

FOOTE GEORGE WILLIAM

FLOWERS OF
FREETHOUGHT (SECOND
SERIES)

George Foote
Flowers of Freethought
(Second Series)

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G. W. Foote

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PREFACE

A little more than a year ago I put forth a collection of articles under the title of *Flowers of Freethought*. The little volume met with a favorable reception, and I now issue a Second Series. By a "favorable reception" I only mean that the volume found purchasers, and, it is to be presumed, readers; which is, after all, the one thing a writer needs to regard as of any real importance. Certainly the volume was not praised, nor recommended, nor even noticed, in the public journals. The time is not yet ripe for the ordinary reviewers to so much as mention a book of that character. Not that I charge the said reviewers with being concerned in a deliberate conspiracy of silence against such productions. They have to earn their livings, and often very humbly, despite the autocratic airs they give themselves; they serve under editors, who serve under proprietors, who in turn consult the tastes, the intelligence, and the prejudices of their respective customers. And thus it is, I conceive, that thorough-going Freethought – at least if written in a popular style and

published at a popular price – is generally treated with a silence, which, in some cases, is far from a symptom of contempt.

I am aware that my writing is sometimes objected to on grounds of "taste." But it is a curious thing that this objection has invariably been raised by one of two classes of persons: – either those who are hostile to my opinions, and therefore unlikely to be impartial judges in this respect; or those who, while sharing my opinions, are fond of temporising, and rather anxious to obtain the smiles – not to say the rewards – of Orthodoxy. The advice of the one class is suspicious; that of the other is contemptible.

As I said in the former Preface, I refrain from personalities, which is all that can be demanded of a fair controversialist. There are sentences, and perhaps passages, in this volume, that some people will not like; but they are about things that *I* do not like. A propagandist should use his pen as a weapon rather than a fencing foil. At any rate, my style is my own; it is copied from no model, or set of models; although I confess to a predilection for the old forthright literature of England, before "fine writing" was invented, or "parliamentary" eloquence came into vogue, or writers were anxious to propitiate an imaginary critic at their elbows – the composite ghost, as it were, of all the ignoramuses, prigs, bigots, fools, and cowards on this planet.

It only remains to say that the articles in this volume are of the same general character as those in its predecessor. They were written at different intervals during the past ten or twelve years. I have not attempted to classify them. In several instances I have

appended the date of first publication, as it seemed necessary,
or at least convenient.

G. W. FOOTE

June, 1894.

LUSCIOUS PIETY

Lord Tennyson's poem, *Locksley Hall: Sixty Years After*, is severe on what he evidently regards as the pornographic tendency of our age.

"Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage of your sewer;

Send the drain into the fountain, lest the stream should issue pure.

Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism,

—

Forward, forward, ay and backward, downward too into the abysm."

There is some truth in this, but far more exaggeration. English novels, however they may trifle and sentimentalise with the passion of love, are as a rule exceedingly "proper." For the most part, in fact, they deliberately ignore all the unconventional aspects of that passion, and you might read a thousand of their productions without suspecting, if you did not already know the fact, that it had any connexion with our physical nature. The men and women, youths and maidens, of Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot, to say nothing of minor writers, are true enough to nature in other respects, but in all sexual relations they are mere simulacri. George Meredith is our only novelist who

triumphs in this region. As Mr. Lowell has noticed, there is a fine natural atmosphere of sex in his books. Without the obtrusion of physiology, which is out of place in art, his human beings are clearly divided into males and females, thinking, feeling and acting according to their sexual characteristics. Other novelists simply shirk the whole problem of sex, and are satisfied with calling their personages John or Mary as the one safe method of indicating to what gender they belong. This is how the English public is pleased to have it; in this manner it feeds the gross hypocrisy which is its constant bane. Hence the shock of surprise, and even of disgust, felt by the ordinary Englishman when he takes up a novel by a great French master of fiction, who thinks that Art, as well as Science, should deal frankly and courageously with every great problem of life. "Shocking!" cry the English when the veil of mystery is lifted. Yet the purism is only on the lips. We are not a whit more virtuous than those plain-spoken foreigners; for, after all, facts exist, however we blink them, and ignorance and innocence are entirely different things.

The great French masters of fiction do not write merely for boys and girls. They believe that other literature is required besides that which is fit for bread-and-butter misses. Yet they are not therefore vicious. They paint nature as it is, idealising without distorting, leaving the moral to convey itself, as it inevitably will. As James Thomson said, "Do you dread that the Satyr will be preferred to Hyperion, when both stand imaged in clear light before us?"

Zolaism, or rather what Lord Tennyson means by the word – for *Nana* is a great and terrible book with all its vice – is not the chief danger to the morals of English youth. Long before the majority of them learn to read French with ease, there is a book put into the hands of all for indiscriminate reading. It is the Bible. In the pages of that book they find the lowest animal functions called by their vulgar names; frequent references, and sometimes very brutal ones, to the generative organs; and stories of lust, adultery, sodomy and incest, that might raise blushes in a brothel; while in the Song of Solomon they will find the most passionate eroticism, decked out with the most voluptuous imagery. The "Zolaism" of the Bible is far more pernicious than the "Zolaism" of French fiction. The one comes seductively, with an air of piety, and authoritatively, with an air of divinity; while the other shows that selfishness and excess lead to demoralisation and death.

There is in fact, and all history attests it, a close connexion between religion and sensuality. No student of human nature need be surprised at Louis XV. falling on his knees in prayer after debauching a young virgin in the *Parc aux Cerfs*. Nor is there anything abnormal in Count Cenci, in Shelley's play, soliciting God's aid in the pollution of his own daughter. It is said that American camp-meetings often wound up in a saturnalia. The Hallelujah lasses sing with especial fervor "Safe in the arms of Jesus." How many Christian maidens are moved by the promptings of their sexual nature when they adore the figure of

their nearly naked Savior on a cross! The very nuns, who take vows of perpetual chastity, become spouses of Christ; and the hysterical fervor with which they frequently worship their divine bridegroom, shows that when Nature is thrust out of the door she comes in at the window.

Catholic books of devotion for the use of women and young people are also full of thinly-veiled sensuality, and there are indications that this abomination is spreading in the "higher" religious circles in Protestant England, where the loathsome confessional is being introduced in other than Catholic churches. Paul Bert, in his *Morale des Jesuites*, gave a choice specimen of this class of literature, or rather such extracts as he dared publish in a volume bearing his honored name. It is a prayer in rhyme extending to eleven pages, and occurs in a book by Father Huguet, designed for "the dear daughters of Holy Mary." As Paul Bert says, "every mother would fling it away with horror if Arthur were substituted for Jesus." *Vive Jesus* is the constant refrain of this pious song. We give a sample or two in French with a literal English translation.

Vive Jesus, de qui l'amour Me va consumant unit et jour.

Vive Jesus, vive sa force, Vive son agreable amore.

Vive Jesus, quand il m'enivre D'un douceur qui me fait vivre.

Vive Jesus, lorsque sa bouche D'un baiser amoureux me touche.

Vive Jesus, grand il m'appelle Ma soeur, ma colombe, ma belle.

Vive Jesus, quand sa bonte, Me reduit dans la nudite;
Vive Jesns, quand ses blandices Me comblent de chastes
delices.

"Live Jesus, whose love consumes me night and night. – Live Jesus, live his force, live his agreeable attraction. – Live Jesus, when he intoxicates me with a sweetness that gives me life. – Live Jesus, when his mouth touches me with an amorous kiss. – Live Jesus, when he calls me, my sister, my dove, my lovely one. – Live Jesus, when his good pleasure reduces me to nudity; live Jesus, when his blandishments fill me with chaste delight." – And this erotic stuff is for the use of girls!!

THE JEWISH SABBATH

Dr. Edersheim's *Life of Jesus* contains some interesting appendices on Jewish beliefs and ceremonies. One of these deals with the Sabbath laws of the chosen people, and we propose to cull from it a few curious illustrations of Jewish superstitions.

The Mishnic tractate *Sabbath* stands at the head of twelve tractates on festivals. Another tractate treats of "commixtures," which are intended to make the Sabbath laws more bearable. The Jerusalem Talmud devotes 64 folio columns, and the Babylon Talmud 156 double folio pages, to the serious discussion of the most minute and senseless regulations. It would be difficult to understand how any persons but maniacs or idiots could have concocted such elaborate imbecilities, if we did not remember that the priests of every religion have always bestowed their ability and leisure on matters of no earthly interest to anyone but themselves.

Travelling on the Sabbath was strictly forbidden, except for a distance of two thousand cubits (1,000 yards) from one's residence. Yet if a man deposited food for two meals on the Friday at the boundary of that "journey," the spot became his dwelling-place, and he might do another two thousand cubits, without incurring 'God's wrath. If a Jewish traveller arrived at a place just as the Sabbath commenced, he could only remove from his beasts of burden such objects as it was lawful to handle on the

Lord's Day. He might also loosen their gear and let them tumble down of themselves, but stabling them was out of all question.

The Rabbis exercised their ingenuity on what was the smallest weight that constituted "a burden." This was fixed at "a dried fig," but it was a moot point whether the law was violated if half a fig were carried at two different times on the same Sabbath. The standard measure for forbidden food was the size of an olive. If a man swallowed forbidden food of the size of half an olive, and vomited it, and then ate another piece of the same size, he would be guilty because his palate had tasted food to the prohibited degree.

Throwing up an object, and catching it with the same hand was an undoubted sin; but it was a nice question whether he was guilty if he caught it with, the other hand. Rain water might be caught and carried away, but if the rain had run down from a wall the act was sinful. Overtaken by the Sabbath with fruit in his hand, stretched out from one "place" to another, the orthodox Jew would have to drop it, since shifting his full hand from one locality to another was carrying a burden.

Nothing could be killed on the Sabbath, not even insects. Speaking of the Christian monks, Jortin says that "Some of them, out of mortification, would not catch or kill the vermin which devoured them; in which they far surpassed the Jews, who only spared them upon the Sabbath day." This interesting fact is supported by the authority of a Kabbi, who is quoted in Latin to the effect that cracking a flea and killing a camel

are equally guilty. Dr. Edersheim evidently refers to the same authority in a footnote. On the whole this regulation against the killing of vermin must have been very irksome, and if the fleas were aware of it, they and the Jews must have had a lively time on the Sabbath. We cannot ascertain whether the prohibition extended to *scratching*. If it did, curses not loud but deep must have ascended to the throne of the Eternal; and if, as Jesus says, every idle word is written down in the great book of heaven, the recording angel must have had anything but a holiday on the day of rest.

No work was allowed on the Sabbath. Even roasting and baking had to be stopped directly the holy period began, unless a crust was already formed, in which case the cooking might be finished. Nothing was to be sent, even by a heathen, unless it would reach its destination before the Sabbath. Kabbi Gamaliel was careful to send his linen to the wash three days before the Sabbath, so as to avoid anything that might lead to Sabbath labor.

The Sabbath lamp was supposed to have been ordained on Mount Sinai. To extinguish it was a breach of the Sabbath law, but it might be put out from fear of Gentiles, robbers, or evil spirits, or in order that a person dangerously ill might go to sleep. Such concessions were obviously made by the Rabbis, as a means of accommodating their religious laws to the absolute necessities of secular life. They compensated themselves, however, by hinting that twofold guilt was incurred if, in blowing out one candle, its flame lit another.

According to the Mosaic law, there was to be no fire on the Sabbath. Food might be kept warm, however, said the Rabbis, by wrapping it in non-conductors. The sin to be avoided was *increasing* the heat. Eggs might not be cooked, even in sand heated by the sun, nor might hot water be poured on cold. It was unlawful to put a vessel to catch the drops of oil that might fall from the lamp, but one might be put there to catch the sparks. Another concession to secular necessity! A father might also take his child in his arms, even if the child held a stone, although it was carrying things on the Sabbath; but this privilege was not yielded without a great deal of discussion.

Care should be taken that no article of apparel was taken off and carried. Fortunately Palestine is not a land of showers and sudden changes of temperature, or the Rabbis would have had to discuss the umbrella and overcoat question. Women were forbidden to wear necklaces, rings, or pins, on the Sabbath. Nose-rings are mentioned in the regulations, and the fact throws light on the social condition of the times. Women were also forbidden to look in the glass on the Sabbath, lest they should spy a white hair, and perform the sinful labor of pulling it out. Shoes might not be scraped with a knife, except perhaps with the back, but they might be touched up with oil or water. If a sandal tie broke on the Sabbath, the question of what should be done was so serious and profound that the Rabbis were never able to settle it. A plaster might be worn to keep a wound from getting worse, but not to make it better. False teeth were absolutely prohibited, for

they might fall out, and replacing them involved labor. Elderly persons with a full artificial set must have cut a sorry figure on the Sabbath, plump-faced Mrs. Isaacs resolving herself periodically into a toothless hag.

Plucking a blade of grass was sinful. Spitting in a handkerchief was allowed by one Rabbi, but the whole tribe were at loggerheads about spitting on the ground. Cutting one's hair or nails was a mortal sin. In case of fire on the Sabbath, the utensils needed on that day might be saved, and as much clothes as was absolutely necessary. This severe regulation was modified by a fiction. A man might put on a dress, save it, go back and put on another, and so on *ad infinitum*. Watering the cattle might be done by the Gentile, like lighting a lamp, the fiction being that he did it for himself and not for the Jew.

Assistance might be given to an animal about to have young, or to a woman in childbirth – which are further concessions to property and humanity. All might be done on the Sabbath, too, needful for circumcision. On the other hand, bones might not be set, nor emetics given, nor any medical or surgical operation performed. Wine, oil, and bread might be borrowed, however, and one's upper garment left in pledge for it. No doubt it was found impossible to keep the Jews absolutely from pawnbroking even on the Sabbath, Another concession was made for the dead. Their bodies might be laid out, washed, and anointed. Priests of every creed are obliged to give way on such points, or life would become intolerable, and their victims would revolt in sheer

despair.

Nature knew nothing of the Jewish laws, and hens had the perversity to lay eggs on the Sabbath. Such eggs were unlawful eating; yet if the hen had been kept, not for laying but for fattening, the egg might be eaten as a part of her economy that had accidentally fallen off!

Such were the puerilities of the Sabbath Law among the Jews. The Old Testament is directly responsible for all of them. It laid down the basic principle, and the Rabbis simply developed it, with as much natural logic as a tree grows up from its roots. Our Sabbatarians of to-day are slaves to the ignorance and follies of the semi-barbarous inhabitants of ancient Palestine; men who believed that God had posteriors, and exhibited them; men who kept slaves and harems; men who were notorious for their superstition, their bigotry, and their fanaticism; men who believed that the infinite God rested after six days' work, and ordered all his creatures to regard the day on which he recruited his strength as holy. Surely it is time to fling aside their antiquated rubbish, and arrange our periods of rest and recreation according to the dictates of science and common sense.

The origin of a periodical day of rest from labor is simple and natural. It has everywhere been placed under the sanction of religion, but it arose from secular necessity. In the nomadic state, when men had little to do at ordinary times except watching their flocks and herds, the days passed in monotonous succession. Life was never laborious, and as human energies were not taxed there

was no need for a period of recuperation, We may therefore rest assured that no Sabbatarian law was ever given by Moses to the Jews in the wilderness. Such a law first appears in a higher stage of civilisation. When nomadic tribes settle down to agriculture and are welded into nations, chiefly by defensive war against predatory barbarians; above all, when slavery is introduced and masses of men are compelled to build and manufacture; the ruling and propertied classes soon perceive that a day of rest is absolutely requisite. Without it the laborer wears out too rapidly – like the horse, the ox, or any other beast of burden. The day is therefore decreed for economic reasons. It is only placed under the sanction of religion because, in a certain stage of human development, there is no other sanction available. Every change in social organisation has then to be enforced as an edict of the gods. This is carried out by the priests, who have unquestioned authority over the multitude, and who, so long as their own privileges and emoluments are secured, are always ready to guard the interest of the temporal powers.

Such was the origin of the day of rest in Egypt, Assyria, and elsewhere. But it was lost sight of in the course of time, even by the ruling classes themselves; and the theological fiction of a divine ordinance became the universally accepted explanation. This fiction is still current in Christendom. We are gravely asked to believe that men would work themselves to death, and civilised nations commit economical suicide, if they were not taught that a day of rest was commanded by Jehovah amidst the lightnings

and thunders of Sinai. In the same way, we are asked to believe that theft and murder would be popular pastimes without the restraints of the supernatural decalogue fabled to have been received by Moses. As a matter of fact, the law against theft arose because men object to be robbed, and the law against murder because they object to be assassinated. Superstition does not invent social laws; it merely throws around them the glamor of a supernatural authority.

Priests have a manifest interest in maintaining this glamor. Accordingly we find that Nonconformists as well as Churchmen claim the day of rest as the Lord's Day – although its very name of Sunday betrays its Pagan origin. It is not merely a day of rest, they tell us; it is also a day of devotion. Labor is to be laid aside in order that the people may worship God. The physical benefit of the institution is not denied; on the contrary, now that Democracy is decisively triumphing, the people are assured that Sunday can only be maintained under a religious sanction. In other words, religion and priests are as indispensable as ever to the welfare of mankind.

This theological fiction should be peremptorily dismissed. Whatever service it once rendered has been counterbalanced by its mischiefs. The rude laborer of former times – the slave or the serf – only wanted rest from toil. He had no conception of anything higher. But circumstances have changed. The laborer of to-day aspires to share in the highest blessings of civilisation. His hours of daily work are shortened. The rest he requires he

can obtain in bed. What he needs on Sunday is not *rest*, but *change*; true re-creation of his nature; and this is denied him by the laws that are based upon the very theological fiction which is pretended to be his most faithful friend.

The working classes at present are simply humbugged by the Churches. The day of rest is secure enough without lies or fictions. What the masses want is an opportunity to make use of it. Now this cannot be done if all rest on the same day. A minority must work on Sunday, and take their rest on some other day of the week. And really, when the nonsensical solemnity of Sunday is gone, any other day would be equally eligible.

Parsons work on Sunday; so do their servants, and all who are engaged about their gospel-shops. Why should it be so hard then for a railway servant, a museum attendant, an art-gallery curator, or a librarian to work on Sunday? Let them rest some other day of the week as the parson does. They would be happy if they could have his "off days" even at the price of "Sunday labor."

Churches and chapels do not attract so many people as they did. There is every reason why priestly Protective laws should be broken down. It is a poor alternative to offer a working man – the church or the public-house; and they are now trying to shut the public-house and make it church or nothing. Other people should be consulted as well as mystery-men and their followers. Let us have freedom. Let the dwellers in crowded city streets, who work all day in close factories, be taken at cheap rates to the country or the seaside. Let them see the grand sweep of the

sky. Let them feel the spring of the turf under their feet. Let them look out over the sea – the highway between continents – and take something of its power and poetry into their blood and brain. During the winter, or in summer if they feel inclined, let them visit the institutions of culture, behold the beautiful works of dead artists, study the relics of dead generations, feel the links that bind the past to the present, and imagine the links that will bind the present to the future. Let their pulses be stirred with noble music. Let the Sunday be their great day of freedom, culture, and humanity. As "God's Day" it is wasted. We must rescue it from the priests and make it "Man's Day."

PROFESSOR STOKES ON IMMORTALITY

The orthodox world makes much of Sir G. G. Stokes, baronet, M.P., and President of the Royal Society. It is so grateful to find a scientific man who is naively a Christian. Many of the species are avowed, or, at any rate, strongly suspected unbelievers; while others, who make a profession of Christianity, are careful to explain that they hold it with certain reservations, being Christians in general, but not Christians in particular. Sir G. G. Stokes, however, is as orthodox as any conventicle could desire. Perhaps it was for this reason that he was selected to deliver one of the courses of Gifford Lectures. He would be a sort of set-off against the rationalism of Max Muller and the scepticism of Tylor. What other reason, indeed, could have inspired his selection? He has not the slightest reputation as a theologian or philosopher, and one of the leading reviews, in noticing his Clifford Lectures, expresses a mild but decided wonder at his appearing in such a character.

Let the Gifford Lectures, however, pass – for the present. We propose to deal with an earlier effort of Sir G. G. Stokes. Nearly two years ago he delivered a lecture at the Finsbury Polytechnic on the Immortality of the Soul. It was reported in the *Family Churchman*, and reprinted after revision as a twopenny

pamphlet, with the first title of "I." This is the only pointed thing about it. The lecture is about "I," or, as Sir G. G. Stokes, might say, "All my I."

Sir G. G. Stokes begins by promising to confine himself to the question, "What is it that personal identity depends upon and consists in?" But he does not fulfil the promise. After some jejune remarks upon this question he drops into theology and winds up with a little sermon.

"I cannot pretend that I am able to answer that question myself," says Sir G. G. Stokes. Why, then, did he not leave it alone? "But I will endeavor," he says, "to place before you some thoughts bearing in that direction which I have found helpful to myself, and which possibly may be of some help to some of you."

Sir G. G. Stokes does not mention David Hume, but that great thinker pointed out, with his habitual force and clearness, that personal identity depends upon memory. Our scientific lecturer, with the theological twist, says it "involves memory," which implies a certain reservation. Yet he abstains from elucidating the point; and as it is the most important one in the discussion, he must be held guilty of short-sightedness or timidity.

Memory involves thought, says Sir G. G. Stokes. This is true; in fact, it is a truism. And what, he asks, does thought depend on? "To a certain extent" he allows that it "depends upon the condition of the brain." But during the present life, at any rate, it depends *absolutely* on the condition of the brain. Look at the head of an idiot, and then at the head of Shakespeare; is not the

brain difference the obvious cause of the mental difference? Are there not diseases of the brain that affect thought in a definite manner? Is not thought excited by stimulants, and deadened or even annihilated by narcotics? Is it not entirely suspended in healthy sleep? Will not a man of genius become an imbecile if his brain softens? Will not a philosopher rave like a drunken fishfag if he suffers from brain inflammation? Is not thought most vigorous when the brain is mature? And is it not weakest in the first and second childishness of youth and old age?

The dependence of thought on the brain is so obvious, it is so demonstrable by the logical methods of difference and concomitant variations, that whoever disputes it, or only allows it "to a certain extent," is bound to assign another definite cause. A *definite* cause, we say; not a fanciful or speculative one, which is perfectly hypothetical.

Sir G. G. Stokes does not do this. He tries to make good his reservation by a negative criticism of "the materialistic hypothesis." He takes the case of a man who, while going up a ladder and speaking, was knocked on the head by a falling brickbat. For two days he was unconscious, and "when he came to, he completed the sentence that he had been speaking when he was struck." Now, at first sight, this seems a strong confirmation of "the materialistic hypothesis." A shock to the brain stopped its action and suspended consciousness. Automatic animal functions went on, but there was no perception, thought, or feeling.

When the effects of the shock wore off the brain resumed

its action, and began at the very point where it left off. But this last circumstance is seized by Sir G. G. Stokes as "a difficulty." *Some* change must have gone on, he says, during the two days the man lay unconscious; there must have been *some* waste of tissues, *some* change in the brain; yet "there is no trace of this change in the joining together of the thought after the interval of unconsciousness with the thought before."

Our reply is a simple one. In the first place, Sir G. G. Stokes is making much of a single fact, which he has not weighed, in despite of a host of other facts, not in the least questionable, and all pointing in one direction. In the second place, he does not tell us *what* change went on in the man's brain. May it not have been, at least with respect to the cerebrum, quite infinitesimal? In the third place, Sir G. G. Stokes should be aware that all brain changes do not affect consciousness, even in the normal state. Lastly, consciousness depends upon perception; and if all the avenues of sensation were closed, and the alteration of brain tissues were exceedingly slight (as it would be if the brain were not working), it is nothing very extraordinary that the man should resume thought and volition at the point where they ceased.

The second "difficulty" raised, rather than discovered, by Sir G. G. Stokes is this. "I am conscious of a power which I call will," he says, "and when I hold up my hand I can choose whether I shall move it to the right or to the left."

"Now, according to the materialistic hypothesis, everything about me is determined simply by the ponderable molecules

which constitute my body acting simply and solely according to the very same laws according to which matter destitute of life might act. Well then, if we follow up this supposition to its full extent, we are obliged to suppose that, whether I move at this particular moment of time – 4.25, on the 30th of March – my hand to the right or to the left, was determined by something inevitable, something which could not have been otherwise, and must have come down, in fact, from my ancestors."

Now Sir G. G. Stokes "confesses" that this seems to him to "fly completely in the face of common sense." And so it does, if by "determined" he means that *somebody* settled the whole business, down to the minutest details, a thousand, a million, or a thousand million years ago. But if "determined" simply means that every phenomenon is *caused*, in the philosophical – not the theological or metaphysical – meaning of the word, it does not fly in the face of common sense at all. Little as Sir G. G. Stokes may like it, he *does*— body and brain, thought and feeling, volition and taste – come down from his ancestors. That is the reason why he is an Englishman, a Whig, a bit of a Philistine, an orthodox Christian, and a very indifferent reasoner.

After all, does not this objection come with an ill grace from a Christian Theist? Has Sir G. G. Stokes never read St. Paul? Has he never heard of John Calvin and Martin Luther? Has he never read the Thirty-nine Articles of his own Church? All those authorities teach predestination; which, indeed, logically follows the doctrine of an all-wise and all-powerful God. Yet

here is Sir G. G. Stokes, a Church of England man, objecting to the "materialistic hypothesis" on the ground that it makes things "determined."

Professor Stokes next refers to "something about us" which we call "will." This he proceeds to treat as an independent force like magnetism or electricity. What he says about it shows him to be a perfect tyro in psychology. At the end of the section he exclaims, "So much for that theory" – the materialistic hypothesis; and we are tempted to exclaim, "So much for Sir G. G. Stokes."

Next comes the "psychic theory," according to which "man consists of body and soul." Here the Professor shows a lucid interval. He points out that if the soul is really hampered by the body, it is strange that a blow on a man's head should "retard the action of his thoughts." He also remarks that, according to this theory, the "blow has only got to be somewhat harder till the head is smashed altogether, and the man is killed, and then the thoughts are rendered more active than ever." Which, as our old friend Euclid observes, is absurd.

Professor Stokes dismisses the "body and soul" theory as "open to very grave objections." He admits that it is held by "many persons belonging to the religious world," nevertheless he does not think it can be "deduced from Scripture," to which he goes on to appeal.

Now we beg our Christian friends to notice this. Here is the great Sir G. Gr. Stokes they make so much of actually throwing up the sponge. Instead of showing *scientifically* that man has

a soul, and thus cheering their drooping spirits, he leaves the platform, mounts the pulpit, and plays the part of a theologian. In fact he can tell them no more than the ordinary parson who sticks his nose between the pages of his Bible.

With regard to the Scripture, it will afford very little comfort to the Christians to know that Professor Stokes does not believe that it teaches the immortality of the soul. He supports this view by citing the authority of the present Bishop of Durham and "another bishop," who regard the doctrine of an immortal soul as no part of a Christian faith. Had Sir G. G. Stokes been better read in the literature of his own Church, he might have adduced a number of other divines, including Bishop Courtenay and Archbishop Whately, who took the same position.

"Well, what do we learn from Scripture?" inquires Professor Stokes. And this is his answer. "In scripture," he says, "man is spoken of as consisting of body, soul, and spirit." And in Sir G. G. Stokes's opinion it is the third article which "lies at the very basis of life." It is *spirit*, "the interaction of which with the material organism produced a living being" in the Garden of Eden.

Here we pause to interject a reflection. Ordinary Christians believe in body and soul; Professor Stokes believes in body, soul, and spirit. That is, he says man is made up of three instead of two. But in step our Theosophic friends, who pile on four more, and tell us that man is sevenfold. Now who is right! According to their own account they are *all* right. But this is impossible. In our opinion they are all *wrong*. Their theories are imaginary. All

they *know* anything of is the human body.

But to return to Professor Stokes's excursion in the region of Biblical exegesis. Never have we met with anything more puerile and absurd. He finds "soul" and "spirit" in the English Bible, and he supposes them to be different things. He even builds up a fanciful theory on the fact that the expression "living soul" occurs in the New Testament, but he does not remember the expression "living spirit." Hence he concludes that *spirit* is not "living" but "life-making."

Surely a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and Professor Stokes is a capital illustration of this truth. We get "soul" and "spirit" in the New Testament, as well as in the Old, simply because both words are used indifferently by the English translators. This is owing to the composite character of the English language. One word comes from the Greek, the other from the Latin, and both mean exactly the same thing. The Hebrew *ruach*, the (Greek *pneuma*), and the Latin *spiritus*, all originally meant *the breath*; and as breathing was the most obvious function of life, persisting even in the deepest sleep, it came to signify *life*, when that general conception was reached; and when the idea of soul or spirit was reached, the same word was used to denote it. All this is shown clearly enough by Tylor, and is corroborated by the more orthodox Max Muller; so that Professor Stokes has fallen into a quagmire, made of the dirt of ignorance and a little water of knowledge, and has made himself a laughing-stock to everyone who possesses a decent

acquaintance with the subject.

Whatever it is that Professor Stokes thinks a man has apart from his body, he does not believe it to be immortal. The immortality of the soul and a future life, he says, are "two totally different things." The one he thinks "incorrect," the other he regards as guaranteed by Scripture; in other words, by Paul, who begins his exposition by exclaiming "Thou fool!" and ends it by showing his own folly. The apostle's nonsense about the seed that cannot quicken unless it die, was laughed at by the African chief in Sir Samuel Baker's narrative. The unsophisticated negro said that if the seed did die it would never come to anything. And he was right, and Paul was wrong.

There *is* a resurrection, however, for Paul says so, and his teaching is inspired, though his logic is faulty. Men will rise from the dead *somehow*, and with "a body of some kind." Not the body we have now. Oh dear no! Great men have thought so, but it is an "incredible supposition." Being a chemist, Sir G. G. Stokes sees the ineffable absurdity, the physical and logical impossibility, of this orthodox conception, which was taught by Mr. Spurgeon without the slightest misgiving, and upheld by the teaching of the Church of England.

But what is it that *will* rise from the dead, and get joined with some sort of inconceivable body? We have shown that Professor Stokes's distinction between "soul" and "spirit" is fanciful. It will not do for him, then, to say it is the "spirit" that will rise, for he denies, or does not believe, the renewed life of the "soul." Here

he leaves us totally in the dark. Perhaps what will rise is "a sort of a something" that will get joined to "a sort of a body" and live in "a sort of a somewhere."

"What," asks Professor Stokes, "is man's condition between death and the resurrection?" He admits that the teaching of Scripture on this point is "exceedingly meagre." He inclines to think that "the intermediate state is one of unconsciousness," something like when we faint, and thus, as there will be no perceptions in the interval, though it be millions of years, we shall, "when we breathe our last," be brought "immediately face to face with our final account to receive our final destiny." And if our final destiny depends in any way on how we have used our reasoning powers, Professor Stokes will be consigned to a warm corner in an excessively high-temperated establishment.

After all, Professor Stokes admits that all he has said, or can say, gives no "evidence" of a future life. What *is* the evidence then? "Well," he says, "the great evidence which we as Christians accept is, that there is One Who has passed already before us from the one state of being to the other." The resurrection of Jesus Christ, he tells us, is "an historical event," and is supported by an enormous amount of most weighty evidence. But he does not give us a single ounce of it. The only argument he has for a future state is advanced on the last page, and he retires at the moment he has an opportunity of proving his case.

Professor Stokes says: "I fear I have occupied your time too long. We fear so too." "These are dark subjects," he adds. True,

and he has not illuminated them. There is positively no evidence of a future life. The belief is a conjecture, and we must die to prove or disprove it.

PAUL BERT¹

Victor Hugo and Gambetta have their places in the Pantheon of history, and Death is beginning his harvest among the second rank of the founders of the present French Republic, Every one of these men was an earnest Freethinker as well as a staunch Republican. Paul Bert, who has just died at Tonquin at the post of duty, was one of the band of patriots who gathered round Gambetta in his Titanic organisation of the National Defence; a band from which has come most of those who have since been distinguished in the public life of France. After the close of the war, Paul Bert became a member of the National Assembly, in which he has held his seat through all political changes. As a man of science he was eminent and far-shining, being not a mere *doctrinaire* but a practical experimentalist whose researches were of the highest interest and importance. His *Manual of Elementary Science*, which has been recently translated into English, is in use in nearly every French school, and there is no other volume of the kind that can be compared with it for a moment. As a friend and promoter of general education, Paul Bert was without a rival. He strove in season and out of season to raise the standard of instruction, to elevate the status of teachers, and to free them from the galling tyranny

¹ November 21, 1886.

of priests. It is not too much to say that Paul Bert was the idol of nine-tenths of the schoolmasters and schoolmistresses in the French rural districts, where the evils he helped to remove had been most rampant.

This distinguished Frenchman is now dead at the comparatively early age of fifty-three. Although his illness was so serious, the French premier telegraphed that it would be impolitic for the Resident General to leave Tonquin suddenly. Thereupon Paul Bert replied, "You are right; it is better to die at my post than for me to quit Tonquin at the present moment." That dispatch was the last he was able to send himself. Subsequent dispatches came, from other hands, and at last the news arrived that Paul Bert was dead. The French premier announced the fact from the Tribune in a broken voice and amid profound silence. "The Chamber loses in him," said M. de Freycinet, "one of its eminent members, science an illustrious representative, France one of her most devoted children." The next day the Chamber, by an overwhelming majority, voted a State funeral and a pension of £400 a year to Mdme. Bert, with reversion to her children. The first vote was strenuously opposed by Monseigneur Freppel, Bishop of Angers, on the ground that the deceased was an inveterate enemy of religion, but the bishop was ignominiously defeated by 379 votes against 45. That is probably a fair test of the relative strength of Freethought and Christianity among educated men in France.

Monseigneur Freppel was right Paul Bert was an inveterate

enemy of religion. He was a militant Atheist, who believed that the highest service you can render to mankind is to free them from superstition. No wonder the Church hated him. At a famous banquet he proposed the toast, "The eradication of the two phylloxeras – the phylloxera of the vine and the phylloxera of the Church." His handbook on the Morality of the Jesuits was a frightful exposure of the duplicity and rascality of priestcraft. About twelve months before Grambetta's death, that great statesman took the chair at one of Paul Bert's atheistical lectures. It was a bold thing to do, but Gambetta was a bold man. The great statesman did a bolder thing still when he took office. He scandalised the Christian world by appointing his atheistic friend Paul Bert as Minister of Public Instruction and Public Worship. Surely this was a piece of irony worthy the assiduous student of Rabelais and Voltaire. "Clericalism is the enemy," said Gambetta. Paul Bert accepted the battle-cry, but he did not content himself with shouting. He labored to place education on a basis which would make it a citadel of Freethought. The *Tory Standard* allows that he "laid the bases of military education in the schools and *lycees*" that he "first dispensed the pupils in State educational establishments from the obligation of attending any religious service, or belonging to any class in which religious instruction was given," and that he first organised the higher education of girls.

Paul Bert was a typical Frenchman and an illustrious Atheist. What do the clergy make of this phenomenon? Here is a man,

trained by his father to hate priests, brought up from his cradle in an atmosphere of Freethought, and owing nothing to the Church; yet he becomes an eminent scientist, a fervid patriot, an educational reformer, a leading statesman, a tender husband and father, and a warm friend of the best men, of his time; and on his decease the State gives him a public funeral and provides for his widow and children. The man, we repeat, was an open, nay a militant Atheist; and again we ask, What do the clergy make of this phenomenon?

During his lifetime Darwin was the *bete noir* of the clergy. They hated him with a perfect and very natural hatred, for his scientific doctrines were revolutionary, and if he was right they and their Bible were certainly wrong. The Black Army denounced his impious teachings from thousands of pulpits. With some of them he was the Great Beast, with others Antichrist himself. And they were all the madder because he never took the slightest notice of them, but treated them with the silent contempt which a master of the hounds bestows on the village curs who bark at his horse's heels. Yet, strange to say, when Darwin died, instead of being buried in some quiet Kentish cemetery or churchyard, he was actually sepulchred in Westminster Abbey. Having fought the living Darwin tooth and nail, the clergy quietly appropriated the dead Darwin. The living, thinking and working man was a damnable heretic, hated of God and his priests, but his corpse was a very good Christian, and it was buried in a temple of the very faith he had undermined.

Darwin, with all his gravity, is said to have loved a joke, and really this was so good a joke that he might almost have grinned at it in his coffin.

By and bye, the great naturalist may figure as an ardent devotee of the creed he rejected. The clergy are hypocritical and base enough – as a body we mean – to claim Darwin himself now they have secured his corpse. Who knows that, in another twenty years, the verger or even the Dean of Westminster Abbey, in showing visitors through the place, may not say before a certain tomb, "Here is the last resting-place of that eminent Christian, Charles Darwin. There was a little misunderstanding between him and the clergy while he lived, but it has all passed away like a mist, and he is now accounted one of the chief pillars of the Church"?

What the clergy have done in the concrete with Darwin they have done in the abstract with his predecessors in the great struggle between light and darkness. What are all the lying stories about Infidel Death-Beds but conversions of corpses? Great heretics, whose scepticism was unshaken in their lifetime by all the parson-power of the age, were easily converted in their tombs. What the clergy said about them was true, or why didn't they get up and contradict? All the world over silence gives consent, and if the dead man did not enter a *caveat*, who could complain if the men of God declared that he finished up in their faith?

Recently the clergy have been converting another corpse, but

this time it has been able to protest by proxy, and the swindle has been exposed all along the line. Paul Bert, the great French Freethinker, died at Tonquin. The nation voted him a state funeral, and his body was shipped to France. The voyage was a long one, and it gave the pious an opportunity of leisurely converting the corpse, especially as Paul Bert's family were all on board the steamer. Accordingly a report, which we printed and commented on at the time, appeared in all the papers that the atheistic Resident General had sent for a Catholic bishop on his death-bed and taken the sacrament. Thousands of Christians believed the story at once, the wish being father to the thought. They never stopped to inquire whether the report was true. Why indeed should they? They took the whole of their religion on trust, and of course they could easily dispense with proof in so small a matter as an infidel's conversion. Some of them were quite hilarious. "Ha," they exclaimed, "what do you Freethinkers say now?" And with the childish simplicity of their kind, when they were told that the story was in all probability false, they replied, "Why, isn't it in print?"

Now that the fraud is exposed very few of the journals that printed it will publish the contradiction. We may be sure that the story of Paul Bert's conversion will be devoutly believed by thousands of Christians, and will probably be worked up in pious tracts for the spiritual edification of superstitious sheep. Give a lie a day's start, said Cobbett, and it is half round the world before you can overtake it. Give it a week's start, and if it happens to

be a lie that suits the popular taste, you may give up all hope of overtaking it at all. First in the way of exposure was a telegram from the Papal Nuncio at Lisbon on December 29, saying that his name had been improperly used. He was not the author of the telegram that had been fathered on him, and he knew nothing of Paul Bert's conversion. A day or two later the ship conveying the heretic's corpse arrived at the Suez Canal. Madame Bert heard of the preposterous story of her husband's conversion, and she immediately telegraphed that it was absolutely and entirely false. Madame Bert, who is a highly accomplished woman, is a Freethinker herself, and she is too proud of her husband's reputation to lose a moment in contradicting a miserable libel on his courage and sincerity.

Before dropping the pen, we take the opportunity of saying a few words on Madame Adam's article on Paul Bert in the *Contemporary Review*. She is an able woman, but not a philosopher, and she labors under the craze of thinking that she is a great force in European politics. She confesses that she hated Paul Bert, and she betrays that her aversion originated in pique and jealousy. We do not wish to be ungallant, but Gambetta had good reasons for preferring Paul Bert to Juliette Lambert, although the lady is ludicrously wrong in saying that "it was to Paul Bert that Gambetta owed all the formulae of his scientific politics." She forgets that Gambetta's speeches before Paul Bert became his friend are in print. She also ignores the fact that Gambetta was a steadfast Freethinker from his college days, and

was never infected with that sentimental religiosity from which she assumes that Paul Bert perverted him. Certainly he was incapable of being moved by the hackneyed platitudes about science and religion that form the prelude of Madame Adam's article, and seem borrowed from one of M. Oaro's lectures. Nor did he need Paul Bert to tell him, after the terrible struggle of 1877, that Clericalism was the enemy. Still less, if that were possible, did he require Paul Bert or any other man to tell him that France imperatively needed education free from priestcraft. Madame Adam is so anxious to deal Paul Bert a stab in the dark that she confuses the most obvious facts. Gambetta and he fought against clericalism, and labored for secular education, because they were both Freethinkers as well as Republicans. In venting her spite, and reciting her own witticisms, she fails to see the force of her own admissions. This is what she writes of a very momentous occasion:

"I saw Gambetta at Saint Cloud the Sunday after the mishap at Obaronne. He had just been taking the chair at the Chateau d'Eau, at an anti-clerical meeting of Paul Bert's.

"He came in a little late to dinner. Some dozen of us were already assembled on a flight of steps at the bottom of the garden when he appeared. He spied me at once [a woman speaks!] across the green lawn and a vase of tall fuchsias, and called out in his sonorous voice:

"Admirable! superb! extraordinary! Never since Voltaire has such an irrefutable indictment been brought against the clergy!

And what a style! What consummate art!"

"And what bad policy!" said a great banker who was with us, in a low voice, to me [note the me].

"Gambetta went on as he approached us:

"And such an immense success – beyond anything that could be imagined! Ten thousand enthusiastic cheers!"

"The ten thousand and first would not have come from me,' I said [said I], as we greeted one another.

"You yourself,' cried Gambetta, 'you yourself, I tell you, would have been carried away; if not by the ideas, by the genius lavished in propounding them.'"

Yes, and notwithstanding Madame Adam's "religion" and the great banker's "policy," Gambetta and Paul Bert were in the right, and miles above their heads.

Following Madame Adam's lively nonsense, the *Echo* says that Paul Bert tried to set up another Inquisition. "In France," says this organ of Christian Radicalism, "they strive to prevent a parent from giving his child a religious education." They do nothing of the kind. They simply insist that the religious education shall not be given in the national school. Every French parent is free to give religious instruction to his children at home, and there are still thousands of State priests who can supply his deficiencies in that respect. Meanwhile national education progresses in good earnest. The Empire left nearly half the population unable to write their names. Now the Republic educates every boy and girl, and Mr. Matthew Arnold assures us that the French schools

are among the best in Europe, while the sale of good books is prodigious. Gambetta and Paul Bert worked, fought, and sacrificed for this, and they cannot be robbed of the glory.

BRADLAUGH'S GHOST

Directly after Charles Bradlaugh's death we expressed a belief that the Christians would concoct stories about him as soon as it was safe to do so. It took some time to concoct and circulate the pious narratives of the deathbeds of Voltaire and Thomas Paine, and a proper interval is necessary in the case of the great Iconoclast. Already, however, the more superstitious and fanatical Christians are shaking their heads and muttering that "Bradlaugh must have said something when he was dying, only they wouldn't allow believers in his sick room to hear it." By and by the more cunning and unscrupulous will come to the aid of their weaker brethren, and a circumstantial story will be circulated in Sunday-schools and Christian meetings.

We are well aware that his daughter took every precaution. She has the signed testimony of the nurses, that her father never spoke on the subject of religion during his last illness. But this may not avail, for similar precautions are admitted to have been taken in the cases of Voltaire and Paine, and, in despite of this, the Christian traducers have forged the testimony of imaginary interlopers, whose word cannot be disproved, as they never existed outside the creative fancy of these liars for the glory of God.

It is quite a superstition that truth is always a match for falsehood. George Eliot remarked that the human mind takes

absurdity as asses chew thistles. We add that it swallows falsehood as a cat laps milk. It was humorously said the other day by Colonel Ingersoll that "The truth is the weakest thing in the world. It always comes into the arena naked, and there it meets a healthy young lie in complete armor, and the result is that the truth gets licked. One good, solid lie will knock out a hundred truths." It has done so with respect to the death of Voltaire and Paine, and it will do so with respect to the death of Charles Bradlaugh.

Meanwhile the Spiritualists are having an innings. Charles Bradlaugh was buried by his friends at Woking, but his ghost is said to have turned up at Birmingham. It appears from a report in the *Medium and Daybreak* that Mr. Charles Gray, of 139 Pershore-road, being "sadly sorrow-stricken by the passing away of a son," was "constrained to remain at home" on the evening of May 31. A seance was arranged "with a few friends," and of course a message was received from the dear departed boy. This was conveyed through Mr. Russell, junior, whose age is not stated. Then Mr. Reedman "was controlled to write by C. Bradlaugh." Mr. Reedman wrote "in a perfectly unconscious state, and on the departure of the influence was much surprised on being told of the nature of the communication."

Mr. Reedman's surprise may have been great, but it scarcely equals our own. One would imagine that if Charles Bradlaugh still lived, and were able to communicate with people in this world, he would speak to his beloved daughter, and to the friends

who loved him with a deathless affection. Why should he go all the way to Birmingham instead of doing his first business in London? Why should he turn up at the house of Mr. Gray? Why should he control the obscure Mr. Reedman? This behavior is absolutely foreign to the character of Charles Bradlaugh. It was not one of his weaknesses to beat about the bush. He went straight to his mark, and found a way or made one, Death seems to change a man, if we may believe the Spiritualists; but if it has altered Charles Bradlaugh's character, it has effected a still more startling change in his intellect and expression.

Here is a "correct copy" of Charles Bradlaugh's message to mankind, and most of our readers will regard it as a very Brummagen communication: —

"As I am not to speak (so says the 'Warrior Chief'), I am to say in writing, I have found a life beyond the grave that I did not wish for nor believe in; but it is even so. My voice shall yet declare it. I have to undo all, or nearly all, I have done, but I will not complain. My mind is subdued, but I will be a man. It is a most glorious truth that has now more clearly dawned upon my mind, that there is a grand and noble purpose before all men, worth living for! May this be the dawn of a new and glorious era of the spiritual life of your humble friend Charles Bradlaugh!

"There is a God! There is a Divine principle. There is more in life than we wot of, but vastly more in death! Oh! for a thousand tongues to declare the truths which are now fast dawning upon my bewildered mind! Death, the great leveller, need have no

more terrors for us, for it has been conquered by the Great Spirit, in giving us a never-ending life in the glorious spheres of immortal bliss. O my friends! may I be permitted to declare, more fully and fervently, the joys which fill my mind. Language fails, no tongue can describe."

Our own impression is that Professor Huxley was justified in saying that Spiritualism adds a new terror to death. Fancy the awful depth of flaccid imbecility into which Charles Bradlaugh must have fallen, to indulge in "ohs," and gasp out "glorious," "glorious," and talk of his "subdued" and "bewildered" mind, and bid himself be "a man." It was not thus that he spoke in the flesh. His language was manly, firm, and restrained; his attitude was bold and self-reliant. After four months in the "spirit world" he is positively trembling and drivelling! It is enough to make the rugged Iconoclast turn in his grave. Messrs. Gray and Reedman may rely upon it that Charles Bradlaugh is *not* able to enter No. 139 Pershore-road, Birmingham; if he were, he would descend in swift wrath upon his silly traducers, who have put their own inanity into his mouth, making the great, virile Atheist talk like a little, flabby Spiritualist after an orgie of ginger-beer.

Anyone may see at a glance that the style of this message, from beginning to end, is not Charles Brad-laugh's. *Whose* style it is we cannot say. We do not pretend to fathom the arcana of Spiritualism. It may be Mr. Reedman's, it may be another's. If it be Mr. Reedman's, he must have been guilty of fraud or the victim of deception. Three distinct hypotheses are possible.

Either someone else produced or concocted the message while he was in a foolish trance, or he wrote it himself consciously, or he had been thinking of Charles Bradlaugh before falling into the foolish trance and the message was due to unconscious cerebration.

We forbear to analyse this wretched stuff, though we might show its intrinsic absurdity and self-contradiction. One monstrous piece of folly bestrides the rest like a colossus – "Your humble friend Charles Bradlaugh." Shade of Uriah Heep! Charles Bradlaugh the "*humble* friend" of the illustrious Gray and Reedman! Think of it, Lord Halsbury; think of it, Lord Randolph Churchill. The giant who fought you, and beat you, in the law courts and in Parliament; the man whose face was a challenge; the man who had the pride, without the malignity, of Lucifer; this very man crawls into a Birmingham house, uninvited and unexpected, and announces himself as the "*humble* friend" of some pudding-headed people, engaged in a fatuous occupation that makes one blush for one's species.

Surely if Charles Bradlaugh's ghost is knocking about this planet, having a mission to undo the work of his lifetime in the flesh, it should begin the task in London. It was at the Hall of Science that Charles Bradlaugh achieved his greatest triumphs as a public teacher, and it is there that he should first attempt to undo his work, to unteach his teaching, to disabuse the minds of his dupes. Of course we shall be told that he must communicate through "mediums," and that the medium must be "controlled"

by Charles Bradlaugh's spirit; but to this we reply that Charles Bradlaugh controlled men easily while he was "in the flesh," and it is inconceivable that he has lost that old power if he still survives.

On the whole, we think the Spiritist trick is worse than the malignity of orthodox Christians. A lie about a man's death-bed ends there, and consigning him to hell for his infidelity is only a pious wish that cannot affect his fate. But getting hold of a man's ghost ("spirit" they call it) after his death; making it turn up at public and private sittings of obscure fools; setting it jabbering all the flatulent nonsense of its manipulators; and using it in this manner until it has to be dismissed for a newer, more fashionable, and more profitable shadow; all this is so hideous and revolting that the ordinary Christian lies about infidels seem almost a compliment in comparison.

This Gray-Reedman story is probably the beginning of a long and wretched business. The Philistines are upon thee, Charles Bradlaugh! They will harness thee in their mill, and make thee grind their grist; and fools that were not worth a moment of thy time while thou livedst will command thee by the hour; and Sludge the Medium will use thy great name to puff his obscene vanity and swell his obscener gains. This is the worst of all thy trials, for thou canst not defend thyself; and, in thy helplessness, fools and pigmies cut capers over thy grave.

CHRIST AND BROTHERHOOD

Clergymen are supposed to be educated; that is, they go to college before taking holy orders, and study what are called "the classics" – the masterpieces of Greek and Roman literature. Theology is not enough to fit them for the pulpit. They must also be steeped in "the humanities," It is felt that they would never find all they require in the Bible. They find a great deal of it in Pagan writings, and as these are unknown to the people, it is safe for the clergy to work the best "heathen" ideas into their interpretation of the Christian Scriptures. There was a time, indeed, when Christian preachers were fond of references to Pagan poets and philosophers. The people were so ignorant, and such implicit believers, that it could be done with security. But now the case is altered. The people are beginning to "smell a rat." It dawns upon them that if so many fine things were said by those old Pagans – not to mention the still more ancient teaching of India and Egypt – Christianity can hardly merit such epithets as "unique" and "wonderful." Accordingly it is becoming the fashion in clerical circles to avoid those old Pagans, or else to damn them all in a sweeping condemnation. Some indeed go to the length of declaring – or at least of insinuating – that all the real truth and goodness there is in the world began with the Christian era. This extreme is affected by the Evangelical school, and is carried to its highest pitch of exaggeration by such shallow

and reckless preachers as the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes. Soon after the *Daily Chronicle* correspondence on "Is Christianity Played Out?" this reverend gentleman, and most accomplished "perverter of the truth," screamed from the platform of St. James's Hall that women and children were regarded as slaves and nuisances before the time of Christ; which is either a deliberate falsehood, or a gross misreading both of history and of human nature. Mr. Hughes has since been gathering his energies for a bolder effort in the same direction. He now publishes in the *Methodist Times* his latest piece of recklessness or fatuity. It is a sermon on "The Solidarity of Mankind," and is really an exhibition of the solidity of Mr. Hughes's impudence. It required nothing but "face," as Corbett used to call it, to utter such monstrous nonsense in a sermon; it would need a great deal more courage than Mr. Hughes possesses to utter it on any platform where he could be answered and exposed.

Mr. Hughes believes in our "common humanity," and he traces it from "the grand old gardener" (Tennyson). "We are all descended from Adam," he says, "and related to one another." Now this is not true, even according to the Bible; for when Cain fled into the land of Nod he took a wife there, which clearly implies the existence of other people than the descendants of Adam. But this is not the worst. Fancy a man at this time of day – a burnin' an' a shinin' light to a' this place – gravely standing up and solemnly telling three thousand people, most of whom we suppose have been to school, that the legendary Adam of the

book of Genesis was really the father of the whole human race!

This common humanity is claimed by Mr. Hughes as "a purely Christian conception." Yet he foolishly admits that "the Positivists in our own day have strongly insisted on this great crowning truth which we Christians have neglected." Nay, he states that when Kossuth appealed in England on behalf of Hungary, he spoke in the name of the "solidarity" of the human race. And why *solidarity*? Because the word had to be taken from the French. And why from *the French*? "Because the French," Mr. Hughes says, "have risen to a loftier level of human brotherhood than we." Indeed! Then what becomes of your "purely *Christian* conception," when "infidel France" outshines "Christian England"? How is it, too, you have to make the "shameful" confession that "we" – that is, the Christians – took "nineteen centuries to find out the negro was a man and therefore a brother"? You did not find it out, in fact, until the eighteenth century – the century of Voltaire and Thomas Paine – the century in which Freethought had spread so much, even in England, that Bishop Butler in the Advertisement to his *Analogy*, dated May, 1736, could say that "many persons" regarded Christianity as proved to be "fictitious" to "all people of discernment," and thought that "nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule." How is it your "Christian conceptions" took such a surprising time to be understood? How is it they had to wait for realisation until the advent of an age permeated with the spirit of scepticism and

secular humanity?

Mr. Hughes is brave enough – in the absence of a critic – to start with Jesus Christ as the first cosmopolitan. "He came of the Jewish stock," we are told, "and yet he had no trace of the Jew in him." Of course not – in Christian sermons and Christian pictures, preached and painted for non-Jewish, and indeed Jew-hating nations. But there is a very decided "trace of the Jew in him" in the New Testament. To the Canaanite woman he said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." To the twelve he said, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." It was Paul who, finding he could not make headway against the apostles who had known Jesus personally, exclaimed, "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles." That exclamation was a turning point. It was the first real step to such universalism as Christianity has attained. No wonder, therefore, that Comte puts Paul instead of Jesus into the Positivist calendar, as the real founder of Christianity.

Even in the case of St. Paul, it is perfectly idle to suppose that his cosmopolitanism extended beyond the Roman empire. A little study and reflection would show Mr. Hughes that the very fact of the Roman empire was the secret of the cosmopolitanism. Moral conceptions follow in the wake of political expansion. The morality of a tribe is tribal; that of a nation is national; and national morality only develops into international morality with the growth of international interests

and international communication. Now the Roman empire had broken up the old nationalities, and with them their local religions. The human mind broadened with its political and social horizon. And the result was that a cosmopolitan sentiment in morals, and a universal conception in religion, naturally spread throughout the territory which was dominated by the Roman eagles. Christianity itself was at first a Jewish sect, which developed into a cosmopolitan system precisely because the national independence of the Jews had been broken up, and all the roads of a great empire were open to the missionaries of a new faith.

But let us return to Mr. Hughes's statements. He tells us that the solidarity of mankind was "revealed to the human race through St. Paul" – which is a great slur upon Jesus Christ, and quite inconsistent with what Mr. Hughes affirms of the Nazarene. It is also inconsistent with the very language of St. Paul in that sermon of his to the Athenians; for the great apostle, in enforcing his argument that all men are God's children, actually reminds the Athenians that "certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."

Mr. Hughes goes on to say that "our common humanity" is "a perfectly new idea." "Max Muller," he tells us, "says that there was no trace of it until Christ came. It is a purely Christian conception." Professor Max Muller, however, is not infallible. He sometimes panders to Christian prejudices, and this is a case in point. What he says about "humanity" is an etymological quibble.

Certainly the Greeks knew nothing about it, simply because they did not speak Latin. But they had an equivalent word in *philanthropia*, which was in use in the time of Plato, four hundred years before the birth of Christ.²

Max Muller or no Max Muller, we tell Mr. Hughes that he is either reckless or ignorant in declaring that the idea of human brotherhood owes its origin to Christ, Paul, or Christianity. To say nothing of Buddha, whose ethics are wider than the ethics of Christ, and confining ourselves to Greece and Rome, with the teaching of whose thinkers Christianity comes into more direct comparison – it is easy enough to prove that Mr. Hughes is in error, or worse. Four centuries before Christ, when Socrates was asked on one occasion as to his country, he replied, "I am a citizen of the world." Cicero, the great Roman writer, in the century before Christ, uses the very word *caritas*, which St. Paul borrowed in his fine and famous chapter in the first of Corinthians. Cicero, and not St. Paul, was the first to pronounce "charity" as the tie which unites the human race. And after picturing a soul full of virtue, living in charity with its friends, and taking as such all who are allied by nature, Cicero rose to a

² Mr. Hughes talks so much that he must have little time for reading. Every educated man, however, is supposed to be acquainted with Bacon's *Essays*, the thirteenth of which opens as follows: – "I take goodness in this sense, the affecting of the weal of men, which is that the Grecians called Philanthropia; and the word humanity (as it is used) is a little too light to express it." Bacon not only knew the antiquity of *Philanthropia*, but preferred it to the later and less weighty term so ignorantly celebrated by Mr. Hughes.

still loftier level. "Moreover," he said, "let it not consider itself hedged in by the walls of a single town, but acknowledge itself a citizen of the whole world, as though one city." In another treatise he speaks of "fellowship with the human race, charity, friendship, justice."

We defy Mr. Hughes to indicate a single cosmopolitan text in the New Testament as strong, clear, and pointed as these sayings of Socrates and Cicero – the one Greek, the other Roman, and both before Christ. Let him ransack gospels, epistles, acts, and revelations, and produce the text we call for.

From the time of Cicero – that is, from the time of Julius Caesar, and the establishment of the Empire – the sentiment of brotherhood, the idea of a common humanity, spread with certainty and rapidity, and is reflected in the writings of the philosophers. The exclamation of the Roman poet, "As a man, I regard nothing human as alien to me," which was so heartily applauded by the auditory in the theatre, expressed a growing and almost popular sentiment. The works of Seneca abound in fine humanitarian passages, and it must be remembered that if the Christians were tortured by Nero at Rome, it was by the same hand that Seneca's life was cut short. "Wherever there is a man," said this thinker, "there is an opportunity for a deed of kindness." He believed in the natural equality of all men. Slaves were such through political and social causes, and their masters were bidden to refrain from ill-using them, not only because of the cruelty of such conduct, but because of "the natural law common to

all men," and because "he is of the same nature as thyself." Seneca denounced the gladiatorial shows as human butcheries. So mild, tolerant, humane, and equitable was his teaching that the Christians of a later age were anxious to appropriate him. Tertullian calls him "Our Seneca," and the facile scribes of the new faith forged a correspondence between him and their own St. Paul. One of Seneca's passages is a clear and beautiful statement of rational altruism. "Nor can anyone live happily," he says, "who has regard to himself alone, and uses everything for his own interests; thou must live for thy neighbor, if thou wouldest live for thyself." Eighteen hundred years afterwards Auguste Comte sublimated this principle into a motto of his Religion of Humanity — *Vivre pour Autrui*, Live for Others. It is also expressed more didactically by Ingersoll — "The way to be happy is to make others so" — making duty and enjoyment go hand in hand.

Pliny, who corresponded with the emperor Trajan, and whose name is familiar to the student of Christian Evidences, exhorted parents to take a deep interest in the education of their children. He largely endowed an institution in his native town of Como, for the assistance of the children of the poor. His humanity was extended to slaves. He treated his own with great kindness, allowing them to dispose of their own earnings, and even to make wills. Of masters who had no regard for their slaves, he said, "I do not know if they are great and wise; but one thing I do know, they are not men." Dion Chrysostom, another Stoic, plainly declared

that slavery was an infringement of the natural rights of men, who were all born for liberty; a dictum which cannot be paralleled in any part of the New Testament. It must be admitted, indeed, that Paul, in sending the slave Onesimus back to his master Philemon, did bespeak humane and even brotherly treatment for the runaway; but he bespoke it for him as a Christian, not simply as a man, and uttered no single word in rebuke of the institution of slavery.

Plutarch's humanity was noble and tender. "The proper end of man," he said, "is to love and to be loved." He regarded his slaves as inferior members of his own family. How strong, yet how dignified, is his condemnation of masters who sold their slaves when disabled by old age. He protests that the fountain of goodness and humanity should never dry up in a man. "For myself," he said, "I should never have the heart to sell the ox which had long labored on my ground, and could no longer work on account of old age, still less could I chase a slave from his country, from the place where he has been nourished for so long, and from the way of life to which he has been so long accustomed." Sentiments like these were the natural precursors of the abolition of slavery, as far as it could be abolished by moral considerations.

Epictetus, the great Stoic philosopher, who had himself been a slave, taught the loftiest morality. Pascal admits that he was "one of the philosophers of the world who have best understood the duty of man." He disdained slavery from the point of view

of the masters, as he abhorred it from the point of view of the slaves. "As a healthy man," he said, "does not wish to be waited upon by the infirm, or desire that those who live with him should be invalids, the freeman should not allow himself to be waited upon by slaves, or leave those who live with him in servitude." It is idle to pretend, as Professor Schmidt of Strasburg does, that the ideas of Epictetus are "colored with a reflection of Christianity." The philosopher's one reference to the Galileans, by whom he is thought to have meant the Christians, is somewhat contemptuous. Professor Schmidt says he "misunderstood" the Galileans; but George Long, the translator of Epictetus, is probably truer in saying that he "knew little about the Christians, and only knew some examples of their obstinate adherence to the new faith and the fanatical behavior of some of the converts." It should be remembered that Epictetus was almost a contemporary of St. Paul, and the accurate students of early Christianity will be able to estimate how far it was likely, at that time, to have influenced the philosophers of Rome.

Marcus Aurelius was one of the wisest and best of men. Emperor of the civilised world, he lived a life of great simplicity, bearing all the burdens of his high office, and drawing philosophy from the depths of his own contemplation. His *Meditations* were only written for his own eyes; they were a kind of philosophical diary; and they have the charm of perfect sincerity. He was born a.d. 121, he became Emperor a.d. 161, and died a.d. 180, after nineteen years of a government which

illustrated Plato's words about the good that would ensue when kings were philosophers and philosophers were kings. Cardinal Barberini, who translated the Emperor's *Meditations* into Italian, in 1675, dedicated the translation to his own soul, to make it "redder than his purple at the sight of the virtues of this Gentile."

Marcus Aurelius combines reason with beautiful sentiment. His emotion is always accompanied by thought. Here, for instance, is a noble passage on the social commonwealth – "For we are made for co-operation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of the upper and lower teeth. To act against one another then is contrary to nature; and it is acting against one another to be vexed and to turn away." In a still loftier passage he says – and let us remember he says it to himself, not to an applauding audience, but quietly, and with absolute truth, and no taint of theatricality – "My nature is rational and social; and my city and country, so far as I am Antoninus, is Rome; but so far as I am a man, it is the world." In his brief, pregnant way, he states the law of human solidarity – "That which is not good for the swarm, neither is it good for the bee." And who could fail to appreciate this sentiment, coming as it did from the ruler of a great empire? – "One thing here is worth a great deal, to pass thy life in truth and justice, with a benevolent disposition even to liars and unjust men."

Here again, it is the fashion in some circles, to pretend that Marcus Aurelius was influenced by the spread of Christian ideas. George Long, however, speaks the language of truth and sobriety

in saying, "It is quite certain that Antoninus did not derive any of his Ethical principles from a religion of which he knew nothing." To say as Dr. Schmidt does that "Christian ideas filled the air" is easy enough, but where is the proof? No doubt the Christian writers made great pretensions as to the spread of their religion, but they were notoriously sanguine and inaccurate, and we know what value to attach to such pretensions in the second century when we reflect that even in the fourth century, up to the point of Constantine's conversion, Christianity had only succeeded in drawing into its fold about a twentieth of the inhabitants of the empire. Enough has been said in this article to show that the idea of our common humanity is not "a purely Christian conception," that it arose in the natural course of human development, and that in this, as in other cases, the apologists of Christianity have simply appropriated to their own creed the fruits of the political, social, and moral growth of Western civilisation.

THE SONS OF GOD

"The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair."

– *Genesis vi. 8.*

According to the first book of the Bible, the earth fell into a very wicked condition in the days of the patriarchs. God made everything good, but the Devil turned everything bad; and in the end the Lord put the whole concern into liquidation. It was a case of universal bankruptcy. All that was saved out of the catastrophe was a consignment of eight human beings and an unknown number of elephants, crocodiles, horses, pigs, dogs, cats, and fleas.

Among other enormities of the antediluvian world was the fondness shown by the sons of God for the daughters of men. That fondness has continued ever since. The deluge itself could not wash out the amatory feelings with which the pious males regard those fair creatures who were once supposed to be the Devil's chief agents on earth. Even to this day it is a fact that courtship goes on with remarkable briskness in religious circles. Churches and chapels are places of harmless assignation, and how many matches are made in Sunday-schools, where Alfred and Angelina meet to teach the scripture and flirt. As for the clergy, who are peculiarly the sons of God, they are notorious for

their partiality to the sex. They purr about the ladies like black tom-cats. Some of them are adepts in the art of rolling one eye heavenwards and letting the other languish on the fair faces of the daughters of men. It is also noticeable that the Protestant clericals marry early and often, and generally beget a numerous progeny, while the Catholic priest who, being strictly celibate, *never* adds to the population, "mashes" the ladies through the confessional, worming out all their secrets, and making them as pliable as wax in his holy hands. Too often the professional son of God is a chartered libertine, whose amors are carried on under a veil of sanctity. What else, indeed, could be expected when a lot of lusty young fellows, in the prime of life, foreswear marriage, take vows of chastity, and undertake to stem the current of their natures by such feeble dams as prayers and hymns?

Who the original "sons of God" were is a moot point. God only knows, and he has not told us. But Jewish and Christian divines have advanced many theories. According to some the sons of Gods were the offspring of Seth, who was born holy in succession to righteous Abel, while the daughters of men were the offspring of wicked Cain. Among the oriental Christians it is said that the children of Seth tried to regain Paradise by living in great austerity on Mount Hermon, but they soon tired of their laborious days and cheerless nights, and cast sheep's-eyes on the daughters of Cain, who beauty was equal to their father's wickedness. Marriages followed, and the Devil triumphed again.

According to the Cabbalists, two angels, Aza and Azael,

complained to God at the creation of man. God answered, "You, O angels, if you were in the lower world, you too would sin." They descended on earth, and directly they saw the ladies they forgot heaven. They married and exchanged the hallelujahs of the celestial chorus for the tender tones of loving women and the sweet prattle of little children. Having sinned, or, to use the vile language of religion, "polluted themselves with women," they became clothed with flesh. On trying to regain Paradise they failed, and were cast back on the mountains, where they continued to beget giants and devils.

"There were giants in the earth in those days" says Scripture. Of course there were. Every barbarous people has similar legends of primitive ages. The translators of our Revised Version are ashamed of these mythical personages as being too suggestive of Jack and the Beanstalk, so they have substituted Anakim for giants. In other words, they have shirked the duty of translators, and left the nonsense veiled under the original word.

The Mohammedans say that not only giants, but also Jins, were born of the sons of God, who married the daughters of men. The Jins soon had the world in their power. They ruled everywhere, and built colossal works, including the pyramids.

Of the giants, the most remarkable was Og. He was taller than the last Yankee story, for at the Deluge he stopped the windows of heaven with his hands, or the water would have risen over his head. The Talmud says that he saved himself by swimming close to the ark in company with the rhinoceros. The water there

happened to be cold, while all the rest was boiling hot; and thus Og was saved while all the other giants perished. According to another story, Og climbed on the roof of the ark, and when Noah tried to dislodge him, he swore that he would become the patriarch's slave. Noah at once clinched the bargain, and food was passed through a hole for the giant every day.

When we look into them we find the myths of the Bible wonderfully like the myths of other systems. The Giants are similar to the Titans, and the union of divine males with human females is similar to the amors of Jupiter, Apollo, Neptune, and Mars with the women of old. In this matter there is nothing new under the sun. Every fresh myth is only the recasting of an ancient fable, born of ignorance and imagination.

Let it finally be noted that this old Genesaic story of the angelic husbands of earthly women gives us a poor idea of the felicity of heaven. In that unknown region, as Jesus Christ informed his disciples, there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage; that is, no males, no females, no courting, no loving, no children, and no homes. Men cease to be men and women cease to be women. Everybody is of the neuter gender.

Or else all the angels are gentlemen, without a lady amongst them. Perhaps the latter view is preferable, as it harmonises with the Bible, in which the angels are always *he's*. In that case heaven would be, to say the least, rather a dull place. No whispering in the moonlight, no clasped hands under the throbbing stars. Not even a kiss under the misletoe. Oh, what must it be to be

there! No wonder the sons of God wandered from their cheerless Paradise, visited this lower world, and saw the daughters of men that they were fair.

MELCHIZEDEK

Melchizedek is the most extraordinary person of whom we have any record. Christ was born and Adam was made, but Melchizedek never began to be and will never cease to exist. If the Bible were not such an intensely serious book without a gleam of humor, except of the unconscious Hibernian kind, we might conclude that Melchizedek was *nobody*, for the description admirably suits that character. But the Bible does not play and must not be played with. All its personages are *bona fide* realities, from the Ancient of Days with white woolly hair on the throne of heaven to the prophet Jonah who took three days' lodging in the belly of a whale.

The name Melchizedek means *king of justice*, being derived from *melec*, a king, and *tzedec*, justice. When the gentleman bearing this name is introduced to us in the fourteenth of Genesis, he is king of Salem, which means peace. Salem was a city on the site of Zion.

Originally it was called Jebus, then Zadek, then Salem, and finally Jerusalem. So says Rabbi Joseph Ben-Gorion. But other writers, no doubt just as well informed, differ from him; and while the doctors disagree, simple laymen may well hold their judgment in suspense; or, better still, dismiss Jebus, Zadek, Salem, and Jerusalem, to the limbo of learned trivialities. Counting the spots on a leopard, the quills on a porcupine, or the

hairs in a cat's whiskers, is just as amusing and quite as edifying as most of the problems of divines and commentators.

When Abraham returned from a successful campaign, in which he defeated five kings and their armies with three hundred and eighteen raw recruits, Melchizedek came out to meet him with victuals and drink. These two friends joined in the friendly office of *scratching* each other. They were, in fact, a small mutual admiration society. Abraham, although at other times a rank coward, was on this occasion a bold warrior laden with spoil; and Melchizedek besides being King of Salem, was "the priest of the most high God." "Bully for you, Abraham," said Melchizedek. "Bully for you, Melchizedek," said Abraham. As usual, however, the priest got the best of it, for the patriarch paid him tithes, which were a capital return for his compliments. Genesis is a little confused, indeed; and what scripture is not? "And he gave him tithes of all" is not very clear. It reminds one of the West of England yokel, who gave his evidence on a case of homicide in this way:

"He had a stick, and he had a stick; and he hit he, and he hit he. And if he'd only hit he as hard as he hit he, he'd a' killed he, and not he he."

But we must not be too hard on Bibles and yokels. So long as we can get a scintillation of their meaning we must be satisfied. Scripture, we may take it, means that the *he* who paid tithes was Abraham, and the *him* who received them was Melchizedek.

Now the book of Genesis is not an early, but a very late

portion of the Jewish scriptures, dating only a few centuries before Christ. And we may depend on it that this little sentence about *tithes*, and perhaps the whole story that leads up to it, was got up by the priests, to give the authority of Abraham's name and the sanction of antiquity to an institution which kept them in luxury at the expense of their neighbors.

Our view of the case is supported by the fact that Melchizedek's name does not appear again in the whole of the Old Testament, except in the hundred and tenth Psalm, where somebody or other (the parsons of course say Christ) is called "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Paul, or whoever wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, works up this hint in fine style. It would puzzle a lunatic, or a fortune-teller, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, or God Almighty himself, to say what the Seventh of Hebrews means. We give it up as an insoluble conundrum, and we observe that every commentator with a grain of sense and honesty does the same. But there is one luminous flash in the jumble of metaphysical darkness. Melchizedek is described as "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." It will be easy to recognise a gentleman of that description when you meet him. When we *do* meet him we shall readily acknowledge him as our king and priest, and pay him an income tax of two shillings in the pound; but until then we warn all kings and priests off our doorsteps.

Jewish traditions say that Melchizedek was the son of Shem, and set apart for the purpose of watching and burying Adam's

carcase when it was unshipped from the Ark. Some, however, maintain that he was of a celestial race; while other (Christian) speculators have held that he was no less than Jesus Christ himself, who put in an early appearance in Abraham's days to keep the Jewish pot boiling. St. Athanasius tells a long-winded story of Melchizedek and Abraham, which shows what stuff the early Christians believed. According to the Talmud, Melchizedek composed the hundred and tenth Psalm himself; and although he is without end of days, his tomb was shown at Jerusalem in the time of Gemelli Oarrere the traveller.

There was an heretical sect called the *Melchizedekiana* in the third century. They held that Jesus Christ was, according to Hebrews, only of the order of Melchizedek, and therefore that Melchizedek himself was the more venerable. This heresy revived in Egypt after its suppression elsewhere, and its adherents claimed that Melchizedek was the Holy Ghost. The last time Melchizedek was heard of he was a London coster-monger's donkey, but whether this was a real incarnation of the original Melchizedek no one is able to decide, unless the Lord should again, as in the case of Balaam's companion, "open the mouth of the ass" and inform the world of the things that belong unto its peace.

S'W'ELP ME GOD

Whoever has seen a Hebrew money-lender in a County Court take up a copy of the Old Testament, present the greasy cover to his greasy lips, and, like honest Moses in the *School for Scandal*, "take his oath on that," must have had a lively impression as to the value of swearing as a religious ceremony. And this impression must have been heightened when he has seen an ingenuous Christian, on the other side of the suit, present a copy of the New Testament to *his* pious lips, and quietly swear to the very opposite of all that the God-fearing Jew had solemnly declared to be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. One's appreciation of the oath is still further increased by watching the various litigants and witnesses as they caress the sacred volume: Here a gentleman wears an expression of countenance which seems to imply "I guess they'll get a good deal of truth out of me"; and there another's face seems to promise as great a regard for truth as is consistent with his understanding with the solicitor who subpoenaed him as an independent witness in the interest of justice and a sound client. Hard swearing is the order of the day. So conflicting is the evidence on simple matters of fact that it is perfectly obvious that the very atmosphere is charged with duplicity. The thing is taken as a matter of course. Judges are used to it, and act accordingly, deciding in most cases by a keen observation of the witnesses and an extensive knowledge

of the seamy side of nature. But sometimes the very judges are nonplussed, so brazen are the faces of the gentlemen who "have kissed the book" Very often, no doubt, their honors feel inclined to say, like the American judge in directing his jury, "Well, gentlemen, if you believe what these witnesses swear, you will give a verdict for the plaintiff; and if you believe what the other witnesses swear, you will give a verdict for the defendant; but if, like me, you don't believe what either side swears, I'm hanged if I know what you will do."

The fact is, the oath is absolutely useless if its object is to prevent false witness. Should there be any likelihood of a persecution for perjury, a two-faced Testament-kisser will be on his guard, and be very careful to tell only such lies as cannot be clearly proved against him. He dreads the prospect of daily exercise on the treadmill, he loathes the idea of picking oakum, and his gorge rises at the thought of brown bread and skilly. But so long as that danger is avoided, there are hosts of witnesses, most of them very good Christians, who have been suckled on the Gospel in Sunday Schools, and fed afterwards on the strong meat of the Word in churches and chapels, who will swear fast and loose after calling God to witness to their veracity. They ask the Almighty to deal with them according as they tell the truth, yet for all that they proceed to tell the most unblushing lies. What is the reason of this strange inconsistency? Simply this. Hell is a long way off, and many things may happen before the Day of Judgment. Besides, God is merciful; he is always ready to forgive

sins; a man has only to repent in time, that is a few minutes before death, and all his sins will be washed out in the cleansing blood of Christ. Notwithstanding all his lies in earthly courts, the repentant sinner will not lose his right of walking about for ever and ever in the court of heaven, although some poor devil whose liberty or property he swore away may be frizzling for ever and ever in hell.

We are strongly of opinion that if the oath were abolished altogether there would be fewer falsehoods told in our public courts. No doubt the law of perjury has some effect, but it is less than is generally imagined, partly because the law is difficult to apply, and partly because there is a wide disinclination to apply it, owing to a sort of freemasonry in false witness, which is apt to be regarded as an essential part of the game of litigation. Here and there, too, there may be a person of sincere piety, who fears to tell a lie in what he considers the direct presence of God. But for the most part the fear of punishment, in this world or in the next, will not make men veracious. The fact is proved by universal experience; nay, there are judges, as well as philosophers, who openly declare that the oath has a direct tendency to create perjury. Anyone, with a true sense of morality will understand the reason of this. Fear is not a moral motive; and when the threatened punishment is very remote or very uncertain, it has next to no deterrent effect. Cupidity is matched against fear, and the odds of the game being in its favor, it wins. But if a moral motive is appealed to, the case is different. Many a man will tell a

lie in the witness-box who would scruple to do so "on his honor"; many a man will lie before God who would scruple to deceive a friend. Let a man feel that he is trusted, let his self-respect be appealed to, and he is more likely to be veracious than he would be if he were threatened with imprisonment in this life and hell-fire in the next.

Why Christians should cling to this relic of barbarity it is difficult to conceive. Their Savior plainly commanded them to "Swear not at all," and the early Church obeyed this injunction until it rose to power under Constantine. It is also a striking fact that the apostle Peter, when he disobeyed his Master, and took an oath, used it to confirm a palpable lie. When the damsel charged him in court with having been a follower of Jesus, he "Denied it with an oath." "You were one of them," said the damsel. "I wasn't," said Peter. "You *were* with him," she rejoined. Whereupon Peter exclaimed "S'w'elp me God, I never knew him." Surely if self-interest made Peter commit flat perjury in the bodily presence of his Savior, it is idle to assert that the oath in any way promotes veracity.

INFIDEL HOMES.³

John Wesley was a man of considerable force of mind and singular strength of character. But he was very unfortunate, to say the least of it, in his relations with women. His marriage was a deplorable misunion, and his latest biographer, who aims at presenting a faithful picture of the founder of Wesleyanism, has to dwell very largely on his domestic miseries. Wesley held patriarchal views on household matters, the proper subordination of the wife being a prime article of his faith. Mrs. Wesley, however, entertained different views. She is therefore described as a frightful shrew, and rated for her inordinate jealousy, although her husband's attentions to other ladies certainly gave her many provocations.

In face of these facts, it might naturally be thought that Wesleyans would say as little as possible about the domestic infelicities of Freethinkers. But Mr. Watkinson is not to be restrained by any such consideration. Although a Wesleyan (as we understand) he challenges comparisons on this point. He has read the biographies and autobiographies of several "leading Freethinkers," and he invites the world to witness how selfish and sensual they were in their domestic relations. He is a pulpit rhetorician, so he goes boldly and recklessly to work. Subtlety

³ *The Influence of Scepticism on Character.* Being the sixteenth Fernley Lecture. By the Rev. William L. Watkinson. London: T. Woolmer.

and discrimination he abhors as pedantic vices, savoring too much of "culture." His judgments are of the robustious order. Like Jesus Christ, he fancies that all men can be divided into sheep and goats. The good are good, and the bad are bad. And naturally the good are Christians and bad are Freethinkers.

The first half of Mr. Watkinson's book of 162 pages (it must have been a pretty long lecture!) is a preface to the second half, which contains his fling at Goethe, Mill, George Eliot, Harriet Martineau, Carlyle, and other offenders against the Watkinsonian code. We think it advisable, therefore, to follow him through his preface first, and through his "charges" afterwards.

Embedded in a lot of obscure or questionable matter in Mr. Watkinson's exordium is this sentence – "What we believe with our whole heart is of the highest consequence to us." True, but whether it is of the highest consequence to other people depends on what it is. Conviction is a good thing, but it cannot dispense with the criterion of truth. On the other hand, what passes for conviction may often be mere acquiescence. That term, we believe, would accurately describe the creed of ninety-nine out of every hundred, in every part of the world, whose particular faith is merely the result of the geographical accident of their birth. Assuredly we do not agree with Mr. Watkinson that "all reasonable people will acknowledge that the faith of Christian believers is to a considerable extent most real; nay, in tens of thousand of cases it is the most real thing in their life."

Mr. Cotter Morison laboriously refutes this position in his fine volume on *The Service of Man*. Mill denied and derided it in a famous passage of his great essay *On Liberty*. Mr. Justice Stephen denies it in the *Nineteenth Century*. Carlyle also, according to Mr. Fronde, said that "religion as it existed in England had ceased to operate all over the conduct of men in their ordinary business, it was a hollow appearance, a word without force in it." These men may not be "reasonable" in Mr. Watkinson's judgment, but with most people their word carries a greater weight than his.

Mr. Watkinson contends – and what will not a preacher contend? – that "the denial of the great truths of the Evangelical faith can exert only a baneful influence on character." We quite agree with him. But evangelicalism, and the great truths of evangelicalism, are very different things. It is dangerous to deny any "great truth," but how many does evangelicalism possess? Mr. Watkinson would say "many." We should say "none." Still less, if that were possible, should we assent to his statement that "morals in all spheres and manifestations must suffer deeply by the prevalence of scepticism." Mr. Morison, asserts and proves that this sceptical age is the most moral the world has seen, and that as we go back into the Ages of Faith, vice and crime grow denser and darker.

If the appeal is to history, of which Mr. Watkinson's references do not betray a profound knowledge, the verdict will be dead against him.

Mr. Justice Stephen thinks morality can look after itself, but

he doubts whether "Christian charity" will survive "Christian theology." This furnishes Mr. Watkinson with a sufficient theme for an impressive sermon. But his notion of "Christian charity" and Mr. Justice Stephen's are very different. The hard-headed judge means the sentimentalism and "pathetic exaggerations" of the Sermon on the Mount, which he has since distinctly said would destroy society if they were fully practised. "Morality," says Mr. Watkinson, "would suffer on the mystical side." Perhaps so. It might be no longer possible for a Louis the Fifteenth to ask God's blessing when he went to debauch a young girl in the *Parc aux Cerfs*, or for a grave philosopher like Mr. Tylor to write in his *Anthropology* that "in Europe brigands are notoriously church-goers." Yet morality might gain as much on the practical side as it lost on the mystical, and we fancy mankind would profit by the change.

Now for Mr. Watkinson's history, which he prints in small capitals, probably to show it is the real, unadulterated article. He tell us that "the experiment of a nation living practically a purely secular life has been tried more than once" with disastrous results. He is, however, very careful not to mention these nations, and we defy him to do so. What he does is this. He rushes off to Pompeii, whose inhabitants he thinks were Secularists! He also reminds us in a casual way that "they had crucified Christ a few years before," which again is news. Equally accurate is the statement that Pompeii was an "infamous" city, "full" of drunkenness, cruelty, etc. Probably Mr. Watkinson, like most

good Christians who go to Pompeii, visited an establishment, such as we have thousands of in Christendom, devoted to the practical worship of Venus without neglecting Priapus. He has forgotten the immortal letter of Pliny, and the dead Roman sentinel at the post of duty. He acts like a foreigner who should describe London from his experience at a brothel.

Philosophy comes next. Mr. Watkinson puts in a superior way the clap-trap of Christian Evidence lecturers. If man is purely material, and the law of causation is universal, where, he asks, "is the place for virtue, for praise, for blame?" Has Mr. Watkinson never read the answer to these questions? If he has not, he has much to learn; if he has, he should refute them. Merely positing and repositing an old question is a very stale trick in religious controversy. It imposes on some people, but they belong to the "mostly fools."

"Morality is in as much peril as faith," cries Mr. Watkinson. Well, the clergy have been crying that for two centuries, yet our criminal statistics lessen, society improves, and literature grows cleaner. As for the "nasty nude figures" that offend Mr. Watkinson's eyes in the French Salon, we would remind him that God Almighty makes everybody naked, clothes being a human invention. With respect to the Shelley Society "representing the *Cenci* and other monstrous themes," we conclude that Mr. Watkinson does not know what he is talking about. There is incest in the *Cenci*, but it is treated in a high dramatic spirit as a frightful crime, ending in bloodshed and desolation.

There is also incest in the Bible, commonplace, vulgar, bestial incest, recorded without a word of disapprobation. Surely when a Christian minister, who says the Bible is God's Word, knowing it contains the beastly story of Lot and his daughters, cries out against Shelley's *Cenci* as "monstrous," he invites inextinguishable Rabelaisian laughter. No other reply is fitting for such a "monstrous" absurdity, and we leave our readers to shake their sides at Mr. Watkinson's expense.

Mr. Watkinson asks whether infidelity has "produced new and higher types of character." Naturally he answers the question in the negative. "The lives of infidel teachers," he exclaims, "are in saddest contrast to their pretentious philosophies and bland assumptions." He then passes in review a picked number of these upstarts, dealing with each of them in a Watkinsonian manner. His rough-and-ready method is this. Carefully leaving out of sight all the good they did, and the high example of honest thought they set to the world, he dilates upon their failings without the least regard to the general moral atmosphere of their age, or the proportion of their defects to the entirety of their natures. Mr. Smith, the greengrocer, whose horizon is limited to his shop and his chapel, may lead a very exemplary life, according to orthodox standards; but his virtues, as well as his vices, are rather of a negative character, and the world at large is not much the better for his having lived in it. On the other hand a man like Mirabeau may be shockingly incontinent, but if in the crisis of a nation's history he places his genius, his eloquence,

and his heroic courage at the service of liberty, and helps to mark a new epoch of progress, humanity can afford to pardon his sexual looseness in consideration of his splendid service to the race. Judgment, in short, must be pronounced on the sum-total of a man's life, and not on a selected aspect. Further, the faults that might be overwhelming in the character of Mr. Smith, the Methodist greengrocer, may sink into comparative insignificance in the character of a great man, whose intellect and emotions are on a mightier scale. This truth is admirably expressed in Carlyle's *Essay on Burns*.

"Not the few inches of deflection from the mathematical orbit, which are so easily measured, but the *ratio* of these to the whole diameter, constitutes the real aberration. This orbit may be a planet's, its diameter the breadth of the solar system; or it may be a city hippodrome; nay the circle of a ginhorse, its diameter a score of feet or paces. But the inches of deflection only are measured: and it is assumed that the diameter of the ginhorse, and that of the planet, will yield the same ratio when compared with them! Here lies the root of many a blind, cruel condemnation of Burnses, Swifts, Rousseaus, which one never listens to with approval. Granted, the ship comes into harbor with shrouds and tackle damaged; the pilot is blameworthy; he has not been all-wise and all-powerful: but to know *how* blameworthy, tell us first whether his voyage has been round the Globe, or only to Ramsgate and the Isle of Dogs."

We commend this fine passage to Mr. Watkinson's attention.

It may make him a little more modest when he next applies his orthodox tape and callipers to the character of his betters.

Goethe is Mr. Watkinson's first infidel hero, and we are glad to see that he makes this great poet a present to Freethought. Some Christians claim Goethe as really one of themselves, but Mr. Watkinson will have none of him. "The actual life of Goethe," he tells us, "was seriously defective." Perhaps so, and the same might have been said of hundreds of Christian teachers who lived when he did, had they been big enough to have their lives written for posterity. Goethe's fault was a too inflammable heart, and with the license of his age, which was on the whole remarkably pious, he courted more than one pretty woman; or, if the truth must be told, he did not repel the pretty women who threw themselves at him. But there were thousands of orthodox men who acted in the same way. The distinctive fact about Goethe is that he kept a high artistic ideal always before him, and cultivated his poetic gifts with tireless assiduity. His sensual indulgences were never allowed to interfere with his great aim in life, and surely that is something. The result is that the whole world is the richer for his labors, and only the Watkinsons can find any delight in dwelling on the failings he possessed in common with meaner mortals. To say that Goethe should be "an object of horror to the whole self-respecting world" is simply to indulge in the twang of the tabernacle.

Carlyle is the next sinner; but, curiously, the *Rock*, while praising Mr. Watkinson's lecture, says that "Carlyle ought not

to be classed with the sceptics." We dissent from the *Rock* however; and we venture to think that Carlyle's greatest fault was a paltering with himself on religious subjects. His intellect rejected more than his tongue disowned. Mr. Watkinson passes a very different criticism. Taking Carlyle as a complete sceptic, he proceeds to libel him by a process which always commends itself to the preachers of the gospel of charity. He picks from Mr. Froude's four volumes a number of tid-bits, setting forth Carlyle's querulousness, arrogance, and domestic storms with Mrs. Carlyle. Behold the man! exclaims Mr. Watkinson. Begging his pardon, it is not the man at all. Carlyle was morbidly sensitive by nature, he suffered horribly from dyspepsia, and intense literary labor, still further deranging his nerves, made him terribly irritable. But he had a fine side to his nature, and even a sunny side. Friends like Professor Tyndall, Professor Norton, Sir James Stephen, and Mrs. Gilchrist, saw Carlyle in a very different light from Mr. Froude's. Besides, Mrs. Carlyle made her own choice. She deliberately married a man of genius, whom she recognised as destined to make a heavy mark on his age. She had her man of genius, and he put his life into his books. And what a life! And what books! The sufficient answer to all the Watkinson tribe is to point to Carlyle's thirty volumes. This is the man. Such work implies a certain martyrdom, and those who stood beside him should not have complained so lustily that they were scorched by the fire. Carlyle did a giant's work, and he had a right to some failings. Freethinkers see them as well as

Mr. Watkinson, but they are aware that no man is perfect, and they do not hold up Carlyle, or any other sceptic, as a model for universal imitation.

Mr. Watkinson's remarks on George Eliot are simply brutal. She was a "wanton." She "lived in free-love with George Henry Lewes." She had no excuse for her "license." She was "full of insincerity, cant, and hypocrisy." And so on *ad nauseam*. To call Mr. Watkinson a liar would be to descend to his level. Let us simply look at the facts. George Eliot lived with George Henry Lewes as his wife. She had no vagrant attachments. Her connection with Lewes only terminated with his death. Why then did they not marry? Because Lewes's wife was still living, and the pious English law would not allow a divorce unless all the household secrets were dragged before a gaping public. George Eliot consulted her own heart instead of social conventions. She became a mother to Lewes's children, and a true wife to him, though neither a priest nor a registrar blessed their union. She chose between the law of custom and the higher law, facing the world's frown, and relying on her own strength to bear the consequences of her act. To call such a woman a wanton and a kept mistress is to confess one's self devoid of sense and sensibility. Nor does it show much insight to assert that "infidelity betrayed and wrecked her life," and to speculate how glorious it might have been if she had "found Jesus." It will be time enough to listen to this strain when Mr. Watkinson can show us a more "glorious" female writer in the Christian camp.

William Godwin is the next Freethinker whom Mr. Watkinson calls up for judgment. All the brave efforts of the author of *Political Justice* in behalf of freedom and progress are quietly ignored. Mr. Watkinson comments, in a true vein of Christian charity, on the failings of his old age, censures his theoretical disrespect for the marriage laws, and inconsistently blames him for his inconsistency in marrying Mary Woolstonecraft. Of that remarkable woman he observes that scepticism "destroyed in her all that fine, pure feeling which is the glory of the sex." But the only proof he vouchsafes of this startling statement is a single sentence from one of her letters, which Mr. Watkinson misunderstands, as he misunderstands so many passages in Carlyle's letters, through sheer inability to comprehend the existence of such a thing as humor. He takes every jocular expression as perfectly serious, being one of those uncomfortable persons in whose society, as Charles Lamb said, you must always speak on oath. Mr. Watkinson's readers might almost exclaim with Hamlet, "How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us."

The next culprit is Shelley, who, we are told, "deserted his young wife and children in the most shameful and heartless fashion." It does not matter to Mr. Watkinson that Shelley's relations with Harriet are still a perplexing problem, or that when they parted she and the children were well provided for, Nor does he condescend to notice the universal consensus of opinion among those who were in a position to be informed

on the subject, that Harriet's suicide, more than two years afterwards, had nothing to do with Shelley's "desertion." Instead of referring to proper authorities, Mr. Watkinson advises his readers to consult "Mr. Jeafferson's painstaking volumes on the *Real Shelley*." Mr. Jeafferson's work is truly painstaking, but it is the work of an advocate who plays the part of counsel for the prosecution. Hunt, Peacock, Hogg, Medwin, Lady Shelley, Rossetti, and Professor Dowden – these are the writers who should be consulted. Shelley was but a boy when Harriet Westbrook proposed to run away with him. Had he acted like the golden youth of his age, and kept her for a while as his mistress, there would have been no scandal. His father, in fact, declared that he would hear nothing of marriage, but he would keep as many illegitimate children as Shelley chose to get. It was the intense chivalry of Shelley's nature that turned a very simple affair into a pathetic tragedy. Mr. Watkinson's brutal methods of criticism are out of place in such a problem. He lacks insight, subtlety, delicacy of feeling, discrimination, charity, and even an ordinary sense of justice.

James Mill is another flagrant sinner. Mr. Watkinson goes to the length of blaming him because "his temper was constitutionally irritable," as though he constructed himself. Here, again, Mr. Watkinson's is a purely debit account. He ignores James Mill's early sacrifices for principle, his strenuous labor for what he considered the truth, and his intense devotion to the education of his children. His temper was undoubtedly

austere, but it is more than possible that this characteristic was derived from his forefathers, who had been steeped in the hardest Calvinism.

John Stuart Mill was infatuated with Mrs. Taylor, whom he married when she became a widow. But Mr. Watkinson conceals an important fact. He talks of "selfish pleasure" and "indulgence," but he forgets to tell his readers that Mrs. Taylor was *a confirmed invalid*. It is perfectly obvious, therefore, that Mill was attracted by her mental qualities; and it is easy to believe Mill when he disclaims any other relation than that of affectionate friendship. No one but a Watkinson could be so foolish as to imagine that men seek sensual gratification in the society of invalid ladies.

Harriet Martineau is "one of the unloveliest female portraits ever traced." Mr. Watkinson is the opposite of a ladies' man. Gallantry was never his foible. He hates female Freethinkers with a perfect hatred. He pours out on Harriet Martineau his whole vocabulary of abuse. But it is, after all, difficult to see what he is in such a passion about. Harriet Martineau had no sexual sins, no dubious relations, no skeleton in the domestic cupboard. But, says Mr. Watkinson, she was arrogant and censorious. Oh, Watkinson, Watkinson! have you not one man's share of those qualities yourself? Is there not "a sort of a smack, a smell to" of them in your godly constitution?

We need not follow Mr. Watkinson's nonsense about "the domestic shrine of Schopenhauer," who was a gay and festive

bachelor to the day of his death. As for Mr. Watkinson's treatment of Comte, it is pure Christian; in other words, it contains the quintessence of uncharitableness. Comte had a taint of insanity, which at one time necessitated his confinement. That he was troublesome to wife and friends is not surprising, but surely a man grievously afflicted with a cerebral malady is not to be judged by ordinary standards. Comte's genius has left its mark on the nineteenth century; he was true to *that* in adversity and poverty. This is the fact posterity will care to remember when the troubles of his life are buried in oblivion.

Mr. Watkinson turns his attention next to the French Revolution, which he considers "as much a revolt against morals as it was against despotism." If that is his honest opinion, he must be singularly ignorant. The moral tone of the Revolutionists was purity itself compared with the flagrant profligacy of the court, the aristocracy, and the clergy, while Freethinkers were imprisoned, and heretics were broken on the wheel. We have really no time to give Mr. Watkinson lessons in French history, so we leave him to study it at his leisure.

It was natural that Voltaire should come in for his share of slander. All Mr. Watkinson can see in him is that he wrote "an unseemly poem," by which we presume he means *La Pucelle*. But he ought to know that the grosser parts of that poem were added by later hands, as may be seen at a glance in any variorum edition. In any case, to estimate Voltaire's *Pucelle* by the moral standard of a century later is to show an absolute want of judgment. Let

it be compared with similar works of *his* age, and it will not appear very heinous. But Voltaire did a great deal besides the composition of that poem. He fought despotism like a hero, he stabbed superstition to the heart, he protected the victims of ecclesiastical and political tyranny at the risk of his own life, he sheltered with exquisite generosity a multitude of orphans and widows, he assisted every genius who was trodden down by the age. These things, and the great mass of his brilliant writings, will live in the memory of mankind. Voltaire was not perfect; he shared some of the failings of his generation. But he fought the battle of freedom and justice for sixty years. Other men indulged in gallantry, other men wrote free verses. But when Calas was murdered by the priests, and his family desolated, it was Voltaire, and Voltaire alone, who faced the tyrants and denounced them in the name of humanity. His superb attitude on that critical occasion inspired the splendid eulogium of Carlyle, who was no friendly witness: "The whole man kindled into one divine blaze of righteous indignation, and resolution to bring help against the world."

ARE ATHEISTS CRUEL?⁴

There seems to be an ineradicable malignancy in the heart of professional Christianity. St. Paul, indeed in a fine passage of his first epistle to the Corinthians, speaks with glowing eloquence of the "charity" which "thinketh no evil." But the hireling advocates and champions of Christianity have ever treated the apostle's counsel with contempt in their dealings with sceptics and heretics. Public discussion is avoided by these professors of the gospel of love and practisers of the gospel of hatred. They find it "unprofitable." Consequently they neglect argument and resort to personalities. They frequently insinuate, and when it is safe they openly allege, that all who do not share their opinions are bad husbands, bad fathers, bad citizens, and bad men. Thus they cast libellous dust in the eyes of their dupes, and incapacitate them from seeing the real facts of the case for themselves. A notable illustration of this evil principle may be found in a recent speech by the Bishop of Chester. Dr. Jayne presided at a Town Hall meeting of the local branch of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and took advantage of the occasion to slander a considerable section of his fellow citizens. With a pious arrogance which is peculiar to his boastful faith, he turned what should have been a humanitarian assembly into a

⁴ April 26, 1891.

receptacle for his discharge of insolent fanaticism. Parentage is a natural fact, and the love of offspring is a well-nigh universal law of animal life. It would seem, therefore, that a Society for preventing cruelty to children by parents of perverted instincts, might live aloof from sectarian squabbles. But the Bishop of Chester is of a different opinion. He is a professional advocate of one form of faith, and his eye is strictly bent on business. He appears to be unable to talk anything but "shop." Even while pressing the claims of poor, neglected, ill-used children on the sympathy and assistance of a generous public, he could not refrain from insulting all those who have no love for his special line of business. And the insult was not only gratuitous; it was groundless, brutal, and malignant; so much so, indeed, that we cherish a hope that the Bishop has overreached himself, and that his repulsive slander will excite a re-action in favor of the objects of his malice.

Dr. Jayne told the meeting that "the persons who were most liable to be guilty of cruelty to their children were those artisans who had taken up Secularist opinions, and who looked upon their children as a nuisance, and were glad to get them out of the way."

Now, on the face of it, the statement is positively grotesque in its absurdity. If Secular principles tend to make parents hate their own children, why should their evil influence be confined to artisans? And if Secular principles do not produce parental hatred in the wealthier classes, why does Dr. Jayne hurl this disgraceful accusation at the poorer class of unbelievers? It

cannot be simply because they are poorer, for he was delighted to know that "poverty by no means necessarily meant cruelty." What, then, is the explanation? It seems to us very obvious. Dr. Jayne was bent on libelling sceptics, and, deeming it *safer* to libel the *poorer* ones, he tempered his valor with a convenient amount of discretion. He is not even a brave fanatic. His bigotry is crawling, cowardly, abject, and contemptible.

Dr. Jayne relied upon the authority of Mr. Waugh, who happened to be present at the meeting. This gentleman jumped up in the middle of the Bishop's speech, and said "it was the case, that the class most guilty of cruelty to children were those who took materialistic, atheistic, selfish and wicked views of their own existence." Surely this is a "fine derangement of epitaphs." It suggests that Mr. Waugh is less malignant than foolish. What connection does he discover between Secularism and selfishness? Is it in our principles, in our objects, or in our policy? Does he really imagine that the true character of any body of men and women is likely to be written out by a hostile partisan? Such a person might be a judge of our *public* actions, and we are far from denying his right to criticise them; but when he speaks of our *private* lives, before men of his own faith, and without being under the necessity of adducing a single scrap of evidence, it is plain to the most obtuse intelligence that his utterances are perfectly worthless.

We have as much right as Mr. Waugh to ask the world to accept our view of the private life of Secularists. That is, we

have no right at all. Nevertheless we have a right to state our experience and leave the reader to form his own opinion. Having entered the homes of many Secularists, we have been struck with their fondness for children. The danger lies, if it lies anywhere, in their tendency to "spoil" them. It is a curious fact – and we commend it to the attention of Dr. Jayne and Mr. Waugh – that the most sceptical country in Europe is the one where children are the best treated, and where there is no need for a Society to save them from the clutches of cruelty. There is positively a child-cultus in the great French cities, and especially in Freethinking Paris. In this Bible-and-beer-loving land the workman, like his social "superior," stands or sits drinking in a public-house with male cronies; but the French workman usually sits at the *cafe* table with his wife, and on Sundays with his children, and takes his drink, whatever it may be, under the restraining eyes of those before whom a man is least ready to debase himself.

One Secular home, at least, is known to us intimately. It is the home of the present writer, who for the moment drops the editorial "we" and speaks in the first person. My children are the children of an Atheist, yet if they do not love me as heartily as Dr. Jayne's or Mr. Waugh's children love their father, "there's witchcraft in it." There is no rod, and no punishment in my home. We work with the law of love. Striking a child is to me a loathsome idea. I shrink from it as I would from a physical pollution. Strike a child once, be brutal to it once, and there is gone forever that look of perfect trust in the child's eyes, which

is a parent's dearest possession, and which I would not forfeit for all the prizes in the world.

I know Christians who are less kind to their children than I am to mine. They are not my natural inferiors. Humanity forbid that I should play the Pharisee! But they are degraded below their natural level by the ghastly notion of parental "authority" I do not say there are no rights in a family. There *are*; and there are also duties. But all the rights belong to the children, and all the duties belong to the parents.

Personally I am not fond of talking about myself. Still less am I anxious to make a public exhibition of my home. But if the Dr. Jaynes and the Mr. Waughs of the Christian world provoke comparisons, I have no fear of standing with my little ones opposite them with theirs, and letting the world judge between us.

Dropping again into the editorial style, we have a question to ask of the Bishop of Chester, or rather of Mr. Waugh. It is this. Where are the statistics to justify your assertion? Men who are sent to gaol, for whatever reason, have their religions registered. Give us, then, the total number of convictions your Society has obtained, and the precise proportion of Secularists among the offenders. And be careful to give us their names and the date and place of their conviction.

We have a further word to all sorts and conditions of libellous Christians. Where are the evidences of Atheistic cruelty? The humanest of the Roman emperors were those who were least

under the sway of religion. Julius Caesar himself, the "foremost man of all this world," who was a professed Atheist, was also the most magnanimous victor that ever wore the purple. Akbar, the Freethinker, was the noblest ruler of India. Frederick the Great was kind and just to his subjects. But, on the other hand, who invented and who applied such instruments of cruelty as racks, wheels, and thumbscrews? Who invented separate tortures for every part of the sensitive frame of man? Who burnt heretics? Who roasted or drowned millions of "witches"? Who built dungeons and filled them? Who brought forth cries of agony from honest men and women that rang to the tingling stars? Who burnt Bruno? Who spat filth over the graves of Paine and Voltaire? The answer is one word – Christians. Yet with all this blood on their hands, and all this crime on their consciences, they turn round and fling the epithet of "cruel" at the perennial victims of their malice.

ARE ATHEISTS WICKED?

One of the most effective arts of priestcraft has been the misrepresentation and slander of heretics. To give the unbeliever a bad name is to prejudice believers against all communication with him. By this means a twofold object is achieved; first, the faithful are protected from the contagion of scepticism; secondly, the notion is propagated that there is something essentially immoral involved in, or attendant upon, unorthodox opinions; and thus the prevalent religious ideas of the age become associated with the very preservation and stability of the moral order of human society.

This piece of trickery cannot, of course, be played upon the students of civilisation, who, as Mill remarked, are aware that many of the most valuable contributions to human improvement have been the work of men who knew, and rejected, the Christian faith. But it easily imposes on the multitude, and it will never be abandoned until it ceases to be profitable.

Sometimes it takes the form of idle stories about the death-beds of Freethinkers, who are represented as deploring their ill-spent life, and bewailing the impossibility of recalling the wicked opinions they have put into circulation. At other times it takes the form of exhibiting their failings, without the slightest reference to their virtues, as the sum and substance of their character. When these methods are not sufficient, recourse is had to insinuation.

Particular sceptics are spared perhaps, but Freethinkers are depicted – like the poor in Tennyson's "Northern Farmer" – as bad in the lump. It is broadly hinted that it is a moral defect which prevents them from embracing the popular creed; that they reject what they do not wish to believe; that they hate the restraints of religion, and therefore reject its principles; that their unbelief, in short, is only a cloak for sensual indulgence or an excuse for evading irksome obligations.

We are so accustomed to this monstrous theory of scepticism in religious circles, that it did not astonish us, or give us the least surprise, to read the following paragraph in the *Christian Commonwealth*—

"Free Life, and No Compulsory Virtue, was the title of a placard borne by a pamphlet seller of the public highway a few days ago. What the contents of the pamphlets were we do not know, but the title is a suggestive sign of the times, and a rather more than usually plain statement of what a good deal of modern doubt amounts to. Lord Tennyson was severely taken to task a few years ago for making the Atheist a villain in his 'Promise of May,' but he was about right. Much of the doubt of the day is only an outcome of the desire to discredit and throw off the restraints of religion and moral law in the name of freedom, wrongly used. Free love, free life, free divorce, free Sundays, in the majority of cases, are but synonyms for license. Those who hold the Darwinian doctrine of descent from a kind of ape may yet see it proved by a reversion to the beast, if men succeed in

getting all the false and pernicious freedom they want."

Now, in reply to this paragraph, we have first to observe that our contemporary takes Lord Tennyson's name in vain. The villain of the "Promise of May" is certainly an Agnostic, but are not the villains of many other plays Christians? Lord Tennyson does not make the rascal's wickedness the logical result of his principles; indeed, although our contemporary seems ignorant of the fact, he disclaimed any such intention. A press announcement was circulated by his eldest son, on his behalf, that the rascal was meant to be a sentimentalist and ne'er-do-well, who, whatever his opinions, would have come to a bad end. When the *Commonwealth*, therefore, talks of Lord Tennyson as "about right," it shows, in a rather vulgar way, the danger of incomplete information. Were we to copy its manners we might use a swifter phrase.

That Atheists, in the name of freedom, throw off the restraints of moral law, is a statement which we defy the *Commonwealth* to prove, or in the slightest degree to support, and we will even go to the length of suggesting how it might undertake the task.

Turpitude of character must betray itself. Moral corruption can no more be hidden than physical corruption. Wickedness "will out," like murder or smallpox. A man's wife discovers it; his children shun him instead of clinging about his knees; his neighbors and acquaintances eye him with suspicion or dislike; his evil nature pulsates through an ever-widening circle of detection, and in time his bad passions are written upon his

features in the infallible lines of mouth and eyes and face. How easy, then, it should be to pick out these Atheists. The most evil-looking men should belong to that persuasion. But do they? We invite our contemporary to a trial. Let it inquire the religious opinions of a dozen or two, and see if there is an Atheist among them.

Again, a certain amount of evil disposition *must* produce a certain percentage of criminal conduct. Accordingly the gaols should contain a large proportion of Atheists. But *do* they? Statistics prove they do *not*. When the present writer was imprisoned for "blasphemy," and was asked his religion, he answered "None," to the wide-eyed astonishment of the official who put the question. Atheists were scarce in the establishment. Catholics were there, and red tickets were on their cell-doors; Protestants were there, and white tickets marked their apartments; Jews were there, and provision was made for their special observances; but the Atheist was the *rara avis*, the very phoenix of Holloway Gaol.

Let us turn to another method of investigation. During the last ten years four members have been expelled from the House of Commons. One of them was not expelled in the full sense of the word; he was, however, thrust by brute force from the precincts of the House. His name was Charles Bradlaugh, and he was an Atheist. But what was his crime? Simply this: he differed from his fellow members as to his competence to take the parliamentary oath, and the ultimate event proved that he

was right and they were wrong. Now what were the crimes of the three other members, who were completely and absolutely expelled? Captain Verney was found guilty of procuration for seduction, Mr. Hastings was found guilty of embezzlement, and Mr. De Cobain was pronounced guilty of evading justice, while charged with unnatural offences. Mr. Jabez Spencer Balfour might also have been expelled, if he had not accepted the Chiltern Hundreds. Now all these *real* delinquents were Christians, and even ostentatious Christians. Compare them with Charles Bradlaugh, the Atheist, and say which side has the greatest cause for shame and humiliation.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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