

PROSECUTED FOR BLASPHEMY.

THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

Sentenced to Twelve Months' Imprisonment for Blasphemy.

Interim Editor, EDWARD B. AVELING, D.Sc., Fellow of University College, London.

William James Ramsey, as Proprietor, sentenced to Nine Months' Imprisonment; and Henry Arthur Kemp, as Printer and Publisher, sentenced to Three Months' Imprisonment.

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

THE LAST LETTER FROM MR. G. W. FOOTE

Her Majesty's Prison, Holloway.

DEAR AVELING,—Having done Ramsey's sentence I am settled down to Kemp's, and then, sweet Holloway, adieu! This is my last letter from gaol; at the end of another three months I shall have the pleasure of addressing all my friends as a free man. Until then I am a slave; *physically*, you understand; for while the mind is unshackled, "stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage."

My health keeps at one level. There is no vital disorganisation, only a lassitude, which I shall no doubt soon shake off when I resume the normal life of a human being. The discipline of the House of *Correction* . . . tries the most robust constitutions. I am much thinner, and can say with Launcelot Gobbo, "You may tell every finger I have with my ribs." I fancy too I am getting anemic for want of fresh air, and do *not* fancy I am getting scorbutic for want of the fruit and fresh vegetables which my constitution requires. A little lime-juice would be very grateful, but the Prison Commissioners believe in nothing but *drugs*. Do not mistake me. I do not wish you to conclude that they have no belief in the trinity and many other obvious truths. On the contrary, they pay a parson to remind us of these things, lest we should hereafter fall into the hands of the Great Prison Commissioner himself.

Life in a cell is dull in the summer, in the winter it is dismal. I have in one sense the worst part of my trouble to encounter. But my spirits are undepressed. My books are a great solace, and I feel a joy in furbishing my armor and sharpening my sword for future battles. While I sit at my fibre-picking (worth about 2d. a day) I weave projects, some of which may be realised before the next November fogs make one long for the fine, dry climate of a place where earthly thermometers are useless. Sometimes also I indulge in whimsical calculations. I reckon, for instance, that I have still to swallow twenty-one gallons of prison tea and twelve prison sermons.

I spent the eve of Ramsey's release, as I dare say he did, pacing my short floor, reviewing the past and dreaming of the future. I could not help feeling softened as I thought of Lord Coleridge's lofty humanity, and the unvarying kindness of the gallant Governor of this gaol. They tempt one to forget the red history of their faith. But I hardened again as my eyes dwelt on the narrow walls of this sarcophagus of a year of my life. I thought of the Christian judge who inflicted my brutal sentence, of the Christian public who tacitly approves it, of the Christian Premier who can "do nothing" since I am not a Bulgarian but only an Englishman, of the Christian official who is allowed to libel imprisoned Freethinkers behind the safe shelter of his privileged position, and of all the various insults and treacheries our party has of late endured. Then I renewed my "vow of Hannibal" and slept as calm as a child. In the morning I had but one thought—"My friend is going." About 9 o'clock I said, "He is gone," and laughed. Was that a shout I heard a little earlier, or only a fancy? I cannot say, but it went through my blood like a ring of steel. Three months more and I shall follow. . . .

Gerald Massey's present reached me. I value it highly, and his brave letter still more. I have also received the

other presentation volume from a great writer whose name I do not feel free to mention.

Mr. Symes's absence will be felt by our party in England, but Australia will gain all we lose; and the battle of Free-thought has to be waged everywhere. I wish him health, prosperity, and the long career of usefulness for which he is fitted, and I desire to subscribe £1 1s. to his well-deserved Testimonial. I cannot send the money, but doubtless Mrs. Besant will send it for me.

Mrs. Foote says that some friends are afraid I shall take too long a holiday. Let them be reassured. I have promised to address a meeting at the Hall of Science two days after my release; but I fancy after all it will be prudent to recruit my strength a little before plunging into the work and excitement. I will therefore ask Mr. Smith to take March 6 instead of February 27, and Mr. Hilditch to take March 10 *only* for Claremont Hall. This will give me a clear week to fortify my nerves, enrich my blood, and expand my lungs; and a chance of reappearing on the platform in something like my old form. If Mr. Smith can't alter now I must still ask Mr. Hilditch to. Subject for Hall of Science, "Modern Martyrdom; or, Twelve Months in a Christian Gaol."

Request Mr. Forder to engage only Sundays during March, and not to carry the list beyond May. London branches can have week nights even in March, and I should like to address the London clubs that have stood up for free speech.

A last word. I am delighted to know that the Free-thought party has profited by our imprisonment; it is a consolation. If the Christians only persecute us for a generation, they will complete our triumph and their own ruin. We are engaged in a war in which there can be no treaty or truce. Our policy is clear. *De l'audace; et encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace.*—Yours ever,

G. W. FOOTE.

THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS TO THE ATHEIST.

Few fashions are more graceful than the keeping of birthdays. Whether we expect our own with a feeling of impatience when we are young or greet them with a half-regret as we grow older, still to us and, if not to us, to some few other folk, the day has its delight or its memories. And we can all of us be the "other folk." So that whether our birthday comes to us as a bright, particular star, or only as any other day, burdened with a little more pain, the birthdays of our beloved have a meaning to us.

A man has left his mark on all time if a nation or many nations keep his birthday. In England unhappily we do not note the days when our greatest have been born. The nation, as a whole, passes over the last eight days of April without remembering that within them Shakspeare was born. It does not commemorate the birth of Socrates, or Plato, or Lucretius, or Newton, or Goethe—men of whom the world was not worthy. But it delights to honor the memory of one man, Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Hence at this season of the year, that we call Christmas, the birth of Christ is celebrated, and even we that are atheists keep Christmas. Nor are we in any way inconsistent. We do not believe in Jesus Christ as anything more than man. We refuse to degrade him by placing upon

him the label "god." We are aware that the date of his birth is not exactly known, just as that of Shakspeare is uncertain. We know that with so many religions, the chief festivals have been fixed at the cardinal points of the year. March 29 was the date of the feast of the Passover and March 25 is that of the Annunciation. September 29 served for the Feast of Tabernacles, serves for that of St. Michael and all Angels. The saints' days mark the times when the sun appears to enter new signs of the zodiac.

To us also there is a charming taste of paganism in all that is best about Christmas. We know that the pagan festivals had a great influence in determining the dates of the Christian year. We read of the Saturnalia "that every one feasted and rejoiced; work and business were, for a time, entirely suspended, the houses were decked with laurels and evergreens, presents were made by parents and friends, and all sorts of games and amusements were indulged in by the citizens." We recognise the surroundings of Christmas as a blending of the details of the Saturnalia with Druidical, German and Scandinavian ceremonies.

We remember also how the "true religion" of one age has condemned the very festivities countenanced by the "true religion" of the next. The Lutherans and Calvinists, both claiming to represent the "true religion," not only of their own, but of all time, were at issue on the manner in which Christmas should be kept. The Puritans, a little later, importing into their regardal of this question as of all others the solemnity tinged with acerbity that is the characteristic of their life in that troublous time, eschewed the pomps and vanities of Christmas as they did those of the world generally. Hamilton, in his more than half-forgotten "Facile Treatise," tells us how "the ministers in Scotland, in contempt of the other holy days observed in England, cause their wives and servants to spin in open sight of the people upon Yule-day, and their affectionate auditors constrain their tenants to yoke their ploughs upon Yule-day in contempt of Christ's nativity, which our lord has not left unpunished; for their oxen ran mad and brake their necks and lamed some ploughmen, as is notoriously known in sunnry parts of Scotland." Within our memory the Dissenters were in doubt whether it was right to dance, or act, or make mirth upon the 25th of December. But the same good influence that has led these would-be ascetics to send their children to balls and to go themselves to theatres, at first furtively, and later openly, is modifying their views as to Christmas Day.

All are recognising that it is well for men and women to have certain seasons of the year at which old enmities are forgotten and in part forgiven, old feuds for a while die out, the bitterness of life is in some measure assuaged, unkindly thoughts are banished, and in the glow of the present the ill of the past is for a moment lost. Then is the hour of kindness, of new resolves, and the future grows warm in the light and joy of the moment, brief as this may be.

So is it that we atheists, seeing how human is the origin of all that encircles Christmas-time, forget for a while the follies and the wickedness that are connected with its very name, pierce through the veil of the supernatural to the real human idea of brotherly kindness that lies at the heart of all festival times, and wish to all men happiness at this the Yule-tide of 1883.

EDWARD B. AVELING.

G L A D T I D I N G S .

(A Christmas Story.)

COME round me now, my children, for I would speak a few words before I die. It seems hard, very hard, that we should have to part just when I begin to feel what a comfort it is for me to have such good dutiful children to assist me in fighting life's battles. But there—I suppose I must submit quietly to the inevitable.

Death is the fate of us all. Whatever our position in life, rich or poor, virtuous or vicious, we all have to face death once. A consolation it is to me, indeed, to know that my life has not been misspent.

Listen! When I was a young man I was a devout Christian. Church and Sunday-school I attended with unerring regularity every Sunday. But one day my friend, William Waitsome put some doubts into my mind.

Never shall I forget the shock it sent to my heart when I felt for the first time that I was an infidel, or, perhaps I

ought to say, an unbeliever—because, after all, the term infidel was manufactured by the enemy, and as it means one who is unfaithful in some way or other, either to his friends or to his convictions, is not, and I hope never has been, appropriate to me.

Charlie Proctor, another companion of mine, held on to the Christian creed. He said he loved to think that there was "more joy in heaven over the return of one sinner that repenteth than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance," and that this doctrine was "tidings of comfort and joy" to him.

Well, my dear children, what became of poor Charlie? One Christmas he had been spending and gambling much money away, and was so depressed in his spirits when his holidays were over, and so much involved by his previous misconduct in spending money that he had not earned, that he resolved to do something desperate. He was too much of a coward to destroy himself; so at night, when his father was asleep, he crept stealthily into the counting-house, extracted some bank-notes and some loose money from the cash-box, and then decamped.

On the following night—taking with him a girl to whom he was engaged—he departed by tidal train to Paris. Here for a month or so he spent his life and money in riotous living.

Meanwhile his father had discovered his son's guilt of theft, and put a couple of experienced detectives on his track. For some time he managed to elude the vigilance of these officers.

One night, I think it was Christmas night—just such another night as this, the snow thick upon the ground, and the trees like so many men dressed in white—I heard a knocking at my street-door. It was Will Waitstone, and he had come to tell me that poor Charlie had been caught at a gambling-hell in Paris, and that he became so infuriated on being discovered, that he struck one of the detectives a terrible blow on the head with a tankard, killing him on the spot.

I need not say when old Mr. Proctor heard the news he was shocked beyond the power of language to describe, and lay for some time in a state of absolute unconsciousness.

Accompanied by Waitsome, I called on Mr. Proctor and tried to pacify him and assuage his grief, but all to no purpose.

He could not realise that his boy, his once darling boy, could have so far forgotten himself as to act in the wicked way in which he had in robbing his own father; but it was even more horrible for him to contemplate his son in the character of a murderer.

In the course of time the trial came on, and Charles Proctor stood before the judge, arraigned for the capital offence. There were many witnesses against him who were present at the perpetration of the crime. Defence there was none. The jury, without leaving the box, returned a verdict of Guilty against Charles Proctor, who, on hearing the sentence, muttered audibly the words, "there is more joy in heaven over the return of one sinner that repenteth than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."

Soon, much sooner than desired, arrived the time for the execution, and Charles having bade his old father a long farewell, and written a letter expressing deep regret to the girl whose life he had blighted, he was marched slowly to the scaffold, and in an hour later all that remained of him was consigned to a grave within the precincts of the gaol, amid the solemn chanting of the Christian burial. Thus poor Charlie's career terminated!

And I said to your mother then that every Christmas I would tell the story of his sad end, as an illustration of the wickedness of the doctrine that advises a man to waste his life, to look forward to a death-bed repentance that shall wipe away all his previous crimes.

But here am I talking like this when I can scarcely get my breath. But I know this, my dear children, that any man can die well who has lived a good life. Repentance then is unnecessary—

What pain is this? Come closer, my children. I feel that the end is near.

* * * * *

Halloa, halloa, what's the matter now? Am I awake? I have been dreaming that dreadful story again of poor Charles Proctor. Ah! that is the effect of eating too much Christmas-pudding. Oh that we were wise. What a life of wealth and happiness this would be for all of us.

There are "glad tidings" for us, and they are these—that our actions bring their own reward in this world, whether there is another or not.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

WORK AND YE SHALL NOT WEEP.

(A Freethinker's Motto for the Coming Year)

FROM out the darkness of sorrow,
From out the blackness of night,
We call to the coming morrow
For the flash of the sun-god's light.

But if never the sunlight breaketh
The mists and the clouds of air.
And if never the dawn awaketh
Our souls from a dark despair!

Till we crush the blackness under
Our feet in the strength of pain,
That severs the clouds asunder,
And we see the sun again.

And we rise from out of the madness,
The sin and the sorrow of night;
By the strength of our human sadness
We come again to the light.

'Twas never with worship or praying
That we conquered our sorrow deep.
'Twas the strength of our manhood saying,
"Work and ye shall not weep."

"Foil and ye shall not sorrow,
Work and ye shall not weep;
Work for the world's to-morrow
When you and your sadness sleep."

So we give to mankind this token,
When saddened by sorrow deep.
Truest of words yet spoken—
"Work and ye shall not weep."

E. O. C. JENKINS.

THE CHRISTIAN SCHEME OF SALVATION.

To anyone who considers seriously for ten minutes the Christian scheme of salvation it must be evident that it is no wise superior to that propounded by other religious systems. First of all, we are told that the deity suddenly conceived the idea of creating man—a sort of "happy thought," as it were. Probably he found eternity a little tedious and monotonous with nobody but the angels. So, to "rouse up" things a little, he manufactured man, and the way he did it had all the beauty of simplicity. He simply scooped up a little dust, fashioned out a man, and breathed into him the "breath of life," and man became a living soul. Now, the question will force itself upon the mind—if he could not do this with perfectly happy results both to himself and his creature, why did he begin the work at all? If he could have made man perfect, and did not, what becomes of his benevolence? If he would have done this, but could not, what becomes of his omnipotence? Well, we are told he created Adam, and that he afterwards manufactured Eve with one of Adam's ribs; though why he should have required raw material for Eve, when it was merely a "Hey, presto!" business with Adam, does not appear. Then he set them down together in a beautiful park—a kind of Cremorne Gardens—with the remark, "You may look, but you must not touch," and, as a natural consequence, they touched. Our "old familiar friend," the devil, got "over the garden wall"—though what the lord was about to let him do so is a mystery—and, in the shape of a serpent, began to talk to Eve, and it did not surprise her at all. It's funny, the easy way people took miracles in those days. Well, the serpent began to "blarney" Madam Eve; probably told her she was very nice-looking, far too good for Adam, etc.; and finally persuades her to take a bite out of a ribston pippin. Then there was a tremendous row in that garden. And the lord god shouted up and down that garden, "Adam, where art thou?" And Adam said, "Please, sir, 'twasn't me; 'twas her!" And Eve said, "Oh, my! It was all along of that nasty crawling thing." And so the devil got it hot all round; but that didn't save Adam and Eve; they were "chucked," and because they ate a ribston pippin between them, we're all of us "original sinners" to this

day. And if you question the perfect justice of that you're "presumptuous," because, although it may not accord with our ideas of justice, we must remember "the lord's ways are not ours;" and if you should be inclined to think it a good thing they are not—well, in that case, I'm afraid you're far too honest for heaven. Well, after some thousands of years had elapsed, and some millions of human beings had gone to damnation as "original sinners," the lord god wakes up from a long sleep, and suddenly discovers that his creatures are all going to hell, and that nothing will save them unless he kills himself—I suppose on the principle of the rule of contraries. So "god kills god to satisfy god." He divides himself into three portions—one portion of him stops up above; another portion of him becomes incarnate. This second portion travels around a square piece of territory in Palestine for about thirty years, fooling the people with third-rate conjuring tricks; "gets himself disliked" by the priests and Tories, as all reformers always do; is brought to trial, condemned, and put to death by the cruel Roman punishment of crucifixion; comes to life again, and setting the laws of gravitation at defiance, makes an aerial promenade back to heaven. The third portion comes down to take the second portion's place. And now there's nothing so easy as to be saved. You've only got to believe this. If you won't be saved on these terms, why, you'll be damned, and that's the long and short of it. Now, that is the Christian scheme of salvation! And there actually are educated people—presumably in a state of sanity—who really persuade themselves that they believe this jargon of nursery tales! I say, *persuade* themselves they believe it, because there is no one out of a lunatic asylum who really does believe it! Lunatics may perhaps believe it, just as they believe in "Hey, diddle, diddle; the cat and the fiddle; the cow jumped over the moon;" but no sane person does. It is simply monstrous that we should be told by priests and other interested persons that it is necessary to believe in such fables. That there should be thousands of well-educated men teaching this drivelling rubbish from every church and pulpit in the country is—although a disgraceful fact—unfortunately, perfectly intelligible. The church affords a living, and is regarded as a fashionable trade. That is sufficient explanation of the one phenomenon; but that there should exist fools enough in the world to accept such teaching and make its profession profitable, is matter not only for sorrow, but astonishment. It only shows to what an extraordinary length human credulity will go. All the details of the Christian scheme are but patched-up borrowings, in slightly varied form, from older and anterior religions. The story of the creation, the fable of Adam and Eve, the doctrine of the trinity, the idea of the deity holding an amor with a beautiful woman, of his being born into human shape, and of his being put to death by his own creatures—all are as old as the hills, as every student of the religious developments of the world knows! The impertinence of these Christians, who pretend originality for their religion, is only equalled by their crass ignorance. The whole Christian scheme is just as much human invention as all religions pretending to the supernatural—one, moreover, of exceedingly poor character, both in fancy and imagination.

CARINGTON FORSTER.

ACID DROPS.

A poor woman died recently at Colebrooke, in Devonshire. The sapient jury brought it in "Death by the visitation of god." Our irreverent young man thought, from the earlier chapters of some of the gospels, that the visitation of god resulted in births rather than in deaths.

THE Rev. W. W. Edwards recently delivered a lecture in connexion with the Guild of St. Matthew, on "Working Men's proper Share of the Wealth created by his Hands, and the Christian's Duty in Helping Him to Secure It." Passing by the unfortunate word "created," let us, while we rejoice to find individuals, be they Christian men or not, interesting themselves in the great question of socialism, remind Mr. Edwards that whilst the church was supreme, and whilst it was a power, though not supreme, yet second to none; and whilst in yet later times it was a power, nothing whatever was done by it, as a body, to limit the extortion of the capitalist. Now, when the church is moribund, it is not to be resuscitated by desperately hunking itself on to great scientific movements, whose progress, in truth, it only impedes.

SAYS Mr. Edwards: "Much of the present misery of the

people is caused by the unsound basis of commercial morality." Quite as much is due to the unsound basis of general morality—that is to the god-idea.

DR. SAMUEL KINNS is to conduct a mission by visiting the chief towns of England, Wales, and Scotland, and delivering in each drawing-room a public lecture upon "The Scientific and Historical Accuracy of the Bible." The nature of the work can be understood when we state that among its patrons are five bishops. The Earl of Shaftesbury, Sir T. Chambers, Sir Hardinge Giffard, Sir W. McArthur, Mr. M'C. Torrens. The scientific world is represented by Mr. Bristow and Mr. Dunkin, two gentlemen whose names are not of world-wide celebrity. Dr. Edward Aveling intends making an effort to obtain the right to discuss with Dr. Kinns when it is possible. One of the lectures is to be at Exeter Hall on January 8, at 8 p.m. Freethinkers are advised to attend if discussion is permitted.

HANLEY, in Staffordshire, known to many on account of the dog and dwarf fight that never occurred there, though it appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*, has added itself to the list of towns that refuse halls to secular lecturers, even when the lecture is to be on a political or scientific subject. Application was made for the Hanley Town Hall, for the purpose of a scientific lecture by Dr. Edward Aveling. The town council refused. An Alderman Powell is the particular, or not very particular, mouthpiece of intolerance on this occasion. A brave article in the *Staffordshire Sentinel* denounces this exhibition of bigotry, and, as a matter of course, Dr. Aveling will lecture in Hanley as soon as ever a hall can be obtained for him. He will on that occasion be pleased to see Alderman Powell face to face.

LEICESTER is a growing town, and nearly extends to Oadby, where its races are held. The Oadby Racecourse Company have recently added to their racecourse a portion of the church land, which they have leased from the present clergyman of that village. In order that their lease shall in no future time be interfered with, they have also purchased the advowson, to have the future presentation of the living; and of course the first question they would ask of any clerical candidate would be as to the soundness of his views upon the turf question. So it has come to this in the Church of England, a parcel of racing men can place a pastor over a parish for racing purposes.

DR. PARKER has been preaching on religious dissent. In regard to the disestablishment Joseph indignantly rejects "the co-operation of the infidel, the atheist, the agnostic, or the blasphemer." The classification is delicious. "I will not," says this showman, "make common cause with those who would disestablish the church to get rid of religion." Dr. Parker may rest assured the loss of his co-operation will not affect Freethinkers. They will steadily pursue their own work, and the disestablishment of the church and something more will come all in good time, whether the City Temple pulpiteer stand aloof or not.

UNDER the title of "A Bank Bill Paid through Prayer," the *Christian Herald* supplies one of the many immoral stories which are put forward under the guise of religion. This veracious chronicle relates that about the year 1845 there lived in Armagh a builder named Thomas Ross. These religious wonders, by the way, always, like the miracles of Christianity, take place a good way off and a long while ago. This Thomas Ross got in great pecuniary difficulties, but "he was a man who professed faith in the lord Jesus, and had often expressed his confidence in the divine promises." Accordingly, when a bank bill became due it became the subject of earnest prayer; and when the very last day of grace arrived, when his name would have been dishonored at the bank, it chanced that a Mrs. Kirkpatrick arrived, and wanted to leave a sum of money in his care till she could go to Belfast to use it. Mr. Ross, we are told, had no objection, and when she counted the money the amount was just equal to a penny to the demand held by the bank against Mr. Ross, who "paid his debt with a glad heart, and received a fresh evidence of the care of his heavenly father." Nothing is said as to the ability of this favored faithful one to repay Mrs. Kirkpatrick. Perhaps he meant to repay her in the world to come, or thought she should be content with being the humble agent in her heavenly father's hand for his benefit. It would hardly do at the Central Criminal Court for a person charged with using for his own purposes money entrusted to him, to allege that he had been praying to god, and had the money, even to a penny, placed in his way as an answer to prayer.

In giving judgment in the Queensferry clerical divorce case, Lord Lee found it necessary to say that "in the case of a minister of the gospel his conduct could not be considered in a different way from that which guided a judge in the case of ordinary people." He believed the evidence of the female witnesses, and not that given by the Rev. J. Whyte, to whose wife he granted the divorce prayed for with costs.

AT San Francisco a spiritist medium, calling herself Elsie Reynolds, was recently arrested and held for trial for obtaining money under false pretences. At one of her materialising séances, complainant, G. B. Miltz, had his suspicions aroused. He determined to discover if there were frauds connected with alleged materialisation of spirits, and, seizing one of the professed ghostly visitants, had incontrovertible evidence that it was a dummy made up for the occasion. Mrs. Reynolds and others interfered forcibly, so he was not able to retain his hold of the dummy; but feeling that he and others had been grossly imposed upon, he has brought criminal action against Mrs. Reynolds, and assured a reporter that he has ample evidence to secure conviction.

As some of our readers are aware, a series of lectures designed to meet the scepticism of the age are being delivered at Hampstead. The first, on "Miracles," by Edward White, is fully reported in the *Nonconformist*. Mr. White rightly faces the fact that the claim of Christianity rests on supernaturalism. Indeed he says, "Its very morals are inferences from its supernatural pretensions." How idle it is to represent such a religion as a religion of law, of mere morality harmonising with the orderly constitution of nature. From first to last it is supernatural or nothing. Mr. White seeks to find the solution of this opposition to the uniformity of nature as observed by science, because Christianity "deals with the abnormal or preternatural evils of sin and death, both of which are outside the constitution of things and the domain of law." Anyone who reflects will see the fallacy of this. The actions theologians call sin are no more outside the domain of law than any other actions. They all refer to man's real or supposed duties to society. Death is as much a normal process of nature as growth or decay: and we know that it existed both in the vegetable and animal world long before the days of the suppositious Adam.

A COMICAL but blasphemous jury, at a recent inquest at Manchester on the bodies of several persons who were killed by the falling of a mill chimney, brought in a verdict of "Death by the act of god," and added to this sapient verdict a recommendation that mill chimneys should be under supervision, to prevent their having to bring in a charge of manslaughter or murder against a person not subject to British law.

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

WHAT must I do if saved I would be?
Believe, says the Christ, in my father and me.
What must I believe? this question I ask,
Before I begin to this soul-saving task.
Believe, says the Christ, that god loved the world
So much, that nine-tenths of mankind will be hurl'd
To the lake full of brimstone, with fallen saints cramm'd:
If you can't believe this, look out—you'll be damn'd.
Well, this is so strange that I cannot believe
That till now—since the days of old Adam and Eve—
Nine-tenths of mankind either roast or will stew—
If I've this to believe I'll be damn'd if I do.
What harm does poor man to the great god of earth?
Sure he's helpless and innocent on from his birth,
And the great god himself is without a condition:
I cannot hurt him though I go to perdition.
Says the Christ, That's not true; don't you make it your boast
That you care not for us—father, son, holy ghost.
You spitefully use us as though we were not,
Although I assert by my blood you were bought.
By your blood, sir! then tell us where you got the blood,
Since none are in heaven till after the flood;
Where perhaps you got some for your father and you,
Who's known by the name of "the old butcher Jew."
It's a fact, I believe it—you've done dire deeds,
Your Father and Co., to establish the creeds,
But the darkness is gone, and we cannot be sham'd.
Than believe against reason we'd rather be damn'd.

DIDYMUS.

REVIEW.

The Mirror of Freethought. Reflecting Bible Errors and Secular Truths. By ARTHUR B. MOSS. Price 1s. London: Watts and Co., 84 Fleet Street, E.C.

The popular pamphlets by Mr. Moss, on "The Bible God," "Bible Horrors," "The Old Faith and the New," "Fictitious Gods," "Miracle Workers," "Is Religion Necessary or Useful to Man?" "Socrates, Buddha, and Jesus," "Bruno and Spinoza," "Health, Wealth, and Happiness," and "The Secular Faith," are here bound together and introduced with a very modest preface. Doubtless many will be glad to have these pamphlets in this convenient and more permanent form.

SPECIAL NOTICES.

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

March 6, Hall of Science; 9, Claremont Hall; Pentonville; 12, Hackney; 16, Manchester; 23, Plymouth; 30, Glasgow. April 3, 6, 10, 13, 17, 24, Hall of Science; 20, Bradford; 27, Oldham. May 4 and 11, Hall of Science; 19, Huddersfield; 26, Leicester. June, N. S. S. Conference. All Sundays for which Mr. Forder had authority to make arrangements are now filled up.—All applications for lectures during March, April and May, to be made to Mr. Forder. Stamped envelope to be enclosed for reply. Mr. Foote can only lecture in the provinces on Saturday and Sunday during these months.

DR. E. B. AVELING'S LECTURES.

Dr. Edward B. Aveling (interim editor of the *Freethinker*) will lecture on all Sundays in January at Milton Hall, Hawley Crescent, Kentish Town Road.

CORRESPONDENTS.

ALL business communications to be addressed to the Manager, 28 Stonecutter Street, Farringdon Street, E.C. Literary communications to the Editor of the *Freethinker*, 13 Newman Street, Oxford Street, London, W.

THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded, directly from the office, post-free to any part of Europe, America, Canada, and Egypt, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 6s. 6d.; Half Year, 3s. 3d.; Three Months, 1s. 7½d.

MR. W. J. RAMSEY'S ENGAGEMENTS.—January 6, Leeds; 13, Walworth; 20, Bradford; 27, Claremont Hall.—Applications to J. T. Ramsey, 18 Pearson Street, Kingsland Road, E.

RECEIVED.—J. Davis, Charles A. Berry, L. J. Nicholson, G. W. Derby.

OWING to Dr. Aveling's absence several correspondents stand over till next week.

M. COLEMAN.—We use one for *Progress*. You will see the other mentioned in the *Freethinker*.

H. SLYMOUR.—The poem you send was published in the *Freethinker* some time back.

J. F.—No *Freethinker* should sanction the offices of clergymen either at deaths or marriages.

MARK TEMPLE.—Compare Galatians ii., 16 with James ii., 14.

J. SUTHERLAND.—Get "Supernatural Religion" if you can possibly procure the work from a library. Possibly Mr. Wheeler's "Frauds and Follies of the Fathers" may be of use.

It is particularly requested that all orders for literature should be sent to Mr. R. Forder, 28 Stonecutter Street, London, to whom all Post-office Orders should be made payable. Considerable delay and annoyance are caused by the disregard of this rule. In remitting stamps halfpenny ones are preferred.

AGENTS wanted in town and country to sell this paper and other Freethought literature.

SUGAR PLUMS.

The January number of *Progress* is now ready. A list of its varied contents will be found on our last page.

The project for reducing the subsidy given by the Russian government to the convents and monasteries of the empire has received the almost unanimous approval of the Russian journals. It costs over one million roubles annually to subsidise these religious institutions, which have been a great means of keeping the people in superstition and ignorance. Let this sum be devoted to purposes of education, and the Russian people will soon achieve political freedom. Spiritual tyranny is at the bottom of most political oppression.

ROUTLEDGE AND SONS publish a new edition of Emerson's works, containing several pieces not hitherto published. Among these are papers on "Aristocracy," "Education," "The Man of Letters and the Scholar." In his "Historical Notes of Life and Letters in New England," Emerson, whose prose Matthew Arnold has recently asserted to be the greatest prose of our century, gives an account of the well-known social experiment at Brook Farm, so finely satirised in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Blithedale Romance."

IN "The Story of my Heart," by Richard Jefferies, a book recently published by Longmans and Co., the author says: "No intelligence whatever interferes in human affairs. . . . How can I adequately express my contempt for the assertion that all things occur for the best, and are ordered by a humane intelligence? It is the most utter falsehood. . . . It is the duty of all rational beings to acknowledge the truth. There

is not the least trace of directing intelligence. This is a foundation of hope, because if the present condition of things were ordered by a superior power, there would be no possibility of improving it for the better in spite of that power. The credit given by the unthinking to the statement that all affairs are directed, has been the bane of the world since the days of the Egyptian papyri and the origin of superstition. . . . A man bathes in a pool; a crocodile seizes and lacerates his flesh. If anyone maintains that an intelligence directed that cruelty, I can only reply that his mind is under an illusion. In human affairs everything happens by chance—that is, in defiance of human ideas and without any direction of an intelligence. . . . A man is caught by a revolving shaft and torn to pieces, limb from limb. There is no directing intelligence, no protection, and no assistance. . . . Anyone who will consider the affairs of the world at large, and of the individual, will see that they do not proceed in the manner they would do for our happiness if a man of humane breadth of view were placed at their head with unlimited power, such as is credited to the intelligence which does not exist."

MR. SYMES hopes to begin work at Melbourne on the second Sunday of February, and has promised that *Freethinker* readers shall hear from him.

"THE world is my country, humanity my brethren, and to do good my religion." This sentence of Thomas Paine's, which admirably sums up the creed of the "Age of Reason," has been handsomely illuminated in a style suitable for framing, and can be procured from Mr. Standing, 8 Finsbury Street, London, E.C.

FOR some time we have not drawn attention in these columns to the Testimonial to Messrs. Foote and Ramsey. Now that the one to Mr. Symes has been satisfactorily disposed of, we desire that the party shall prove itself equally worthy of its martyrs. Contributions should be sent to Mrs. Besant, 19 Avenue Road, St. John's Wood, and will be acknowledged in the *National Reformer*.

CHRISTMAS A PAGAN FESTIVAL.

If there is one thing more certain than another about the festival of Christmas, it is that it has no connexion with the nativity of the founder of Christianity except an ecclesiastical one. In the earliest periods of the Christian church the celebration of Christmas was by no means uniform. Some, we are told, kept it on the 1st of January, others on the 9th; some kept the Jewish Passover at the end of March, and others the Feast of Tabernacles at the end of September. Others, again, kept a festival of the birth of the Christ child in April or May. In the course of the fourth century, Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, addressed a letter to Pope Julius I., asking him to fix a day for the celebration, and a council of doctors resolved on adopting December 25, though this date was not universally accepted until the sixth century. It is very certain that for this decision the church doctors had no warrant, either in tradition or in scripture. Indeed, the legend of the shepherds watching their flocks by night was in blank opposition to the idea of Jesus having been born at this season of the year, which is a period generally of great inclemency in Judaea. The decision was formed upon other reasons. Jablonski attempts to show that the custom of keeping Christmas Day on December 25 originated with the Basilidians in Egypt. All the heathen nations kept a festival at the winter solstice, and the Christian church fixed this, its most important anniversary, like its other holidays, upon certain cardinal points of the year, and without any respect to the historical dates which they commemorated. Thus the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary was placed on the 25th of March, or about the time of the vernal equinox. The birthday of John the Baptist they assigned to the summer solstice, the Feast of St. Michael they fixed at the autumnal equinox, and that of Christ at the time of the winter solstice. As with many other indications of sun-worship in Christianity, the words attributed to John the Baptist in the fourth gospel, that he must decrease and Jesus increase, may be referred to this connexion of their respective birthdays with the summer and winter's solstice. As there are six months between this change in the sun's position, so, according to Luke (i., 24), the Baptist was just six months younger than Jesus. In his learned work on the Angel Messiah of Buddhists, Essenes, and Christians (chap. ii; Longmans, 1880) Ernest de Bunsen has shown that Gautama Buddha was alleged to have been born on December 25, and this is the date which has also been

ascribed as the natal day of the Egyptian child sun-god Horus and the Persian sun-god Mithras. The days being then short, the god was represented as a feeble infant, but destined to grow in strength and overcome its adversaries. Justin Martyr, the Christian Father, who tells us that Mithras was said to have been born in a cave (as with Jesus in the gospel of the infancy) when the sun gains his first degree of ascent, also informs us that wicked devils imitated the Christian mysteries of the eucharist in the mysteries of Mithras. Yet the mysteries of Mithras long preceded Christianity, and the bread and wine of the lord's supper are evidently the offering of his fruits to the sun. Plutarch, in his treatise on Isis and Osiris, tells us that it was on the first day of the New Year that Osiris was born, and that a voice came into the world with him, saying that the lord of all things is now born. The Persians at this season lighted fires in honor of Mithras.

From the 21st of December till the end of the year the Romans held the Saturnalia, a period marked by the prevalence of universal license and merry-making. Temporary freedom was given to slaves, and they were even waited upon by their masters. Everyone feasted and rejoiced, business was for a season entirely suspended, the houses were decked with laurel and evergreen, visits and presents were exchanged between friends, and clients gave gifts to their patrons. The whole season was one of rejoicing and goodwill, and all kinds of amusements and games were indulged in by the people.

Long before the Christians brought their superstitions to this island, the inhabitants of Britain celebrated the winter solstice with a festival of rejoicing, which they called Yule—a word allied to *wheel*, and signifying the revolution of the seasons. Yule-tide was also called the Feast of Lights. The custom of burning the Yule log sufficiently indicates its heathen origin. In the south of France to this day the fire is blessed and prayed to, the youngest member of the family going down on his knees before it and supplicating it to extend its warmth to the poor throughout the winter. (See "Larousse Dictionnaire Universel," Art. Noël).

One of the most ancient customs is the practice of decorating the houses with the Druidic mistletoe and evergreens, symbols of the continued vitality of nature. Bourne ("Antiq Vulg," p. 173) cites a canon of the council of Bracara forbidding Christians to deck their houses with green boughs. The custom of having a Christmas-tree is a relic of one of the very oldest worships. Though derived by us from our Scandinavian forefathers—the custom is almost universal in every house in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Germany—it, like much else that has found its way into Christianity, is of Egyptian origin. The fir-tree is chosen by the northern natives for its pyramidal shape, being thus the symbol of fire as well as of ever-renewed vitality; but in Egypt they used the palm. The palm-tree is said to put forth a shoot every month, and a spray of this tree, with twelve shoots on it, was used in Egypt at the time of the winter solstice, as a symbol of the year completed.

I recollect last year Mr. Foote being taken to task for calling the number of the *Freethinker*, for which he has suffered so severely, a Christmas Number. He replied to the effect that Christmas was a pagan festival, and he should be sorry to make it over exclusively to the Christian. I need not say that in this sentiment I concur. To suppose that the meeting of friends and the eating of roast beef and plum-pudding has any connexion with the birthday of Jesus of Nazareth, is only worthy of those who celebrate their so-called savior's death by getting drunk on Good Friday.

J. M. WHEELER.

MAN, GOD'S CREATOR.

(Concluded from page 407.)

THAT god was regarded by the Israelites as a tyrant who delighted in slaughter, we have proof in the conduct of the expedition against the Canaanites. "And Israel vowed a vow unto the Lord and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, I will utterly destroy their cities. And the lord hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites, and they utterly destroyed them and their cities" (Numbers xxi., 23). Of the still more horrible outrages against the Midianites related in the 31st chapter, it is needless to speak. The story is too well known, and too sickening in its details. After forty years in the wilderness

they crossed the Jordan, and attacked Jericho. "And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword" (Joshua vi., 21). Certain articles only—"silver and gold, and vessels of brass and iron"—were saved, for they could not be tortured, and were valuable "for the treasury of the lord" (Joshua vi. 19). After Jericho it was the turn of Ai. That city was burnt, and twelve thousand men and women slain. "For Joshua drew not his hand back wherewith he stretched out the spear until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. Only the cattle and the spoil of the city Israel took for a prey unto themselves according to the word of the lord" (Joshua vii., 26, 27). After this we cannot be surprised to read that "it came to pass, when all the kings which were on this side Jordan, in the hills, and in the valleys, and in all the coasts of the great sea over against Lebanon, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite heard thereof, that they gathered themselves together to fight with Joshua, and with Israel with one accord" (Joshua ix., 12). Lest we might suppose that they formed this alliance for mutual defence against a savage invader, we are expressly told, "It was of the lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly" (Joshua xi., 20). It is as unnecessary as it would be distasteful to wade through all the blood-stained pages of Joshua for evidences of the barbarous cruelty and insatiable greed of the old Jew-god and the savages who fathered him. Thirty-one cities were taken, and their inhabitants brutally exterminated. "And all the spoil of the cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves, but every man they smote with the edge of the sword until they had destroyed them; neither left they any to breathe. As the lord commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the lord commanded Moses" (Joshua xi., 14-15).

Is this the same god who, some fifteen centuries later, is said to have become human for the love of humanity, and with human voice uttered such words as are recorded in Matthew v. ?—"Blessed are the meek." "Blessed are the merciful." "Blessed are the peace-makers." "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you." The same of whom it is written, "God is light" (1 John i., 5), and again, "God is love" (1 John iv., 16)? If so, civilisation had made more rapid progress in heaven than on earth, or else in taking human form his human heart had strangely refined his divinity. Is it the same god preachers now declare to be infinite in all goodness? I cannot believe it, but I do believe that every god is, of man's making, the exaggerated shadow of himself. For myself I reject alike the bloody deity of the Israelites and his weak, degrading successor, who finds a blessing in poverty, famine, and sorrow (see Luke vi., 20-21). I choose rather, the great spirit of humanity, now in its struggling infancy, but destined to grow up in power until it has taught the world that the best worship is reverence for truth and right, the best morality the greatest good of the greatest number. And so much of peace and happiness as these will bring is a better reward for man than the golden streets and jewelled walls of a New Jerusalem.

E. J. BOWTELL.

THE TESTIMONIAL TO MR. SYMES.

As many of Mr. Symes' friends and admirers as the Hall of Science could well accommodate, assembled on Thursday evening, Dec. 20, to do our constant contributor honor on his departure for the antipodes. The hall was tastefully decorated with evergreens and potted plants, and the whole proceedings reflected much credit on all concerned.

At eight o'clock prompt Mr. Bradlaugh escorted Mrs. Symes to the head supper-table, followed by Mrs. Besant on the arm of the hero of the evening. When the guests had done ample justice to the viands, the one toast of the evening, the health of Mrs. and Mr. Symes, was pledged with three ringing cheers.

After some music, Mr. Bradlaugh, who presided, rose and was received with the enthusiastic greeting his presence invariably provokes. He said: Friends,—We meet to bid good speed to our vice-president who is going to the other side of the world, we meet to present him with a testimonial which will show the friends there the esteem in which we hold him, and we meet to present him with a little purse containing £139, and, much more than that—the kindly wishes, the loving thoughts, the hearty hopes, and the great goodwill of

men, women and children throughout the land. We regret, even for a time, to lose so good a soldier. (Hear, hear.) We hope to see him back. The colonies will learn soon enough to value him. I am glad he has accepted their invitation, glad he should have opportunities of new experience, and be able to carry out of the struggle here the banner he will hold aloft there. (Cheers.) He trusted his presence would help to knit together the various scattered Freethought bodies and unite them with the mother country. (Hear, hear.) Melbourne, New Zealand, India and Ceylon, had invited him. This was in itself an honor. It was said, untruly, a prophet had no honor in his own country. This your presence proves. We tender Mr. Symes thanks for what he has achieved during his seven years' apprenticeship, I call it, in our cause. Now, companion, we call you past-master. We send you, brave soldier, with our banner to the other side of the world, in the full conviction that you will bring it back unstained. (Loud cheers.)

Mrs. Besant, who was deputed to present the testimonial, then read the address, which had been placed for inspection in the hall. It was tastefully illuminated on vellum, framed in gold, and fitted in a rosewood case. It read as follows:—

"To JOSEPH SYMES, Vice-President of the National Secular Society and one of its special Lecturers.

"Sir,—By a resolution of the National Secular Society and on behalf of the Freethought party in Great Britain, we take the occasion of your leaving England to visit the southern hemisphere, to testify to you our goodwill and affection, and our wishes for your health and prosperity.

"We desire to place on record our thorough appreciation of your devotion to the Freethought cause, and our recognition of the brave work you have done with tongue and pen during the time you have been in our ranks.

"We bid you farewell in the full trust that you will gain honor and respect amongst your new friends on the other side of the Pacific, and in the hope that we shall soon welcome you back in our midst.

(Signed) {CHARLES BRADLAUGH, President.
ROBERT FORDER, Secretary."

Mrs. BESANT said: Friends;—I am your spokeswoman to express in a few words something of the thought our party gives to one who has never shrunk from danger. It must be an additional pleasure to Mr. Symes to meet, together with so many of his friends, his co-worker, Mr. Ramsey. In giving this testimonial I would like to say that in a fighting party like our own, which is now more than ever militant, it is a question with men who come to the front how long their devotion will hold fast, how long they will keep our cause nearest their hearts. Of this we feel assured in Mr. Symes. He will come back to his friends who will not forget him, greater and wiser but not one whit more loyal than to-day to the cause to which he has given his life. (Applause.)

Mr. SYMES, who was visibly affected, was received with a perfect ovation. He said: My dear friends,—I think you will believe me when I say I am bewildered. I accept your present with the same feelings that prompted the gift. This is without exception the proudest moment of my life. I hardly know whether to laugh or cry—I can stand fighting, but this is the kind of thing I cannot stand. I think you comprehend me. I have been struck to the core to see the little sums contributed. Those who have subscribed largely will forgive me, but I feel the little ones most. From my heart I thank you all. I thank you, too, for the beautiful address, beautiful in sentiment, and beautiful in execution. It is a certificate I can take to the other side of the world, and I'll try to be worthy of it. (Cheers.) I feel I do not go alone. I am your delegate. I hope it will have the effect of knitting the Freethinkers I visit with those at home. It is only by unity we can make our principles triumph. If we show a bold front to the enemy we shall be able to demand what we cannot now get—justice. I think my voyage will have the effect of developing myself, and I trust to come back a better man than I go. (A Voice, "No, no.") I will prove you are mistaken. I will come back a better man. Both in physical and in mental health I have improved since I have joined the Freethought ranks. I believe in growth, and travel is a great developer. If unworthy of the testimonial now, I hope when I come back you will find I have grown worthy of it. Be assured it will strengthen me to make you, as well as myself, proud of the work of my life. (Prolonged applause.)

The rest of the evening was devoted to amusement. Messrs. Lowry, Humphreys and Mr. Bell's quartette party giving some excellent musical selections.

Mr. Bradlaugh left at ten o'clock, after which Mr. Symes had to go through the ordeal of a heavy hand-shaking from his numerous well-wishers, while the hall was being cleared for the devotees of Terpinolone, who tripped the light fantastic till an early hour in the morning.

THE housekeeping man who hammered his thumb-nail while putting down carpets, should remember that in the revised version of the New Testament the words have been changed to "hades" and "condemnation."

PROFANE JOKES.

WHO was the first *dust*-man?—Adam.

WHY was Noah the best financier the world ever saw?—Because he kept up a floating company when all the rest of the world was in liquidation.

WHEN did the early spread of Christianity occur?—At the lord's supper.

"SIMPLY to thy cross I cling," chirruped the thief as he skedaddled with a lady's neck ornament.

PARSON: "Children, when all those people had eaten of the loaves and fishes what was left?" "The bones and crusteses!" shouted an eager little boy.

"I'm always glad when it's your turn to preach," said an old lady to a conceited parson, who was a miserable preacher. "Why, my good woman?" he asked. "Because then I can get a good seat."

"Do you ever observe how very devotional Deacon Buffam is?" asked a pious lady of her husband. "Yes, my dear, the deacon is very devotional. He always keeps his head bowed in prayer till the contribution-box has passed."

A MINISTER hearing a boy say "both the mosquitos," reproved him saying, that "Like all other creatures, they were doubtless made for some end." "That may be," said the boy; "but I don't like the end that I feel, at any rate."

BEGGING PARSON (to congregation): "The lord loveth a cheerful giver, and will restore unto him fourfold. Yet, in sober seriousness, I would advise those in debt not to give, even though others may point at them contemptuously." *Result*—The lord got a larger banking account. All contributed.

A LITTLE girl was taught to close her evening prayer, during the temporary absence of her father, with "and please watch over my papa." It sounded very sweet, but the mother's amusement may be imagined when the child added—"And you'd better keep an eye on mamma, too!"

ONE Sunday morning a minister of the gospel had his attention called to a number of boys who were in search of a lost ball with which they had been playing football. After lecturing to them for awhile about the wickedness of playing on that day, he said, "Now boys, let me assure you that it is useless you searching for that ball any more, for Satan has it now in his possession." Whereupon one of the lads remarked, "Why, he's too cunning to touch it, he's not a member in our club."

LORD TEIGNMOUTH relates that his tutor, Rev. Mr. Jerram, was one day preaching, when he was disturbed by snoring. He more than once appealed to the supposed sleeper, and at length peremptorily intimated that, unless the good man or woman to whom he attributed the interruption was awakened, he must discontinue his sermon. "Sir," exclaimed a man from a remote part of the church, "it's a howl!"

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Edited by

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Interim Editor, EDWARD B. AVELING, D.Sc.

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