

to this fountain of genuine Jewish learning to study Jewish history, Talmudic jurisprudence, Hebrew language, and the vast Jewish literature from the Bible down to the works of the New York Ghetto poet."

A provisional programme of the lectures for the first year has already been published, and the officers of the University may be addressed at the Bible House, New York City.

SUGGESTIONS TOWARD A THEORY OF GRAVITATION.

To the Editor of the Open Court :

A distinguished English physicist has recently brought forward evidence that the atomic theory does not adequately account for the ultimate constitution of matter; a conclusion that has long been advocated by me as essential to a solution of the problem of gravitation.

In view of the evident trend of investigation in that direction it has occurred to me that this might be a favorable time to lay the matter before the public of *The Open Court*. The following is a brief synopsis of my argument :

I. Recent discoveries in physical science tend to show that the atomic theory, in so far as it pronounces upon the ultimate constitution of matter, is unfounded. With due regard for scientific caution, we cannot go beyond the statement that matter acts *as if* it were composed of atoms; but further than this their existence is experimentally unproven, and it seems probable that their distinctive characters will remain forever unknown.

II. With our conception of matter thus qualified, we may say that ether is a rarified kind of matter. This conclusion is widely disputed, but we cannot escape it without doing violence to logic, inasmuch as whatever possesses attributes of matter must be matter. The main objection to it is that matter is composed of ultimate particles and ether is not; but it is equally permissible and somewhat more consistent with the present trend of investigation to regard the atom as a center of concentration of properties inhering in ether, and continuous with it.

III. Given a universe as above constituted and assuming the existence of a tendency to contraction at its periphery, we would then have a condition capable of effecting the phenomenon of gravitation within its mass. All solid bodies located therein would be subjected to an equal pressure on all sides except the side opposite an adjacent body, upon which side each body would be relieved of the pressure to an extent varying with mass and proximity. The result would be the establishment between the two bodies of a line of least resistance along which each body would tend to move.

IV. This is, in substance, the theory of Le Sage; but he provided for his pressure by a system of "transmundane particles" that violated the consistency of nature. If, instead, we postulate a body of matter without discontinuity, we obviate the difficulty that made Le Sage's hypothesis intolerable. If this explanation is accepted, an adequate physical cause of gravitation will have been attained, but the problem of adjusting this conception, and the mechanism it involves, to the preconceived order of nature will raise fresh difficulties in many directions.

NEW YORK CITY.

GEO. S. SEYMOUR.

AN AMERICAN EDITION OF LOTI'S BOOK.

The Story of a Child by Pierre Loti is a book that has become famous in its original form, which is in French, and needs not our praise to recommend it. The

English translation by Caroline F. Smith, prefaced by Edward Howard Griggs, and published by C. C. Birchard & Co., a young but enterprising house of Boston, is in every respect excellent. The style is simple and dignified, the print is antique, clear, and artistic, and the binding tasteful.

To characterise the book, we reproduce here chapter 77, pp. 286-289 :

"I will here recount a dream that I had in my fourteenth year. It came to me during one of those mild and sweet nights that are ushered in by a long and delicious twilight.

"In the room where I had spent all the years of my childhood, I had been lulled to sleep by the sounds of songs that the sailors and young girls sang as they danced around the flower-twined May-pole. Until the moment of deep sleep I had listened to those very old national airs which the children of the people were singing in a loud, free voice, but distance softened and mellowed and poetised the voices as they traversed the tranquil silence; strangely enough I had been soothed by the noisy mirth and overflowing joyousness of these beings who, during their fleeting youth, are so much more artless than we, and more oblivious of death.

"In my dream it was twilight, not a sad one however, but on the contrary, the air was soft and mild and overflowing with sweet odors like that of a real May night. I was in the yard of our house, the aspect of which was not changed in any particular, but as I walked beside the walls all abloom with jasmine, honeysuckle and roses, I felt restless and troubled as if I was seeking for some unnamable something; I seemed to have a consciousness that some one, whom I wished ardently to see, awaited my coming; I felt as if there was about to happen to me something so strange and wonderful as to intoxicate me by its very advance.

"At a spot where grew a very old rosebush, one that had been planted by an ancestor and for that reason guarded sacredly, although it did not bear more than one rose in two or three years, I saw a young girl standing motionless with a seductive and mysterious smile upon her lips.

"The twilight became a little deeper, the air more languorous.

"Everywhere it became darker; but about her there shone a sort of indeterminate light, like that coming from a reflector, and her figure outlined itself clearly against the shadows in the background.

"I guessed that she was very beautiful and young; but her forehead and her eyes were hidden from me by the veil of night; indeed, I could see nothing very distinctly except the exquisite oval of her lower face, and her mouth which was parted smilingly. She leaned against the old flowerless rosebush, almost in its branches. Night came on rapidly. The girl seemed perfectly at home in the garden; she had come I knew not from where, for there was no door by which she could have entered; she appeared to find it as natural to be here as I found it natural to find her here.

"I drew very close in order to get a glimpse of her eyes which puzzled me; suddenly, in spite of the darkness that became ever thicker, I saw them very distinctly; they also were smiling like the lips;—and they were not just any impersonal eyes, such, for instance, as may be found in a statue representing youth; no, on the contrary, they were very particularly somebody's eyes; more and more they impressed me as belonging to some one already much beloved whom I, with transports of infinite joy and tenderness, had found again.

"I waked from sleep with a start, and as I did so I sought to retain the phantom being who faded away and became more and more intangible and unreal, in proportion as my mind grew clearer through the effort it made to remember.

Could it be possible that she was not and had never been more than a vision? Had nothingness re-engulfed and forever effaced her? I longed to sleep again so that I might see her; the thought that she was an illusion, nothing more than the figment of a dream, caused me great dejection and almost overwhelmed me with hopelessness.

"And it took me a very long time to forget her; I loved her, loved her tenderly, and the thought of her always stirred into life an emotion that was sweet but sad; and during those moments every thing unconnected with her seemed colorless and worthless. It was love, true love with all its great melancholy and deep mystery, with its overwhelming but sad enchantment, love that, like a perfume, endows with a fragrance all it touches; and that corner of the garden where she had appeared to me and the old flowerless rosebush that had clasped her in its branches awakened in me, because of her, agonising but delicious memories." P. c.

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES.

FROM WHENCE, WHAT, AND TO WHAT END? Being a Narrative Life of Man. By *Frederick Wollpert*. New York: Peter Eckler, Publisher. 1901. Pages, vii, 75. Price, 25 cents.

The title of this book seems to indicate that the author would discuss the problem of the origin and destiny of the soul; but the real subject of discussion is the problem whether or not suicide under special conditions would be allowable. The tenor of the book is partly agnostic, partly positively infidel, and many passages will be apt to shock religious people. The author is frequently sarcastic, but behind his sarcasm there is a serious background which solicits sympathy with the gloom and melancholy of a distracted soul. It is a pity that the book does not tell us anything of the author's life history, for it would afford a key to the notes of despair which ring through its pages.

The author says in the preface: "When a survey of the field is taken, it is found that instead of civilisation being a detriment unto the thought of suicide, it encourages it, rather than being a barrier; for as civilisation and knowledge increase, a longing for a freer activity of thought increases, and intensifies the smallness of this sphere."

Church institutions are regarded as invented merely for "the enslavement of the ignorant." "Individuals claiming to be divinely appointed for the extension of the original and divine word, have ever had but one object in view; and that is, the enslavement of the ignorant; and in their endeavors they have had recourse to all manner of pious frauds. As stated, the one universal object of the priesthood, of whatever worship, is deception."

Neither is there solace in evolution. Our author does not see forward, but backward; he does not see that man rises higher, but grows melancholy at the idea that he has risen from below. He says: "All the higher forms of living beings, including man, are descendants of some lower and extinct forms, which have become extinct in the gradual struggle for life; thus the process has gone on until the present species have been evolved." He growls at religion because it condemns suicide, and the theological argument is set forth as follows: "God being the Creator of all, man cannot commit self-destruction, lest he err greatly, and defy the laws of his Lord and Creator." The God of the Old Testament is especially objectionable to the author. The book abounds in passages such as these: "It has been demonstrated, again and again, that Jehovah is the breaker of his own laws.