

Promoters' Report.

I promised to send the Pioneer list of promoters to the Torch when we numbered 20. Here it is. March, 1897, Eliza Mowry Bliven, Conn.; Pearl W. Geer, Oregon. April, H. L. Green, Ill. May, Jacob Miller, N. Y.; Mrs. M. M. Turner, Washington, D. C.; F. M. Van De Bogart, Iowa; A. L. Newton, Conn. July, Maurice Pritchard M. D., Cal.; Mrs. Mary Pritchard, Cal.; J. W. Thomas, Mo.; Dr. B. L. Hjermstad, Ohio. Aug., Joel M. Berry, Ohio; V. Anderson M. D., Neb.; John A. Wilson, Mass. Sept., John Peaker, Ohio; Mrs. R. A. Bell, Texas. Oct., A. Slaman, Dakota; S. D. Bliven, Conn.; James Brightman, R. I. Nov., J. E. Hosmer, Oregon; Mrs. M. P. Hosmer, Oregon.

Most of these will distribute tracts. Seven have already subscribed \$1. each. Some have written articles for the Torch and other papers, some have been distributing literature, some have written to friends about it, four have sent helps for the tracts, three propose trying to start Scientific Sunday meetings by and by, a few have not stated what they will do to help, and Mr. and Mrs. Hosmer, Mr. Geer, and Mr. Green, are devoting their whole time to the promotion of Freethought and Scientific Wisdom in so many ways that we can't enumerate them. Mrs. Bell has consented to try to forward the work throughout Texas. Joel M. Berry will take charge of the work in Ohio. I shall push it in Connecticut. Who else will offer to help? If our cause is worth anything, we should not be behind the Christians in zeal, perseverance, methods, or character. Don't be cowards. Be brave. There may be plenty of doubters all around, who only need a fearless, conscientious leader, to bring them gladly to your side, to learn more and help on the work.

Now that the first tract is ready, the distribution and enrollment ought to progress rapidly. Three states have three members each. What state will enroll the greatest number by Jan. 1st? Send me word what you do, so I can make out a live report, to encourage half-hearted ones to take hold and help. The second tract will soon be completed. I want some more helps on the third—examples or reason to prove that Science is more reliable than the Bible. But I shall want the most helps on the fourth tract, for I have not the works for making that first-class. I want that to convince the Christians that their bible is no better than others, and how science sets them all aside. Who will help a little? Send your helps in December. The revision of the "Plan" cannot be completed and printed in pamphlet form ready for distribution till January;

but it will be surer to become a success, because we are making it easier to carry out.

I want to report 100 members enrolled by January 1st. Hereafter, instead of their names, I will report the number in each state, with the promoters who obtain ten or more. We want no free-lovers nor drunkard-makers in our membership, for they are destroyers, not friends, of progress. Who can become members? If you favor scientific wisdom and morality, in place of Christianity, but your business prevents your talking or distributing our literature, send me your address with the statement, and I will list you with the Friends of Progress, so you can count one. But if you promise to talk favorably of our work to a dozen persons, or subscribe to the Torch or Candle, or any other moral Freethought paper, and loan it, or anything else you can do that will help us along, I will list you with the Promoters. Send me six cents and I will send you twenty-five copies of the first Tract, a Guide and a blank and list you as a Tract Distributor. For 10 cents I will send you 50 Tracts; for \$1, 600 tracts; or best of all, subscribe \$1. for the year's tracts and receive fifty each month, and thus "keep the hind ones learning." The first 100 Promoters and Tract Distributors enrolled, will receive a free copy of the "Plan" when printed, but those who enroll only as Friends of Progress, must send me 5 cents if they want a copy.

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Selfishness, Free Will and Social Conditions.

A writer in the Torch has said that we may be selfish in our relations with things outside of our species, but that we must be unselfish man with man. This he puts forth as a social solvent—the way to Brotherhood.

Now man, in common with all nature, is a selfish being—it is the first requisite of life. And this he must ever be in all his relations, not only with his neighbors, but even in the closest possible relationship with another of his kind. This seems like a harsh doctrine when we look about us and see the misery resulting from "man's inhumanity to man", which we are in the habit of considering as due to selfishness wholly. I say habit because people have habits of thought as well as of action. There are even fads in thought and theory, as well as in dress and the breed of dogs. But saying that man is and must be selfish is not saying that the brotherhood of man is impossible. The miseries referred to, which have caused some sympathetic persons to jump to the conclusion that unselfishness is the remedy and extoll this impossible attribute as a vir-

tue, result not so much from selfishness as such, as from ignorance—unwise social arrangements. There is no call for the exercise of unselfishness, even were it possible, in righting these wrongs. In fact, we delude ourselves if we suppose we are unselfish in desiring a better condition of things. We cannot desire the good of others above self, any more than a god could understand and sympathize with man. Had I never suffered, I could not sympathize with those who suffer; and if I did not suffer in beholding misery, I could have no possible interest in relieving it. Therefore I am selfish in desiring better conditions for those who are even poorer and more miserable than myself. In the search for happiness, man will some time learn that it is not to be found in treading his brother in the dust, and though not less selfish than he has been in this mad scramble for wealth, he will accord to all a just share in the necessities and comforts of life, and find his individual happiness in the happiness of all. The difference here indicated is only that between wisely and unwisely directed selfishness.

My point is a fundamental one in a scientific study of the question. We may preach unselfishness for a lifetime, and so long as present conditions last the same manifestations will continue. The system compels men to a cut-throat competition. We have not been created and set up here with the power of being this or that, good or bad, by the simple exercise of will. We are products of conditions, and so long as conditions continue to operate upon us the product is incomplete. Each day, every change and variation of environment has its share in determining our conduct. This is the new doctrine that Freethought is destined to bring to the people, and when fully comprehended, when the yoke of superstition is sufficiently broken that men dare to accept a truth contrary to the dogmas of the priesthood, it will revolutionize social conditions. We have been habituated to the idea that man is a "free moral agent" that by the mere exercise of will he can determine what manner of man he will be. But mind being as much a product of conditions as the body, he can no more change the one than the other by force of will, which is itself but the impulse arising from the play of environment upon the organism. The free-will dogma has habituated men to the idea that social conditions are of no consequence—that if people wish to be good they can be good, and if they wish to be bad they will be bad, under any social system. How often we are told that we "must change human nature before we can have better conditions." This is a direct outgrowth of free-will dogma—a dogma as false as the god

idea itself, and one that must die with it. The fact is, bad conditions are due to ignorance. Man adopts new truths as he is able to comprehend them, which process has been so hindered by religion that he has not yet progressed beyond the point where a few can exploit at pleasure the toiling many. But with the destruction of this one dogm, and the comprehension of the relation of man to his surroundings, which much to be desired consummation the pioneers of Freethought have brought within sight, a new era will open up to mankind, in which progress can no more be interrupted by the priests of superstition.

J. H. MORRIS.

Bible House to Be Sold.

Owing to a decrease in its income, the American Bible Society has been forced into a position where it must secure a large sum of money or cease its operations. Rumor to this effect has been in circulation for some time, but they lacked confirmation until this afternoon, when the truth was admitted by E. W. Gilman, Secretary of the Society, and by William Foulke, the Treasurer. An appeal is to be made to the pastors of all churches in New York and Brooklyn next week for funds to carry on the labors of the Society. The Bible House, at Fourth avenue, and Astor place, has been put on the market, and Treasurer Foulke said this forenoon that no reasonable price for it would be refused. The property is said to be worth more than \$750,000.

The cause of the present troubles of one of the most famous religious organizations in either this country or Europe seems to have been a gradual loss of interest. The circulation of Bibles as a means of spreading Christianity seems also to have been suspended to a great degree to other methods. The present site of the Bible House is no longer appropriate for the society, because of the growth of the city uptown and the income from it has decreased in consequence. For many years the Bible House offices were in great demand, and the rentals furnished a sufficient income to pay the salaries of the executive officers.

The deficiency in this income has had to be made up from other sources. The legacies and donations on which the society has been existing are about exhausted, and while not financially embarrassed in the general acceptance of the term, the organization is in a serious condition, and it must curtail its work greatly if it does not go out of existence entirely.

At the last meeting of the Board of Directors of the Society the suggestion was made that the manufacture of Bibles be stopped. No definite action, however, was taken.