

TWO recent events, occurring in Germany and Austria respectively, have revealed on the part of the despotic rulers of these two empires a spirit of patience, justice and even sympathy with the labouring masses that is probably unprecedented in those quarters. In the great miners' strikes in Rhenish Westphalia, though the Emperor William declared in autocratic and threatening tones his determination to repress all disorders, he yet evinced a good deal of sympathy with the strikers in their demand for higher wages, and apparently not without effect. In the case of the strike of the street car conductors in Vienna, Emperor Francis Joseph pursued a very similar course. While rebuking the police for want of energy in putting down the mob, he did not hesitate to notify the companies that, in his opinion, the men were right in asking for shorter hours. This, too, produced the desired result, and the conductors have now to work but twelve hours instead of fourteen. It is noteworthy that in this case the City Council of Vienna took a somewhat novel course in fining the companies £5,000 for breach of contract and £1,000 for every day of idleness. If this action should be followed as a precedent it would put a new and powerful weapon into the hands of striking employees of contractors, whenever the former were able to carry with them the sympathy of the public.

### PRISON LABOUR.

THE question of prison labour is one which at present attracts a good deal of attention from politicians and political economists. The good old-fashioned idea was that criminals, who had forfeited their right to go at large, and who had to be supported by the state in our jails and penitentiaries, should be kept at hard labour; and an eminently proper view of the case it was and is. But with the extension of the franchise and the organization of labour unions the workingmen's votes have become such an important factor in election contests that politicians have yielded to the popular clamour that prison labour shall not be allowed to compete with free labour, even if the result should be to keep prisoners in a state of idleness. I would be the last to advocate anything detrimental to the best interests of the working classes; at the same time it is desirable that the criminal class who will not work out of prison should be made to work in it; and, I think, I can show that the competition with free labour from within prison walls is very insignificant, and that the working classes would be losers instead of gainers were imprisonment "with hard labour" done away with.

There are two aspects from which the matter may be viewed—how it affects the prisoners and how it affects society. With reference to the first it must be borne in mind that the object of punishment is two-fold—to protect society and to reform the criminal. The latter object will fail if prisoners are to be kept in idleness. Nothing can be worse for their bodies and minds, to say nothing of the desirability of teaching them a trade by which they may earn an honest living when they are set free. A recent report of a committee on political reform in the State of New York shows the effect of idleness on the part of prisoners. Formerly their labour was farmed out on the contract system to manufacturers of shoes, hardware and other goods; but to meet the demands of the labour organizations the system was done away with. The results are described by the wardens of the prisons as horrible. Deprived of liberty and kept in idleness, brooding over their condition, mind and body have alike become affected, and restlessness, disease and insanity have ensued. The commitments to the insane asylums show a marked increase since the change. The workers of the country need protection at no such cost.

The Quaker poet Whittier, who has given some study to the aspect of the case just referred to, recently wrote the following letter on the occasion of a public meeting in New York to protest against the enforced idleness of prisoners:

DEAR MR. ROUND,—I am glad that a public meeting is to be held in your city to protest in the name of Christianity and humanity against the enforced idleness in prisons, perilous alike to body and mind, which can only result in filling your prisons with maniacs. My sympathies are with the labouring class in all their just demands, and I would favour every legitimate measure which promises to benefit them. But the suppression of labour in the prisons is too small a gain for them to be purchased by the transformation of prisons into mad-houses. I trust further reflection and knowledge of the dreadful consequences of the slow torture of brooding idleness will ere long induce them to forego what must be a trifling benefit at the best. With my best wishes for the success of your philanthropic endeavours I am truly thy friend,

JOHN G. WHITTIER.

Danvers, Mass., April 5, 1889.

As to the effect on society. Even if the result of keeping prisoners in idleness was not that already indicated, an idle life has such an attraction for those who constitute the criminal classes that the prospect of being sent where they would be well warmed and fed and have nothing to do would have a tendency to increase crime for the mere sake of being committed to prison; and our jails and penitentiaries should certainly not be made places which offer any attraction.

But the extent to which prison labour enters into competition with free labour is greatly exaggerated. In the State of New York, assuming all the prisoners to be employed, their proportion to the total labour list is placed

at fifty-two one-hundredths of one per cent, and it is not likely that in Canada the proportion is any greater. The efficiency of prison labour as compared with outside labour is reckoned at only sixty per cent. Taking these two facts into consideration the competition is reduced to three-tenths of one per cent, an infinitesimal amount. Is it not better to stand this competition than to be heavily taxed to maintain prisoners in idleness? A moment's reflection will show which is the cheapest and best.

As to the kind of work at which prisoners should be employed so as to enter as little as possible into competition with free labour, there seems to be great difference of opinion. It has been suggested that they should be utilized in public works, or in working mines or forests. In any of these departments their labour would compete with that of outsiders, while a large force of guards would be required to watch them if employed outside the prison walls. It has also been recommended, and the labour commission recently appointed by the Dominion Government took this view in their report, that prisoners should make the articles required by the government in the public institutions. I do not see how that would do away with competition, for if these articles were not made by prison labour they would be produced by free labour and purchased by the government as required. One suggestion may be good in its way, namely, that the profits of prison labour should go to the maintenance of the prisoner or to his family, rather than into the pockets of contractors.

If prisoners are to be made to work at all they must compete to some degree—after all very limited as I have shown—with free labour. Criminals may stand living in idleness, but no well ordered society can stand it. What kind of work they shall be employed upon so as to compete to as small a degree as possible with outside labour is the problem to be solved. Nor will it do to keep them at unproductive work such as I have heard of in some prisons—wheeling sand, for instance, from one part of the yard to another. Such an occupation may furnish mere physical exercise; but it can never interest the mind, in fact the spirit must rebel against such work. That prisoners should be employed must be conceded, in what manner is the question which demands an answer.

J. J. BELL.

### THE WAIL OF THE SCEPTIC.

AN article signed F. J. Gould, and entitled "The Christian's God," which defines the position of the sceptic concisely and clearly, appears in *Secular Thought*, of May 4. If the article voices the sentiments of sceptics in general, it shows us not only what they reject in Religion, but also what they would fain accept; indeed, what they long for, but confessedly cannot find.

Mr. Gould begins thus: "If an Almighty and supremely good God were to reveal Himself to mankind to-day, all scepticism would vanish away by to-morrow. The world stands in sore need of Almighty Justice and Almighty Love. Oppressed nations, trembling slaves, the fatherless, and widow, the leper, the cripple, and the blind, the unhappy Lazarus that lies at the gate of society; all these murmur a ceaseless prayer for a God."

Again: "The Christian believes in a God; the sceptic yearns for one."

We are glad to hear this. We know, indeed, that there are some who do not want a God at all—who see no necessity for one. But we are glad to know that Mr. Gould and those he represents (who are, we suppose, the readers of *Secular Thought*) all "yearn for a God"—a God of "Almighty Justice and Almighty Love." There is something here to work upon.

To the question which is obviously suggested by these cravings of the sceptic: "Why then do you not accept the Christian's God?" Mr. Gould answers that the Christian's God does not come up to his ideal. First, because the Christian's God is only revealed "by a book." "I should not have to pore over the pages of a book to find God. He would meet me face to face in every nook and cranny of this broad world." Secondly, because the Bible ideal of God is so anthropomorphic. "The Christian's God eats, He drinks, He smells, He laughs to scorn, He mocks," etc. "The Christian's God is continually hindered and thwarted by the devil." In short, "He is lacking in dignity, nobility, generosity, love, wisdom, power."

Mr. Gould next gives a *résumé*, somewhat one-sided, of Bible History, and says that "God closed His Revelation with a book full of fearful imprecations, volcanic horrors, volumes of smoke from the accursed abyss and the lurid flames of hell. If you seek for the cause of unbelief, study this history of the Christian's God, for the cause is there. The Bible is the mother of scepticism."

Bishop Butler's reply to these old-time objections is next taken up; and to his reasoning on "The Analogy of Revealed Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature," Mr. Gould says, in effect, so much the worse for both. "Every drop of man's blood cries out indignantly that the constitution of things is not right." "If then the God of the Bible is the God of Nature, He is doubly condemned. I, as a sceptic, refuse to bow the knee to either, because both are unmerciful and unrighteous." "Of course, if you read his famous 'Analogy' you will see that his grand aim is to excuse the blots on the Bible by pointing out the bloodstains which Nature has left on the earth." And then Mr. Gould winds up his article with the curious appeal to us Christians; "In spite of Bishop Butler's frowns, I invite you to imagine a God

worthier of worship than the God he worshipped and whom he was obliged to defend."

We have given an outline of this article; now, let us see what is its import.

The sceptic "yearns for" a God—a God of "Almighty Justice and Almighty Love." "The world," he confesses, "stands in sore need" of such a God. All the victims of wrong or suffering "murmur a ceaseless prayer" for such a God. But the God that he wants is not the God of the Bible—because He "is lacking in dignity," etc. Nor does he want for his God the Creator of all things. "If the God of the Bible is the God of Nature, He is doubly condemned." That is to say, if a God did create the Universe, that God must be a malignant God—because Nature is so cruel. Yet he "yearns" for a God; and since the Author of Nature is his aversion, he invites us Christians to gratify his "yearnings" by "imagining" a God superior to the Creator of all things, "worthier of being worshipped than the God he [Bishop Butler] worshipped."

Well, we will try and accommodate Mr. Gould by "imagining" such a God. This God could never (by the hypothesis) have made the world. Yet He must be "an almighty and supremely good God"—this God of whom "the world stands in such sore need," and for whom all distressed nature "murmurs a ceaseless prayer."

Now, if this God for whom the sceptic "yearns" is in existence, how came it that He allowed some other God to create the universe, and so become the "Author of Nature"? Why, if he is almighty (and that is insisted upon), did He stand idly by, and not interpose when "cruel nature" thus began her course? This God whom the sceptic "yearns for" and "invites" us to "imagine" must be an otiose God, a God who "sleepeth, and must be awaked," to adopt Mr. Gould's own quotation. This God, whom he imagines "without passions, without vengeance, without harshness, full of dignity, love, wisdom and power," must have been enjoying his *otium cum dignitate* in some "Nirvana" when the Constitution of Things came into being, whenever and by whomsoever it came to pass; and his "love, wisdom and power" must have been at that time in abeyance. If there be such a God—a God, mark you, who disclaims all connection with the Author of Nature, for the sceptic will have nothing to do with Him—pray what is the use of "yearning" for him or "murmuring ceaseless prayers" to such a negligent God?

If, on the other hand, such a God is non-existent (and he might as well be for all the good he is to us), what is the use of "inviting" us to "imagine" him? The wail of the sceptic is unavailing. The "murmurs of ceaseless prayers" of all the sad world are as ineffectual as the "fanes of useless prayer," of which Tennyson sings—unless, indeed, our author imagines that by-and-by, in the "course of nature," in spite of her "unkind and reluctant hands," such a God will somehow be "evolved."

In either case we Christians must pity the sceptic who "yearns" and "murmurs ceaseless prayer" for a God that shall come up to his standard. And we can only try to calm his agitation and silence his wail by saying: There is a God who is all that you yearn for, and infinitely more. He is a God of infinite power, infinite wisdom, infinite love. He is of such infinite power that "all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." He has revealed Himself, and that not simply "by a book," as you think; that "book," though conventionally called His Revelation, is strictly speaking only the record of His Revelation, for he revealed himself *in person*. That "Book," which you say is "the mother of scepticism," is such only to those who, like yourself, read it amiss. Such men imagine that the Book is His only Revelation, and that it was published all at once, in the English language, stereotyped, in one bound volume, on a certain date. Such men talk of God's "closing His Revelation" with "the Book of the Apocalypse," when, in fact, the Apocalypse preceded in date some of the other portions of the record of the Revelation, and was placed at the end of the Bible by the canons of the Catholic Church as an arbitrary or convenient arrangement.

Such men forget, too, that the Bible is a series of records of divers revelations extending for over 1500 years—that these revelations were at first made to a race of men reduced by 400 years of most degrading slavery to a condition little short of brutism. It would be as absurd to attempt to teach the binomial theorem to the wretched creatures just dragged out of the hold of some slave dhow by a British cruiser, as to teach the children of Israel at Mount Sinai in the very refined and delicate style which Mr. Gould thinks the correct thing. Why, to such degraded creatures there was no other way of teaching the first principles of religion than by saying that God was jealous, angry, wroth, etc., and by speaking of His Eye, His Ear, His Hand, His Arm. As to His "executing vengeance," His "burning, drowning, raising fire from heaven, causing the earth to open," etc., why Nature is doing this to-day as of old. Our author rails at Nature as well as Nature's God. But we can't get over the facts, all the same: there they are, account for them as we may, abuse them as we may. But the Christian contents himself with the thought that his God—the author of Nature—is a God of Almighty Justice and Almighty Love, and knows what He is doing better than we do, and that His purposes and aims are higher than we can comprehend. Mr. Gould says: "If this be so, the matter is not mended, unless with Pope we have that large faith which maintains 'Whatever is, is right.'" Well; better, surely, to have