It is the brutalising effects of certain forms of punishment on those whose are alive that society has to dread. We need not trouble how it affects those who are dead.

Parallels are often drawn between our own civilisation and that of the Roman Empire during the days of its

decline. Here is another that may be worth consideration. Socially, Rome showed the same extremes of great wealth and great poverty that we have to-day. It was oppressed by a swollen urban and a depleted agricultural population. A useless luxuried class developed. The more intellectual men and women of the time had ceased to believe in the old religion, and this gave the cruder and more superstitious believers a chance to assume positions of importance and control. The idle rich who were not overburdened with brains were always seeking some new sensation, and many found it in cultivating various forms of "occultism," which were as fashionable then as they are now. These facts—the withdrawal of the controlling influence of superior intelligence from the official religion of the country, and the craze for mystical religion amongst the idle classes—were very prominent features of the time, and played no small part in bringing about the retrograde movement that led to the establishment of Christianity. And they are the chief elements that make for retrogression to-day.

Judging by the authoritative tone of his pulpit utterances, one would naturally come to the conclusion that Principal Forsyth is God's plenipotentiary on earth. In the most dogmatic manner he speaks in the name of the so-called Sovereign of the Universe. Preaching on faith the other Sunday at Kensington, he said that men's "power with Christ is of more moment than Christ's own power over men." That is a strange assertion; but here is a stranger one still: "A living faith in him *does* move and alter the action of God." Jesus said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove" (Mat. xvii. 20); but Dr. Forsyth, a much superior authority, contradicts Jesus flatly, saying, "We *cannot* move mountains, but we *can* move the God who made the mountains." The fact is that mountains have never been moved by faith, knowing which this modern divine conveniently gives Jesus the slip.

In other words, defeated by the known, the reverend gentleman flies for shelter to the unknown. It is so delightfully safe to talk about God. He never contradicts, or in any way interrupts, the speaker. Neither praise nor blame has ever tempted him to utter his voice. Not even the fact that men have always fought and killed one another in controversies concerning him has induced him to interfere. Is not this inexplicable if God there be? We know nothing about God; but we confidently challenge the reverend Principal to adduce one instance of an alteration occurring in the action of Nature, which is the only action known to us, in answer to human prayer.

Mr. J. Ramsay Macdonald was speaking at Leicester last Sunday. He represents the town in Parliament, and he evidently knows the tenure by which he holds his seat. He praised the good old orthodox view of the Sunday question, and even recommended the adoption of the Scottish Sabbath. All the talk about turning Sunday into a day of recreation, he said, was humbug and dangerous. He appealed to religious organisations to see that Sunday is not secularised. He was in favor of a "dull" Sunday. Well, now, we are quite willing to let his Sunday be as dull as he chooses to make it. What we object to is the right he arrogates to himself of inflicting "dull" Sundays upon other people. That is the real point at issue; not Mr. Macdonald's own preference, but his claim to make it the rule for everybody else. Fortunately the "dull" Sunday is doomed. A thousand Ramsay Macdonald's could not save it. And calling it "Scottish" will not help it much in England. For there is an England, after all, in spite of 1603 and what some call the Scottish annexation.

The "Methody" airs, as William Cobbett called them, which some of these working-class leaders give themselves are quite astonishing. Now and then they beat the bourgeois at his own game. You would almost think that they had invented morality, and that religion was one of their monopolies.

Mr. R. J. Campbell's progress is simply phenomenal. At last he has seen the eyes of God, tells his people all about them, and flatters them with the assurance that one day soon, when they "stand free from the shackles of sense," they too shall see them, and thereafter to all eternity look at all things through those ineffable Divine orbits. And there are still superficially intelligent people who can listen to such balderdash apparently without turning a hair.

For two thousand years the omnipotent Savior has been diligently seeking the lost world, and for six thousand years

the lost world has been yearning unspeakably, from the depth of its sore need, for the omnipotent Savior, and to this day the two have never once met. Is it not all wholly inexplicable and passing strange, except only on the assumption that the tragi-comical story is a complete illusion? And in highest comedy is there not always the making of deepest tragedy?

The Catholic Bishop of Northampton has the courage to face the facts concerning the religious outlook. On the one hand, he warns his followers against the modern views on religion, which he stigmatises as "cruel, impudent lies," and on the other declares "that throughout the world religion is in bad odor with the male sex." This, of course, is an intolerable reflection on the female sex; and yet what his right reverence says is entirely true, though with an ever-increasing number of brainy women religion is in worse odor even than with the men. What the Bishop fails to realise is that the modern mind is steadily outgrowing and abandoning all the ancient superstitions, and getting to look at them with disgust.

How marvellously hazy and illogical, though superficially plausible, some would-be men of God are, to be sure. Under a cloak of exceeding cleverness, one of them explodes into verse in the following manner:—

"There is no unbelief.
Whoever plants a seed beneath the sod,
And waits to see it push away the clod,
He trusts in God.

There is no unbelief.
Whoever says, when clouds are in the sky,
'Be patient, heart, light breaketh by and by,'
Trusts the most high."

When Daniel Webster, the celebrated American barrister, rose to address the jury in defence of the prisoner, on one occasion, all that he said in reply to the long and eloquent address of the prosecuting counsel was this: "Daniel Webster says, That's nonsense"; and the jury unanimously agreed with him. Well, of the sentiment expressed in the verses just quoted we venture to say, "That's nonsense." Unless Nature and God mean precisely the same thing, the lines are utterly meaningless.

"From seven to fourteen is the time for character building," says Mrs. Annie Besant. The lady need not have studied the "wisdom of the East" for twenty years to find this out, for it is engraved in every school copy-book.

A pious father found his small son's pocket book, and was struck by the entries "S. P. G.," followed by the figures 6d., 8d., 4d., 3d. Thinking his boy had subscribed to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, he asked him what it meant. "Oh! that is 'something—probably grub,' father," he replied.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton, who took the chair at a lecture on "Modern Miracles" the other day, gave vent to some of his usual quips and cranks, but incidentally touched on a rather important truth. The modern world, he said, was a sceptical world, and tried to flatter itself by calling itself daring. He maintained, however, that it was a very timid world. "It funk'd nearly all the problems of life." "Advanced people were holding back in a manner that was little short of cowardice." We are afraid there is a great deal of truth in this statement. Mr. Chesterton meant that if the modern world had more courage it would accept miracles—which is merely Chestertonese. But that the "advanced" world is timid we believe to be an unfortunate truth. In private conversation people will admit their disbelief in religion, or their indifference to it; they will admit the absurd and useless character of many of our institutions; and yet in practice they will be found either supporting these things or placing obstacles to the progress of those who are trying to achieve reform. There are, for example, quite enough Freethinkers in Great Britain to make Freethought a recognised power in the land. It is not so recognised because so many Freethinkers think far more of how to avoid offending Christians than of how to promote their own principles.

The truth is that the average Englishman takes less pride in his opinions than he does in anything that he possesses. He will take pride in his home, his family, his pictures, his athletic record, his possessions. He seldom evinces a genuine pride in his opinions. In the main, this is doubtless the expression of social heredity. He does not belong to a society in which the value and the power of ideas is properly recognised and appreciated. On the contrary, the man of strong opinions—particularly if they be unorthodox—is called a crank, a faddist, a fanatic, and is always regarded as more or less of a nuisance. He grows

up impressed with the wisdom of keeping his opinions to himself—as if an opinion that one does not ventilate were worth the having. To realise this, one need only reflect on how few of us know the opinions of those around us on some of the most important and vital of questions. There is more or less concealment all round, with the result that there is more or less cowardice all round. And for this mental cowardice, so well established that it is practically accepted as a virtue, Christianity itself is principally responsible.

Learning was recognised in the "Honors" conferred on sundry persons on the King's Birthday. Professor J. G. Frazer, the author of that great book, the *Golden Bough*, received a knighthood. It reminds us of an earlier King George, who received a new volume of the famous *Decline and Fall* from the author with "Another big book, Mr. Gibbon!"

The Bishop of Wakefield wants children under sixteen kept from the cinema shows, which he thinks harmful. Yet the dear Bishop thinks that children under sixteen should be taught the horrors of hell.

The *Evening News* recently had a paragraph concerning a curate who received ten shillings a quarter. It seems like a choirboy's "honorarium"; but, really, the dear clergy may have thought that religion, like virtue, was its own reward.

According to our Nonconformist contemporary, the *Daily News and Leader*, William Morris "may have professed no religion," but he was among those who "whilst denying God with their tongues, admit him by their actions." This, we presume, is an admission that Morris did not worship at the same tabernacle as the members of a famous cocoa firm.

An inmate of the Milton Union Infirmary, Sittingbourne, has reached a hundred years, and the pressmen are taking photos and writing paragraphs. If those scribes could only have met Adam, Methuselah, or Melchizedek! As the last-named gentleman, according to the Bible, had neither beginning nor end of days, he may be photographed yet in the halfpenny press.

Nothing shows the desperate plight of the Churches better than the way some of the religious papers are building hopes on the ridiculous "Come to church" movement that is to be tried next January. Everybody in the country is to receive a personal invitation to come to church on a particular day; and it is quite possible that some may. Anything large and impudent is bound to strike the fancy of some people, and they may attend to see what it is all about. But we doubt if the clergy are silly enough to quite believe that it will lead to any permanent increase in church attendance. People cannot have forgotten that there are churches, or that the clergy would like them to attend. Their staying away is not for want of being invited, but from want of conviction. And how is the "Come to church" game going to supply that? Besides, in the main, people don't advance *backwards*. A man may hang on to Christianity in spite of all one may do. But once he has outgrown it, how can you remove the knowledge of the truth that he has obtained? "Come to church" will be like the Christian Endeavor and other fads. It will amuse and interest those *in* the Church. It will have precious little effect on those outside.

A few weeks ago, at such an eminent Protestant centre as Edinburgh, Professor M. Bergson was hailed enthusiastically as a new religious ally, as a prophet of brilliant originality, and as a distinguished leader of twentieth century thought; though from the newspaper reports of his Gifford Lectures we do not learn that he expressed his views on the universe even in terms of eighteenth century Deism, to say nothing of Christian Theism. Now, the curious fact is that, while the Protestant world, being in a state of desperation, welcomed the pseudo-scientific philosopher with open arms, immense audiences hanging receptively upon his lips, the Catholic world was authoritatively called upon to disown him and all his works as a pernicious influence in modern life. We maintain that, having due regard to its own interests, the Church of Rome has taken a thoroughly wise action. In no sense whatever can M. Bergson be claimed as a force that is calculated, in the least degree, to help the cause of supernatural religion. He is simply an Idealist that must be put in a category by himself. But how amazingly self-contradictory the Christian world is.

Rev. Cyril John Valpy French, vicar of St. David's, Exeter, left £22,323. Pity the lot of "the poor clergy."

To Correspondents.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1914.—Previously acknowledged, £174 4s. 6d.

C. D.—We quite agree with you that people in love with the memory of great historical characters should not inflict them upon their children. Julius Cæsar Jones is rather a burden to carry through life. So is Charles Bradlaugh Barker. Whatever ordinary name a child bears may be rendered illustrious—by himself; to start with a ready-made illustrious name is apt to be unfortunate. There is much in the story of Voltaire and the Duke de Rohan. The dull, insolent Duke, when the company were hanging on Voltaire's lips, bawled out, "Who is that young man who talks so much?" "My lord," Voltaire replied, "he is not one who carries about a great name, but one who wins respect for the name he has. You, my lord, are the last of your house; I am the first of mine." We presume you know that there is a legal way of changing one's name. This is often done when money is at stake. The late Mr. Watts-Dunton was a case in point. His original name was Theodore Watts.

E. B.—Thanks for cuttings again.

H. F.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

G. E. FRANCIS.—We are quite aware that the Catholic Church does not encourage the reading of the Protestant versions of the Bible. Neither do the Protestant Churches encourage the reading of the Douai version of the Bible; which, by the way, though the English people don't know it, preceded the Authorised Version in print.

OLD READER.—We did not mean that Mr. Cohen had broken down, but that he might be on the way to it. We are happy to say he is better.

T. N. N.—We note your view that our "Open Letter" should be re-marked for republication as a pamphlet.

R. OOLVIE wishes he could order fifty copies of "that valuable Bible Handbook."

W. M.—Thank you for noting it. It is just one of those abominable misprints that will happen. No book is so carefully "read" as the Bible; yet the famous Adultery Bible got through with the "not" omitted from the seventh commandment, so that all good Christians were told to "commit adultery."

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

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Editorial.

THE sudden attack of the torpid English summer has made me a sun-worshiper again. Any man, editor or otherwise, who writes more than he can help in this weather (Tuesday, June 30, 1914) is simply a fool. I will postpone fulfilling the promise I made in last week's "Editorial." Yet although the matters I mean to write about will keep a little, they are of great and grave importance.

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

Wales is progressive in many things, but not in the matter of religion. Welsh Members of Parliament, even, are capable of talking the greatest nonsense in this respect. Mr. Hugh Edwards, for instance, told a Rhyl meeting the other day that they would be guilty of treason if they succumbed to the temptation to destroy their traditions as Sabbath-loving people by giving facilities for Sunday boating

and Sunday excursions. *Treason!* What on earth does the man mean? Fortunately the growth of Sunday freedom in England more than balances any Sabbatarian reaction in Wales. Recreation, and innocent recreation too, takes thousands away from "divine worship" every Sunday. The latest development is a proposal to run People's Theatres on Sunday. Many actors and managers, including Sir H. Tree, are strongly in favor of this policy. Some actors and actresses are opposed to it on the ground of the danger of a seven-days' week to their profession. But a few strokes of the pen, in a new Act, would render this impossible.

We make the following extract from a letter written by a new subscriber in South Africa:—

"For a long time I have wished to write and let you know what delight, pleasure, and profit I am afforded by the pages of the *Freethinker* from week to week. About two years ago a copy of the *Freethinker* accidentally came into my hands, and, after reading but a few pages of it, I instantly became a confirmed Freethinker. The reason I so easily became 'converted' to Freethought will be obvious to your readers when I say that I was walking in the black darkness of religious superstition, many times wishing that something would happen soon to end my miserable existence. As I write this, I feel that I would like to be able to put a copy of your paper in the hands of every man and woman who find themselves in the same position as I was in then: knocking, but not getting any reply—knocking at a purely imaginary door; seeking, but not finding; asking, but no answer. To such people the *Freethinker* must be a real boon, a genuine treasure, and the Light of the World to them. I read many papers and magazines, but none will even compare with the *Freethinker*—written by thinking men for thinking people. I am deeply sorry to know that Mr. Foote is not as well as the readers of the *Freethinker* wish him to be, but I sincerely hope that before this reaches you he will be his old self again. I hope he may be spared long to be, as he has been all through his long and well-spent life, the Champion of English Freethought.

"What a mighty difference it would make to poor distracted Ireland if only a few of her leaders—say Sir E. Carson and John Redmond—were Freethinkers. Then Ireland would be what she ought to have been, what she would have been, centuries ago."

The writer ends by remarking that the Irish question would have been settled long ago if it were not for "Protestant" and "Catholic" factions.

Mr. B. A. Le Maine, 526 Oxford-street, London, W., is organising the Annual Outing of the Metropolitan Secular Society, which takes place on Sunday, July 12, to Southend-on-Sea. Tickets, including rail and high tea, 4s. 6d. each, to be obtained at the aforesaid address before July 5.

For some years now there has been no organised work done by the National Secular Society in Regent's Park, in consequence of the North London Branch having concentrated their efforts upon the newer station at Parliament Hill. Regent's Park, thirty years ago, was celebrated for the large, orderly, and intelligent audiences that gathered round the Freethought platform, demonstrations held there being always most enthusiastic. This year the Branch has recommenced afternoon meetings, and we are pleased to have a report from Miss Vance, who attended the meeting last Sunday, that the audiences are as large and as enthusiastic as ever, notwithstanding the fact that other Freethought meetings both precede and follow the N. S. S. meeting.

White Christians—you must be white to be an *accepted* Christian—are such a selfish, conceited, and boastful lot of people, and go swaggering so insolently over this planet, that a Freethinker is naturally glad to see them taken down a bit. We rejoiced—assuming that there had to be a war—that Holy Russia was soundly beaten by Heathen Japan. In the same way—although we don't trouble our readers about prize fights, or trouble ourselves in ordinary cases who wins or who loses—we are glad that Jack Johnson has soundly beaten the "white champion" who was going to give him a licking at Paris. Nothing could be more hypocritical than the attitude of the Christian whites to the so-called Christian blacks; and we like to see the pride of color humbled now and then.

CHRISTIANITY A FAILURE.

Ah! how true it is that Christianity has not, as you say, Christianised the world! There is something curious in the spectacle of the embarrassment of every sect of Christians in accounting for this fact. I know no subject on which there is more miserable floundering among incompatible views and untenable assertions.—*Harriet Martineau.*

Christian Apologetics.

VIII.—ORIGEN AND EUSEBIUS.

MANY years ago, when I was quite a youngster, I remember going several times with some older lads to hear the great Infidel-slayer, Thomas Cooper, hold forth on the London Fields. I can see him now in my mind's eye stepping briskly along, with books under his arm, followed by three or four disciples, to take his place in the arena. I cannot call to mind any of the arguments used—I was scarcely of an age to understand them—but no one seemed able to stand against this great Christian Evidencer. Upon one point only is my memory clear. This is, the method he employed, upon more than one occasion, to reduce an opponent to silence. Looking at the latter individual gravely, almost pityingly, he slowly asked: "Have you read Irenæus?" (a pause). "Have you read Origen?" (a pause). "Have you read Eusebius?" (a longer pause). "Then allow me to tell you, my friend, that you are very, very ignorant."

After this set-down, the opponent, however strong or cogent may have been his argument, was left without a leg to stand upon. Knowing nothing of the unimpeachable evidence borne by those Christian "fathers" to the truth of the Gospel records, he ignominiously collapsed. How, indeed, was it possible for anyone who had not read a line of Irenæus and Co. to impeach the credibility of the New Testament accounts? Who would be so rash as to question the Virgin Birth story, or that of the Devil placing Jesus on a pinnacle of the temple, without knowing what bombshells lay concealed in the pages of Irenæus and Eusebius? Years afterwards, when I came to examine the Gospel "history," I did not forget to consult Irenæus and his confrères, and then I discovered that the valiant Thomas Cooper had been making much ado about nothing. I also learnt that the great Christian advocate had written several volumes on "the verity" of the Gospel narratives—copies of which I procured and read. Among these were: *The Bridge of History over the Gulf of Time—The Verity of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*—and *The Verity and Value of the Miracles of Christ*. On the title page of each volume the author calls himself "Lecturer on Christianity."

In the first of these works the writer undertook to trace back the existence of the four Gospels from the nineteenth century into the first—each century being considered a bridge. The author might, however, have saved himself much writing and a good deal of ink, by commencing at the end of the second century, and tracing back into the first; for no hostile critic then denied, or denies now, that all four Gospels were known and in circulation in A.D. 180. But had this been done, where would Thomas Cooper's great book have been? The letterpress would then have made but a small pamphlet—which accounts for the long succession of bridges. With the aid of one of his boasted authorities, Irenæus, our "Lecturer on Christianity" thought he had succeeded in placing the Gospels in the first century; but this task was accomplished by taking all the statements made by that mendacious "father" respecting the apostle John and Polycarp as historically true—which statements, I have already shown, are not in agreement with facts. This easy work of tracing back—which our credulous lecturer believed he had actually performed—still remains to be done.

Having already dealt with Irenæus, I will now say a few words respecting Mr. Cooper's two other authorities—Origen and Eusebius. The first of these, Origen (A.D. 230—250), was a voluminous writer; but his works have no evidential value. He was one of those who indulged in a system of allegorising the Jewish scriptures, and he carried his methods of distortion to extravagant lengths. According to this perverter, every passage of "holy writ" contained three meanings—the literal, the moral, and the mystical. He was also addicted to fanciful speculations on points beyond human know-

ledge or reason. After reading some of Origen's distortions of the Old Testament writings, the Pagan critic Porphyry is quoted by Eusebius (Ecl. Hist., vi., 19) as saying:—

"But some Christians, ambitious rather to find a solution of the absurdities of the Jewish writings than to abandon them, have turned their minds to expositions, inconsistent with themselves, and inapplicable to the writings; which instead of furnishing a defence of those scriptures, only give us encomiums and remarks in their praise. For boasting of what Moses says plainly in his writings, as if they were dark and intricate propositions, and attaching to them divine influence as if they were oracles replete with hidden mysteries, and in their vanity pretending to great discrimination of mind, they thus produce their expositions."

It is probable that what Mr. Cooper liked in Origen's writings was his pretentious reply to Celsus in eight "books." This was of the usual argumentative and presumptive character.

I come now to our lecturer's third authority, the ecclesiastical historian Eusebius (A.D. 380). This bishop conceived the idea of arranging and putting into historical form all matters connected with the Christian religion which he found mentioned by the various Christian writers who lived between the first century and his own days, commencing with the alleged ministry of Jesus and the preaching of the apostles, as recorded in the Book of the Acts, including the New Testament writings which were received or rejected by the orthodox, the various heresies that arose, an account of the persecutions which had taken place at different times, and many other matters. For this work Eusebius had access to a large number of earlier writings, from the majority of which he made extracts; the only point upon which there can be any doubt is, as to the fairness of his methods. He says in his introduction: "Whatsoever, therefore, we deem likely to be advantageous to the proposed subject, we shall endeavor to reduce to a compact body of historical narration." As an illustration of his mode of making selections, I subjoin what he says about Celsus:—

"At this time [i.e., A.D., 244] Origen also composed, in eight books, a reply to that work written against us by Celsus, the Epicurean, bearing the title *The True Account*" (E. H., vi., 6).

This is all; nothing in the work of Celsus against the Christians and their religion was "likely to be advantageous" to Christianity; nothing therefore was quoted from it. Upon this method of selection Gibbon has something to say in his *Decline and Fall* (chap. xvi.).

Eusebius wrote a life of the emperor Constantine, who caused his son Crispus, his nephew Licinius, and his wife Fausta to be put to death. Referring to the latter crimes, Gibbon, in another place, remarks:—

"The courtly bishop who has celebrated in an elaborate work the virtues and piety of his hero, observes a prudent silence on the subject of these tragic events."

It should, however, be borne in mind that Constantine was the first Roman emperor that took the Christians under his protection; that he stopped all persecution, made Christianity the religion of the State, and was very friendly with Eusebius.

I will now take another example of the methods of Eusebius. In Acts xii. 23 it is stated of Herod Agrippa I. that "an angel of the Lord smote him....; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost." This statement is, of course, unhistorical. On the occasion referred to, king Agrippa was seized with acute abdominal pains, which continued for four days, at the end of which he died (probably poisoned). The "worms" in the Acts were taken from the last illness of Herod the Great. Josephus, giving a detailed account of the death of Agrippa, says:—

"As he presently afterwards looked up he saw an owl sitting on a certain rope over his head, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings, as it had once been the messenger of good tidings to him," etc. (*Antiq.*, xix., viii., 2).

Referring to the Acts account of the death of Herod

Agrippa, Eusebius says (E. H., ii., 10) :—

"It is wonderful to observe.....the coincidence of the history given by Josephus, with that of the sacred scriptures" [he quotes a long passage from the *Antiquities*, and then the foregoing passage]....."After a little while, raising himself, he saw an angel sitting above his head. This he immediately perceived was the sign of evil, as it had once been the sign of good," etc.

Thus by the change of one word Eusebius has piously added corroboration to the mendacious Acts account. It may further be stated that Eusebius was the first to find—or at least to quote—the well-known Christian interpolation in the *Antiquities* respecting "Jesus a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man," etc. One point in connection with this interpolation is beyond question, namely, that it was not in the *Antiquities* in the time of Origen; for the latter, in his reply to Celsus, quoted the passages respecting James and John the Baptist (*Antiq.*, xx. and xviii.) in proof of the historicity of the Gospel history; but the great passage respecting Jesus (*now* found in *Antiq.*, xviii.), which would have completely disproved the allegations of Celsus, and which Origen would most certainly have cited, had it been there, is in this reply conspicuous by its absence.

It was, again, Eusebius who piously found the Letter of Jesus Christ to Abgarus, king of Edessa. According to the story, Abgarus, "who reigned over the nations beyond the Euphrates," being stricken with an incurable disease, and hearing of the wonderful cures wrought by Jesus, sent to the latter by hand a letter beseeching him to come and heal him. In reply to this request, Jesus sent the following letter by bearer to the afflicted king :—

"Blessed are they, O Abgarus, who, not having seen me, have believed in me. For it is written concerning me, that they who have seen me will not believe, and that they who have not seen me will believe and be saved. But in regard to what thou hast written, that I should come to thee, it is necessary that I should fulfil all things here, for which I have been sent. And after this fulfilment, I shall be received again by Him that sent me. And after I have been received up, I will send to thee one of my disciples, that he may heal thy affliction, and give salvation to thee and to those who are with thee" (Eccl. Hist., i. 13).

This letter, Eusebius tells us, was "taken from the public records of the city of Edessa.....from the archives." And he further says that "it has been literally translated by us from the Syriac"—the supposed language of Edessa. Whence, its authenticity should be unquestionable. We have, at any rate, more evidence for the genuineness of this letter than for any of the Gospel miracles; yet there is not the smallest doubt that it is a Christian fabrication. That Eusebius found the letter written in Syriac, and translated it into Greek, may be readily admitted; but that it was a historical document "taken from the public records of the city of Edessa" is very unlikely indeed. I should perhaps have stated that Eusebius gives a copy of two letters—the other being that sent by Abgarus to Jesus Christ, in which the miracles alleged to have been wrought by Jesus, and the rejection of that Savior by the Jews, are mentioned as well-known facts of history. The two letters, both written in Syriac, bear marks which clearly prove that they were composed by a Christian. There is, therefore, no mystery in accounting for them. In the days of Eusebius the four Gospels were written in Syriac, as well as in Greek; the fabricator of the letters was a Syriac-speaking Christian. The statement of Eusebius, then, that the letters were taken from the archives of the city of Edessa, was made on his own authority; he had no warrant for making it.

As to the statements in the letter about believing and not believing in Jesus, the only passage in "holy writ" bearing upon the subject is the following :—

John xx. 29.—"Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen me, and yet have believed."

The foregoing is evidently the writing referred to by the third century Christian who forged the letters. That the Fourth Gospel was not written in the time of Jesus probably never entered this late forger's head. He could only know of some such statement by seeing it in Christian writings of his own day, which at that period were all ascribed to the apostolic age.

ABRACADABRA.

Pandemonium in the Balkans.

THE two recent wars, and the innumerable consequential massacres, in the Balkans, first as between Christians and Moslems, and then as between the rival races and religions of the Balkan States, might almost be regarded as colossal object-lessons wrought for us in blood and tears by the "Finger of God" in order to prove to the smug optimists of the twentieth century that the Middle Ages are still with us in all their callousness and naked horror. We watch on the tragic scene a group of newly formed nations who had enjoyed for centuries a community of suffering under the Turkish yoke, and observe that no sooner had they broken the power of their traditional enemy than they began to quarrel violently over the spoils of victory. They had enough religion, of a sort, to give their racial hatreds the keen edge of fanaticism, and having the same brand of religion, the difference between Patriarchalist and Exarchist came providentially in aid in order to exacerbate the primitive national enmities of the Greek and Bulgarian elements in the great Balkan imbroglio. The sanguinary war which broke out between the Allies for the political appropriation of Macedonia and Thrace produced a fresh crop of atrocities, and an equally vigorous crop of mutual accusations of murder and tortures, of mutilation, not only of prisoners of war, but of vast numbers of the civil population, of victims buried alive, burnt to death or accorded the doubtful honor of crucifixion.

The well-known Belgian Deputy, M. Georges Lorand, who knows the Balkans well, and its several races and tongues, revisited the scene of carnage in September last, and recorded his *Notes et Souvenirs** in a pamphlet published at the end of 1913. M. Lorand is inclined to think that oriental exaggeration played a large part in the relation of these atrocities, especially as regards the Bulgarians, but it is sufficiently horrifying to learn even from his temperate pen that more perhaps than in any other war grave excesses were committed by the various bands of irregulars, Turkish bashi-bazouks, Bulgarian comitadjis, and Greek irregulars, and by the populations themselves, "whenever the occasion was offered to them of sating the lust for vengeance lying dormant in their breasts during generations of hatred and oppression." Official Europe, which concerns itself with boundaries, treaties, and alliances, was naturally indifferent to mere questions of massacre and torture as between Bulgarians, Greeks, Turks, and Servians; and if the full truth is ever to be known, or even approximated by dint of comparison of data, it will be due mainly to the revelations of the Carnegie Commission of Inquiry.

The psychology of the Balkan War is sufficiently indicated by the religious fanaticism which was imported into the dreary procedure of massacre and outrage, and by the ominous fact that when King Constantine made his triumphant entry into Athens, he was acclaimed by the significant cry, "Long live King Constantine the Great, the Bulgaroktonos!" Bulgaroktonos (which means "the killer of Bulgarians") was the title of a Basileus in the tenth century, who bears the name in history of Bulgaroktonos because of the frightful massacres which attended his campaign against the Bulgarians. One of his exploits was the gouging out of both eyes of 15,000 prisoners of war, and the blinding in one eye

* *En Bulgarie : Notes et Souvenirs.* (Brussels : pp. 40.)

of 150 others, in order that the latter might bring back the blind Bulgarians to their country, and show the nation of what noble feats of arms the Byzantine Greeks were capable. It cannot be said that the brutalities of war—civil or otherwise—have been sensibly diminished in the twentieth century when a name like *Bulgaroktonos* of infamous import is fixed by a band of Athenian Jingoos as a title of honor to their victorious King. The records of the recent campaign show that some of the present-day Greeks have not lost the art of mutilating their Bulgarian prisoners in the manner consecrated by the example of their first *Bulgaroktonos*.*

In the prosecution of the Balkan War, and in the resultant outrages which followed in its train, three prime factors dominated the whole situation: first, the instinctive antagonism of Cross and Crescent; second, the racial antagonisms between the miscellaneous elements composing the Balkan population; and thirdly, the fierce enmities of Patriarchalists and Exarchists, representative of the Greek and Bulgarian divergencies of religion. When this situation is embittered by actual warfare in the Balkans, everybody fancies he has excellent religious and patriotic reasons for being unjust and cruel towards his fellow-man. The shocking charges and recriminations of Turk, Bulgarian, and Greek are but the lurid commentary in fire and blood on the inexhaustible intolerance of the religious instinct of man, especially when that instinct is inflamed with the animosities begotten of racial antagonism.

In the eyes of the Greeks, the Bulgarians were guilty of two capital offences: first, they belonged to a race against whom the Greeks have preserved immemorial hatred, based on national antagonisms and religious divergencies; and secondly, the Bulgarian victories in the first war had created for Bulgaria the conqueror's right to Salonica and to a major part of South-East Macedonia, and thus stood as an inexpugnable bar in the way of Greek expansion in the conquered region. At the outbreak of hostilities against Bulgaria, her armies, which had borne the brunt of battle in the fierce contests which had broken the power of Turkey, were placed in a position of grave strategic inferiority relatively to the Servian and Greek armies, and the overwhelmed forces of Bulgaria in Macedonia were quite unable to protect the population, the major part of which was Bulgarian in race and sympathy, from outrage, decimation, and exile at the hands of the Greek army and its satellites. There is trustworthy evidence adduced by Professor Miletitch and by Dr. Kyroff that the Greek army, acting conjointly with the irregulars and the fanaticised Greek elements in the population, who were hounded on to the work of destruction by the local Greek clergy and their holy bishops, displayed their heroism last year by patriotically devastating Bulgarian villages and rooting out, either to death, exile, or torture, the Bulgarian elements in the Macedonian population. The results were as profitable to the sentiment of Greek nationality as they were calamitous to the cause of Bulgarian expansion; for an enormous body of Bulgarian exiles, estimated to be one hundred thousand or more in number, were compelled to flee from Macedonia, and only escaped after many hardships and dangers into Bulgaria, where they naturally became a serious charge upon the heavily burdened resources of the stricken country. The removal of the Bulgarian elements in the Macedonian population, whether by death or exile, providentially subserved the cause of the Greek megalomaniacs, who thereby acquired a sitting claim to the decimated country, where the work of massacre had received the consecration of true religion and high statecraft. At the same time, the assiduous circulation throughout Europe of the story of Bulgarian atrocities, thanks to the astuteness of the Greeks and the press agencies worked in their interests, dried up the fountains of European and

American charity, which no doubt would have been moved to generous relief of the hapless exiles but for the stigma of horror which the *Bulgaroktonos* had affixed to the Bulgarian national character.

The horrors related by Dr. Miletitch and by Dr. Kyroff are among the most saddening documents that I have ever read. But perhaps the most sickening of all are the two collections of "Fac-simile" letters written by Greek soldiers belonging to the 19th regiment of the VII. division of the Greek army. The original letters were captured by the Bulgarian troops at Razlog before transmission through the post. The letters are intensely interesting as illustrating the awful depths of moral depravity to which self-confessedly the Greek soldiers were sunken in the inebriation of victory, and as showing the curious psychology which war creates amongst its agents and glorifiers. Before me is a letter of a Greek soldier, dated July 11, 1913:—

"We have burnt all the villages abandoned by the Bulgarians. These burn the Greek villages and we destroy the Bulgarian villages.....Out of the 1,200 prisoners whom we captured at Nigrita, only 41 remain in the prisons. and wherever we have passed we have left no sprig of that race."

I pass over a number of letters merely relating common or garden acts of massacre, to cite the letter, dated July 12, of a Greek soldier named Costi, who gloats that "I have taken five Bulgarians and a girl of Serrès.....The girl is killed. The Bulgarians have been made to suffer; while they were yet alive we gouged out their eyes." True warriors these of the valiant *Bulgaroktonos*! Another hero writes that "when we find one or two" of the Bulgarians, "we kill them like sparrows." "We burn here all the villages, and we kill all the Bulgarian women and children," writes one from Tricala, Thessaly, on July 14. Another soldier, writing to his brother on July 15, declares "that such things have never taken place since the coming of Christ." One soldier writes that out of 16 prisoners committed to his charge only two were brought along; the others "were swallowed by the darkness, massacred by me." The man's name is Theophilatos, which means a man who loves God! Another hero writes to his brother George that he thanks God that his health is good after the recent five battles, and states that, "by order of the King, we are burning all the Bulgarian villages," and adds that "we have violated all the young girls we have found." One gentle letter-writer describes a battle where the prisoners captured were killed, "for such are the orders we have. Wherever there is a Bulgarian village, we set fire to it and burn it in order that this filthy race of Bulgarians may never spring up there again." A soldier, writing to his mother, tells her that "we have orders to burn the villages, massacre the young men, sparing only the old folk, the children, and minors." And, of course, much piety and trust in God run through these edifying epistles. And so I might continue the sickening relation, but a limit must be imposed to the dreadful task of exposing the nakedness of these horrifying orgies which are glorified by the name of patriotism and sanctified by the halo of religion.

I do not wish to pretend that the Bulgarians are angels of light, or that they entered the Balkan campaign a race of sinners and emerged with the nimbus of beatified saints. They had their faults, and impartial history may have to apportion a heavy charge of responsibility upon them for their conduct during the two Balkan wars. But certain it is that much of that burden of responsibility will be rolled away, especially as regards the second war, when the true record is unearthed of the sinister part played in the grim Balkan tragedy by the *Bulgaroktonos* and his men of arms.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

* See the "Fac-simile" letters (both series) referred to in the *Freethinker* of June 21.

The *London Mail* had a paragraph the other day headed "A Religion that Appeals." We never heard of a religion that did anything else.

Animals Recently Extinct.

THE long-since extinct forms of animal life with which primitive man was familiar, comprise a very interesting group. But the organisms which, during recent centuries, have departed for ever, are probably more interesting still. Among those mammals that were undoubtedly contemporaneous with the early races of mankind, but which died out before the period embraced by history or tradition, were several at which we will glance before dealing with those animals that have survived right down to our own era.

All the mammals of prehistoric times which have since disappeared were either the ancestors or the near relatives of surviving stocks. With the advent of the human biped the range of mammalian life was seriously restricted; the larger animals were driven to more sheltered areas; the cave-lion and the cave-hyæna became extinct in their European haunts, and their descendants, the common lion and the spotted hyæna, unless their present ruthless destruction is stayed, will be numbered, in the course of a few generations, among the departed glories of great Nature's handiwork.

The remains of the hairy elephant—the mammoth—a mammal that does not appear to have outlived the Glacial Epoch, are so abundant that we know its outward and visible signs as clearly as those of any living animal. In addition to its well-preserved bones, and drawings of great artistic merit executed by prehistoric men on ivory and on cavern walls, we have been fortunate in discovering the entire carcasses of mammoths frozen for untold centuries in the icy cliffs of Siberia. The first of these was found in 1799, and the skeleton and a fragment of the hide are still exhibited in the St. Petersburg Museum. Another was discovered in 1901 which is also on view in the same building. "The beast had evidently died by an accident, as was shown by a broken hip and foreleg, by the extravasated blood in the chest, and even by grass still in the mouth."

A more primitive type of elephant, also extinct, was the mastodon. The remains of this proboscidean have been found in Tertiary deposits from Miocene times onwards in all parts of the globe. About thirty different species have been described, but the career of this varied and widely spread organism ended with the advent of man.

The hairy rhinoceros was another contemporary of the mastodon and mammoth, and soon shared their fate. *Cervus megaloceros*, the so-called Irish elk, an animal once widely spread, and whose skeletons, dug out of the Irish peat bogs, are so conspicuous in the Palæontological Gallery at the Natural History Museum, is likewise to be numbered among the things of the past. So far as is known, this defunct deer was the noblest of its race, alike in height, antlered splendor, and grace of form. Frank Finn in his delightful book, *Wild Animals of Yesterday and To-Day*, declares that the Irish elk,—

"must have been far the most grand and beautiful animal which has ever existed, since no other creature combines gracefulness and size in the same way; while its strength must have been equal to resisting the attacks of any creature in fair fight, for the ordinary red stag has been known to beat off a tiger enclosed in the arena with him, and the moose can kill a wolf with a single blow of his hoof."

But such æsthetic considerations as these made no appeal to primitive man. Without compunction he slew the Irish elk and devoured its flesh. Still, there is much more excuse for the aboriginal hunter than there is for the modern "sportsman," who, with the true spirit of the barbarian, encounters no rare beast or bird which he does not scruple to destroy.

The gigantic ground-sloths of America must be numbered with the departed fauna of the world. The megatherium is the most celebrated of these, and is probably the largest edentate that has ever lived. Apparently herbivorous, these extinct animals were highly generalised, when compared with modern

forms, as they combined the head and teeth of a sloth with the vertebræ, limbs, and tail of the ant-eater. These animals reclined on their hind limbs, and employing their forelimbs as hands, they pulled down the boughs of trees on whose verdure they fed. That these huge creatures were extant when man had reached the New World appears probable from Dr. Molteno's recent discoveries in Patagonia. The remains of the mylodon, another fossil ground-sloth, were found in a similar state of preservation to those of man in the same deposit. Dr. Rudolph Hanthal's cavern investigations have confirmed this evidence, and what is even more interesting, the accumulated ordure of the animals, artificially cut grass, and the presence of human bones in the same cavern, certainly point to their domestication by man. "The cave was, in fact, a stable in which these queer cattle were stall-fed by some primitive race, and examination of the droppings showed that the food consisted of grass."

These discoveries strengthened the opinion of those who suspected the continued survival of these ground-sloths in the unexplored regions of Patagonia; but an expedition specially organised to discover them in a living state has met with no success.

Among the organisms exterminated by man within the past few centuries is the bluebuck of the Cape, the third species of the genus *Hippotragus*, the two others being the roan and sable antelopes. When first noted by European naturalists, the bluebuck was a declining organism. Its range was restricted to Cape Colony, and the commerce which was soon set up in its skins quickly reduced it to the brink of extinction. The animal was first described by Kolbe at the commencement of the eighteenth century. A hundred years later, in 1803, Lichtenstein, writing of South Africa, remarked that while there was wild game in plenty, the "blaubock" was practically extinct. The last of these beautiful animals appears to have been shot in 1799, and all that now survive are to be seen as mounted specimens in natural history museums.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be continued.)

Correspondence.

"THE WORD OF GOD."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—It is very curious—clearly an act of Providence—that Mr. Foote's article, "The Word of God," appeared this week; for I was, for the how many hundredth time I don't know, discussing it with a friend on Sunday night, to whom I have sent the current *Freethinker*.

My feeble powers can but deal with this matter in a very inferior manner to Mr. Foote, and, considering that it is of perennial interest, I do hope that this article of his will appear in pamphlet form.

June 26.

A. J. MARRIOTT.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON JUNE 25.

The President, Mr. G. W. Foote, occupied the chair. There were also present: Messrs. Baker, Barry, Bowman, Brandes, Cohen, Cunningham, Heaford, Leat, Lazarnick, Lloyd, Moss, Nichols, Quinton, Roger, Rosetti, Samuels, Silverstein, Thurlow, and Wood.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

This being the first meeting of the new Executive, the following officers were elected:—General Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance; Benevolent Fund Committee: Messrs. Davey, Leat, Roger, Samuels, and Wood; Monthly Auditors: Messrs. Leat and Samuels.

The monthly cash statement was presented and adopted.

New members were admitted for Edmonton, Huddersfield, Leeds, St. Helens, and the Parent Society.

Several matters of routine business held over from the last meeting were transacted. The Secretary received instructions on various details arising from correspondence, and the meeting adjourned.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary*.

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): Howell Smith, B.A., 3.15, "The Duty of Freethinking"; 6.15, "The Dissolution of Christianity."

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 6, a Lecture.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Edmonton Green): 7.30, R. H. Rosetti, a Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (corner of Ridley-road): J. W. Marshall, 11.30, "The Insanity of Jesus"; 7.30, "The Atonement."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Finsbury Park): 11.30, Mr. Davidson, a Lecture. Parliament Hill: 3.30, Miss Kough, a Lecture. Regent's Park (near the Fountain): 3.30, Mr. Hope, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, E.): 7, W. Davidson, a Lecture.



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