

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:

Vol. IV.—No. 4.]

JANUARY 27, 1884.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.

GODS, PRIESTS, AND BLASPHEMY.

MAN'S greatest foes are the gods. They have cursed him for thousands of years with plague and pestilence; they have kept him ignorant and brutal, the prey of priestly superstition and kingly tyranny; and all the progress he has made, the victories he has won, have been in spite of their malignant opposition. They are the ghastly vampires that have feasted on the vitals of humanity, and with cannibalistic sacramental rights have eaten its flesh and drunk its blood. In the name of the sacred rights of man, so long outraged by these tyrants, we will ever express our hatred and loathing of every member, ancient and modern, of the diabolical confraternity of deities.

In making this vow we are actuated as much by love for man and sympathy with his sufferings, as by hatred of the gods and their villainies.

A word of explanation, however, is necessary concerning our antipathy to the gods. We do not regard them as real existences; that is to say, we do not consider Brahma, Jupiter, Jehovah, the Christian trinity, and *hoc genus omne*, other than as fantastic fictions of man's ignorant imagination. We are not more convinced of the actual existence, past or present, of the Hindoo triad than of its Christian counterpart, but denounce and despise them both as puerile inventions of pre-scientific superstition. We define the gods as phantom ghosts haunting the darkness of human ignorance, who, like the pious corporation of the City of London, have neither souls to save nor bodies to be kicked. As a matter of fact, it is not the gods we fight against, but the priesthoods, the pious impostures, the intellectual and moral monstrosities, the orthodox lies which have been built up by holy knaves on the gloomy superstition of belief in god. The being we denounce, but which faith adores, is a something of which we know nothing, excepting that it is merely an idea bred and born and doomed to die in the mind of bigotry and credulity. When, therefore, we brand the gods with the infamous distinction of being the most fruitful and frightful source of man's misery, we mean neither more nor less than that the superstitious belief in the reality of fictitious gods, whom man made brutal and vicious in his own image, has been the ever fertile mother of most of the evils, past and present, of humanity. Why then, it may be asked, do we attack god, and not the priest? Because only by attacking "god," the priests' stock-in-trade, can the priest be successfully assailed. In the freethought warfare all that god, the fictitious figure-head of theology, can possibly lose, are myriads of stupid prayers, and the lickspittle adoration of millions of superstitious devotees. The stake which the priest risks is something more precious—pounds, shillings, and pence, whereby he grows rich on the poverty of the flock whom he piously fleeces. As to poor god, who is indispensable for the success of the swindle, he gets not a farthing for his pains, and certainly comes off second best in the bargain.

God is the priest's armor; pierce the armor and the old warrior falls like a log of wood. Discredit the deity and the priestly occupation is gone. By gibbeting the abominations of their god the entire trade of supernatural commodities, so lucrative to the priesthood, becomes involved in moral and financial bankruptcy.

It is passing strange that men can be so infatuated by the frenzy of superstition as to love the idea of god.

Nothing man can conceive could be more unlovely than the notion of god. Whether we open the book of "god's revelation," or gaze on the face of animated nature, the tale concerning the deity is equally dark and dismal. In the bible his portrait is traced with a pencil dipped in the blood of man and of beast. The moral sense of enlightened humanity is thereby shocked, and feels disgust at the abominations which, in the pages of the "holy book," are coolly credited to the honor and glory of god. Crimes that would reflect everlasting disgrace on earthly tyrants are there ascribed to deity, and are approved to-day by the pliant subserviency of Christian piety simply because they were perpetrated by "a good and gracious god." If, shuddering at the moral turpitude of the biblical fetish, we seek relief by taking a survey of animated nature, with the hope to discover there the indications of the existence of a deity less fond of revelling in human misery, we are doomed to disgust and disappointment. In the first place, nature is everywhere silent respecting the existence of god; and science, her interpreter, knows nothing of deity. In the second place the Theist is obliged, in the absence of facts, to base his belief on bare assumption, and then to attempt to make the facts of existence fit in with his queer notion of a god. But the facts stubbornly refuse to harmonise. This discordance of fact and theory revive the old queries: Whence came evil into the world? Why did god frame the world on so defective a plan? Why does not his omnipotence rectify to-day the mistakes which it made at the beginning? How can god, consistently with his vaunted goodness, permit the perpetration of daily and hourly crimes against innocence and justice? How can he be relieved of full responsibility for all the misdeeds and miseries of humanity, if it be true that he is the author of all things, animate and inanimate? To these ever-recurring and never-settled questions no reply satisfactory to the reputation of god has been or can be given. The failure of the biblical and of the natural test of the character of the deity is, consequently, complete, and exhibits in naked ugliness the unloveliness of an ideal which true morality rather prompts us to hate than to love.

In view of the stupid craze and bitter curse of theology, our solemn duty as Freethinkers is to "blaspheme." The devil is not more afraid of holy water than is priestcraft of "blasphemy." Blasphemy is the magic charm that exorcises the demon of deity, and casts out of man the unclean spirit of god. It is man's real savior, going about doing good, healing the god-caused wounds of humanity; giving light to them that sit in the darkness of superstition, and opening the eyes which priestcraft had blinded. It is the enemy of god because he is the foe of man; that is to say, it recognises in priestcraft the evil genius of humanity. It is the scoffing enemy of sanctified humbug and white-chokered cant. Its weapons are reason and ridicule, its object the spread of truth; its ideal, human emancipation from the thralldom of the gods. Blasphemy is the flagellator of corrupt and tyrannising priesthoods, the awakener of man's intellect from the sloth and slumber of superstition, the emancipator of humanity from the thralldom of theology. It is hated by cowardly priests because it speaks long-hidden truths about the consecrated lies of that customary cant, orthodoxy. All ideas counter to the sanctified formulae of priestcraft have the fire-and-brimstone odor of blasphemy loud and strong about them. Common sense in "religion" is blasphemy. The application to god and his ways of the

ordinary human rules, whereby morality is determined, is blasphemy. To dare to recognise murder, cruelty, hatred, malignity, and injustice when we cannot fail to see them in the character of the god—belief in whom is, in more senses than one, common at the present time—is blasphemy. It is blasphemy to touch the ark of the lord, to take intellectual stock of the god who is held aloft by ill-paid bishops and other poor and holy men, for the adoring contemplation of Christendom. To pity the Caananites, and to condemn their cruel treatment at the pious hands of their heaven-appointed butchers; to say that hell is too hot even for the warmest member of the council of the ungodly, is flat blasphemy. To think without help or guidance of priest or bible; without fear or respect of god or devil; with more regard to duty than to deity—is to blaspheme. Not to tell, or act, or live a lie, for the glory of god, is to be a blasphemer. In the interests of humanity, so long frightened by the ghost of the theology, we vindicate our right and duty to blaspheme. Only by a persistent outpouring of the vials of blasphemy can man subdue the rampant tyranny of the gods and priests, and rid himself of these, his greatest and most implacable foes.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

SURVIVALS.

It is not to be expected that the progress of civilisation should resemble the march of a regiment on parade—a thin red line sweeping grandly across the field with geometrical precision, and yet with all the vigor and spontaneity of healthy life. Rather may it be compared to the same regiment torn and dislocated by a well-placed foe, all appearance of military formation gone, and every man fighting for his own hand. Many have fallen victims to the shot and shell that ploughed through their ranks; others are bravely, but feebly, toiling onwards, while here and there a solitary hero appears challenging the onslaught of a whole army. Meanwhile the camp followers are taking as much care of themselves as is compatible with keen watchfulness for opportunities of plunder. In the battle of life we have many camp followers, identified to a certain extent with the army of progress, and yet ignobly content to await and enjoy the fruits of victory without any share in its achievement. Many fight and fall, unhonored and unsung; a few gallant leaders conduct campaigns in their own persons against a host; and that host, though perhaps numerically weak, is so strongly entrenched as to be very formidable indeed. Now, if this be anything like a fair representation, we ought to be very guarded in our treatment of historical epochs. As in geology, so in history, it is a serious fallacy to suppose that one characteristic period is distinctly marked off from another. A generalisation of this kind may be a good working hypothesis, but must not be allowed to crystallise into dogmatism. No doubt we can point to the times when the burning of heretics was common, and to the dates when that practice ceased in particular countries. But long before it ceased it was condemned by many pioneers of thought who were sceptical enough to be tolerant at least of their opponents' existence. This milder type characterises another epoch, which was, nevertheless, unable to remove heresy out of the category of crimes. Another stage has been the so-called negative treatment which excluded the unorthodox from place and power, on the plea that he was the aggressor in thus obtruding his views upon his neighbors and claiming for heresy a quasi-official sanction. Next comes the limitation of persecution to the sphere of social relationships—a stage which must be the last and most prolonged, for it cannot terminate until heresy has become actually dominant in society. Now it is clearly convenient thus to graduate our civilisation and to note the development of each generation by so convenient a method. But while we congratulate ourselves that our stage is the latest, that the general feeling towards the heretic is merely one of social ostracism, we must not forget that we still have among us minds that properly belong to ages past, that, in short, so far from keeping up with the march of progress many men are doing their best to retard it, and are grieving over defeats that have long been the commonplace of history. The men who have so zealously and meanly resisted Mr. Bradlaugh's entrance into Parliament, so far as they are not actually wicked, are curious survivals of the third stage of superstition. The persecutors of the

Freethinker carry us still further back, and remind us of the time when any penalty short of death was considered appropriate for independence of thought. And why say "short of death"? Is there no logic among the orthodox? Surely there are zealots enlightened enough to see that even such a qualification is a deviation from the strict letter of their theories. It is nothing but cowardly fear, either of the ridicule of the crowd or of the scorn of the humanitarian, that saves our Newdegates, Beggs, and Mannings from openly avowing their lust for blood. These men know that toleration implies faithlessness, that the mere existence of the Atheist calls loudly to their almighty fiend for vengeance, and that their yearning for crusades and dragonnades, though never to be satisfied, will be to the all-seeing eye their passport to everlasting habitations. Let them have all their consolations. Meantime they are fighting a losing battle. The spirit of the age is against them because it is godless, and every day their fury is becoming more impotent and ridiculous.

S.

TO JEHOVAH THE GOD OF THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE?

ACCURSED god! beneath thine awful trail
Lies the dark past, and from that midnight gloom
Upon mine ear breaks now a bitter wail,
As tortured millions mock their silent tomb.
Thy creatures curse thee from the grave's dark womb,
Foul vampire of the soul. When hearts grew pale,
Thine was the feast of blood—thine be the doom,
Man's scorn, before which thy false priests shall fall.
Know thou man's freedom is beyond a "god's" recall.

Black-browed impending tempest sullen stood
Guard in the portals of man's mind. "God's" stain
Sealed the dark waters of a treacherous flood;
Vile falsehood, mapping earth a huge domain,
Crowned "Ignorance" king, so that thy faith should reign;
Made "knowledge" crime, thus was thy worship plann'd.
Whilst "god" did lie, "Man" spoke of truth in vain,
And red fires flashed their answer o'er the land.
Thine was the flame, though storm-clouds hid thy blood-
stained hand.

Thou could'st look down from "heaven's" high throne and see
Thine altars smoke, the hideous fumes ascend,
Nor stay thy murderous hordes, nor victims free—
Was't in thy "praise" the maniac shriek did blend.
With clank of chain, thy "judgment" to attend,
The victims sped that thou should'st doom again,
Death no release, eternity's dark end
Illumined by thy fires which ne'er shall wane.
"Most merciful art thou!" none ever asks in vain!

Inspirer thou? Still o'er thine ancient page
Pore learned dupes old fables to renew,
Stolen from former creeds whose very age
Dwarfs to a day thy "faith" which overthrew
Almighty gods of old; and just as true,
Now being thine as being by them possess't.
They had their day, no doubt thy temples drew
Shoals of such fools as hurry still with zest
To pray, or praise, or sleep an hour, as suits them best.
E. PERCY P. MACLOGHLIN.

OLD TESTAMENT POLYTHEISM.

(Concluded from page 22.)

Six centuries later we find that Jahveh was still only a local god and his worshippers acknowledged the divinity of other deities in other lands. In the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of Judges, a story is related which plainly illustrates this. Briefly it is as follows. "There was a man of Mount Ephraim whose name was Mical." This man had stolen 1100 shekels of silver from his mother. Warned at last by the old lady's cursing and lamenting over her loss, he owned that he was the thief and restored the property. Then she told him that she had "wholly dedicated the silver unto the lord to make a graven image and a molten image." Now Jahveh had expressly said "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exodus xx., 4). And again, "Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold" (verse 23). It is impossible that this woman could have thought to win a blessing from the lord by dedicating 1100 shekels of silver wholly to the purpose of

offending him, and therefore we must conclude that the lord alluded to was some other divinity. Although the silver was wholly dedicated to this purpose, on recovering it she gave only 200 shekels to the founder to make images, and I sincerely hope made some better use of the remaining 900. The founder made a graven image and a molten image "and they were in the house of Micah, and the man Micah had a house of gods." That convinces me that Jahveh was not there. What a fight would have been going on in that house! When Micah went to morning prayers he would have found nothing but fragments of silver. After a while a Levite travelled that way, and Micah invited him to be his priest, offering "ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and his victuals." He thought it mattered very little to a priest what god he served provided he was sufficiently paid. And he was right, for his offer was accepted. Sometimes after this, six hundred men of the tribe of Dan, who were on their way to Laish for the purpose of capturing it and destroying all its inhabitants, because, as we are told, "they dwelt quiet and secure," broke into Micah's house and took forcible possession of his gods. The priest at first objected, but they said "Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest; is it better for thee to be a priest, unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel? And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod and the seraphim and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people." Then they continued on their way to Laish, which they burnt, and put to the sword all the inhabitants. Afterwards they rebuilt the city, calling it Dan, and dwelt there. The account concludes: "And the children of Dan set up the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Cushom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made all the time that the house of god was in Shiloh."

How was it that this Levite deserted Jahveh for gods of silver, yet the earth did not open and swallow him? That Micah owned a house full of gods, that it did not fall and crush him and them together? That the Danites could worship stolen images, yet no fiery serpents or dreadful plagues appeared among them? The author of Judges has fortunately explained this for us. He has given us two reasons for this unusual liberty of conscience. This was taking place "all the time that the house of god was in Shiloh" (xviii., 31), and his power did not extend to Mount Ephraim and Dan. That was one reason. The other was, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (xvii., 6). Either explanation will satisfy me. Christian interpreters, which do you prefer?

E. J. BOWTELL.

THE IMMORALITY OF CHRISTIAN MORALITY.

The morality taught by the Christian, as by all religions pretending to a supernatural origin, is gross immorality. It is based upon an utterly immoral principle and supported by the most unworthy and ignoble motives. Its sole ministry depends upon the belief in future rewards and punishments. Man is at once bribed with the hope of future recompense, and threatened with future punishment. It is the child's rod and sugar-stick adapted on a magnified scale to the case of adults. The result is that the vast majority of mankind have no true conception of a real morality.

Taking the case of two noble men—both leading good lives, but the one an orthodox Christian and the other an Atheist—the morality of the Atheist, though it may not surpass in degree, is certainly infinitely superior in kind to that of the Christian, because whilst the former has no other motive but his own nobility of soul, and looks for no reward except that which virtue itself brings—the latter, besides these inducements, expects to be rewarded with an eternal heaven.

In proof of the strong hold this degrading and abominable doctrine (that we are to practise virtue in order to secure heaven) has upon the minds of professing Christians, we have their stock objection: "Oh! but if there be no heaven or hell, what on earth is the use of being good?"—thus plainly showing what their much-vaunted morality is worth! Those who speak thus have absolutely no true understanding or appreciation either of the excellence of

virtue or the sin and misery of evil-doing. And it is an infinitely sad thing to think how many thousands of good-living people go through life without ever once rising to the conception of an unselfish and disinterested morality.

Now, much of the morality taught by Christ, though often exaggerated in illustration, was sound in principle; but whatever good there was in it, was entirely spoilt by the motive he taught his hearers to be guided by. Christ said, "Be good, be true, be virtuous;" not as great philosophers before him had taught—because in goodness, truth and virtue alone is real happiness; not because virtue is desirable for itself; but simply for the low and selfish motive that you may secure heaven and escape hell.

"Do good," he said, "and great shall be your reward in heaven." Christ's teaching of morality was false and immoral, because he believed in a heaven and hell; because he failed to realise and appreciate the great truth that virtue brings its own reward; vice and wickedness their own punishment in this present life of ours.

Despite the advance he made upon much of the religious teaching of his time, he failed to understand—or if he understood it he failed to teach it—that virtue is in itself a priceless good; and that it is only with the virtue that knows no motives but its own, that a real morality is concerned. He regarded the practice of virtue only as a means to a selfish end. He entirely omitted to tell his listeners that it is the test of ends in itself.

"Love your neighbor," "forgive your enemies," "give good for evil"—not because you are thereby acting well and nobly towards your fellow man, but because it is a good investment; because it will pay a hundred per cent. in the "sweet bye and bye," when you shall be "in glory," and the majority of your fellow creatures in hell!

Christ may have had some dim perception, some shadowy idea of the beauty and excellence of virtue for and in itself, but it was crushed out by his belief in a heaven and hell. Thus he appealed not to the sense of good, not to the moral consciousness of his hearers, but simply to their lowest appeals to each man's selfishness. The whole burden of its song is "Save yourself!" "Save others if you can, but save yourself. Take first care of No. 1." It is the very acme of the abominable principle, "Each for himself and the devil take the hindmost." Its "tidings of great joy" are, that by far the largest portion of mankind will go into everlasting torment. Its "peace on earth" has been the rack and the stake. Its "goodwill to men" is summed up in the words, "He that believeth not shall be damned!"

As a matter of fact, morality is entirely independent of speculative belief. Belief or disbelief one way or the other is neither a virtue nor a fault. A man's morality does not depend upon his belief in religious dogmas, but on his life and conduct. An individual is neither necessarily better nor worse for belief or disbelief in such speculative problems as the existence of a god, a future state, etc. But he is very much the better or the worse according to his standard of morality.

Some of the greatest believers in god, etc., have been abominably wicked and immoral, as all history abundantly proves. The moral conscience is innate in man; his moral nature has been gradually evolved during his upward development, just as his physical nature has. When the man or woman is highly developed, the intellectual or moral qualities are good. Where there is lack of development from any cause, the moral qualities are stunted and weak. The sources of the moral sense in man may be of so complex a character as to render their analysis a difficult subject for any but the student of psychology, but they are as much the result of the natural laws governing the constitution of man as are the sources of his physical development.

Man has his ideal in morals as in everything else. That ideal is a high or a low one, according as the nature of the man is a high or a low one. And in morals, as in everything else, we should ever endeavor to make our ideal a higher and still higher one; and ever strive to the best of our ability to realise it.

"Men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things!"

Not that by thus propitiating (as the Christian hopes to do) an angry and cruel god we may win an imaginary heaven or escape an imaginary hell; but that we may, whilst ennobling ourselves, do our little best to ennoble also our fellow men. Thus we learn to know the beauty, the wisdom and the happiness of virtue as the supreme end of man!

CARINGTON FORSTER.

OUR PROSECUTION.

I HAVE received two letters referring to my article in last week's *Freethinker*, one of which says "the secretary of the post-office is a rank Tory and member of committee of the Anti-Atheistic Society, with Fowler and Tyler."

The other correspondent says: "You are quite right in supposing that district post-masters have no authority to assist prosecutions. Not long ago I had reason to believe that someone had forged my name to a money-order. On applying at the post-office I was informed that no assistance could be given me in any shape—without instructions from the Secretary to the Post-office."

I am endeavoring to hunt this thing home, so that we may clearly understand whether we are paying our postmen to act as police-spies or to carry our letters.

I have addressed the following letter to Mr. Fawcett, and am awaiting his reply:—

"20 Brownlow Street, Dalston, E., Jan. 22, 1884.

"HON. SIR,—I beg to submit the following to your notice and to ask respectfully for an answer to the questions founded thereon.

"I, with two others—Messrs. G. W. Foote and H. A. Kemp—was prosecuted by one Henry Underwood, on a charge of blasphemous libel, and was tried and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment on the 5th of March last, at the Central Criminal Court.

"Among the witnesses called for the prosecution was one Thomas Alford, letter-carrier in the West-Central district, who deposed under cross-examination as follows:—[Here was inserted the evidence of the postman as given last week]. I beg therefore to ask respectfully—

"1st.—Is it any part of the duty of a district postmaster to arrange for and assist the getting up of private prosecutions for libel?

"2nd.—Is it within the power of any district postmaster to so employ his time and that of the letter-carriers under him, without instructions from the Postmaster-General or someone of equal authority?

"3rd.—From whom must the instruction be obtained?

"4th.—Was such instruction given?

Your obedient servant,

"W. J. RAMSEY."

ACID DROPS.

COLONEL INGERSOLL pithily represents the new faith and the old when he says: "I believe in the new firm of 'Health and Heresy,' rather than the old partnership of 'Disease and Divinity,' doing business at the old sign of the 'Skull and Crossbones.'"

A PROMINENT Chinaman in San Francisco was asked by a reporter how the children of Confucius generally celebrated their Christmas Day. "Samee like Melican man," was the rejoinder; "eat, drink, and git dlunk." These Chinamen need to undergo but a slight change to become good Christians.

A PARAGRAPH, headed "A Terrible Warning," has gone the round of the papers, stating that a soldier—name not mentioned—after making use of the silly phrase, "God strike me blind," laid down upon his bed, but when he attempted to open his eyes, found he could not do so, and had to be conveyed to the Haslar Military Hospital. We suspect this to be one of those pious frauds which crop up as regularly as the big sea-serpent in the dull season. If not, the soldier in question may reckon himself hardly dealt with considering the number of "profane" invocations which are uttered both in public-houses and churches, and never answered.

SINCE writing the above we have had letters from three correspondents who have inquired into the matter. One, who addressed a letter to the principal of the hospital, received a reply stating, "There is no truth whatever in the statement. The young man has a weak right eye, and was slightly inflamed through cold. He did not swear, and is not blind; but is very indignant, and much hurt at the statement." Another correspondent has been in company with several sergeants belonging to the regiment (37th Hampshire), and one and all declare the young man is no card-player, as was reported, and that he has had bad eyes for some time. The lie was started in the first issue of a new Tory organ, the *Evening Mail*.

At an Arkansas love-feast an old man was asked why he joined the church. "Well," he said, "I a'ers did hav a bankerin after the gospil, but this fall it come on me powerful hard. I had bad luck at the saw-mill, six o' my shoats

got drowned, my gray mare broke her leg in the woods, and everything seemed to go wrong. I tried everything, salve and axle grease, but nuthin' seemed to help my misfortune. I shifted from the Democrat to the Republican party, and then changed back again, and nuthin' seemed to help me, so finally I tuck up the notion that I oughter jine the church. The only thing in the way was that I didn't have 'ligion, so I thought mighty hard over this. One day I went down to whar thar was a camp-meetin' and dropped down on my knees. A ole feller with a slick suit o' clothes came aroun' and axed me what I wanted, and I told him I wanted 'ligion. He axed me if I was afeared that my soul would go to torment, and I said that torment wan't botherin' me, that things on the farm won't grow ter suit. 'Wal,' said he, 'pray awhile.' Well, I prayed awhile, all the time thinkin' 'bout the kalamities at home, till at last a rough and ready sort o' feller come aroun' and says, 'Ef yer wanter do anything here, shout.' Wal, I got and shouted and the next day jined the church, but lem me tell yer, if them stock ain't improved I'm a goin' to try somethin' else."

THE *Echo* says "Barnum's 'sacred white elephant' is receiving as severe treatment at the hands of its critics as Dr. Kinns has had dealt out to him by the geologists. That it is not white was declared long ago, and now it is affirmed that it is not sacred. 'There is nothing sacred according to Buddhist teaching,' says a correspondent of the *Times*, 'in a white elephant or in any other elephant.'"

WILLIAM HARTLEY is a nice specimen of a Salvation Army postman. He was employed in the Chelsea district, where many letters have of late been missing, among others one containing a £5 note. This note has been traced to the Salvation Army headquarters, whither it had been sent by Hartley with an order for a 50s. uniform and a 50s. regulation overcoat and cape. At Bow Street, where the prisoner is being prosecuted by the Postmaster-General, an unctuous letter to headquarters was read, in which the prisoner, writing from the 211th Blood and Fire Chelsea Corps, declares, "I hope you received the bank-note all right, and trusting you will let me know when I can have them, or if it is necessary for me to get away from work, or to come up to headquarters. I am beautifully saved, thank god. God bless you. I am expecting and believing." Hartley was probably expecting and believing the lord would send more £5 notes to be devoted to so laudable a cause as purchasing uniforms from the Army.

CAN any of our readers give us the names of the East Essex magistrates who committed two boys, aged 13 and 14, to prison for a fortnight for laughing in church?

ON Monday, at a meeting of the Aberdeen Town Council, an apostle of Christ moved that the refreshment-rooms in Duthie Park be closed on Sundays. A Mr. Walker objected on the ground that refreshments were as necessary on Sundays as on other days. On a division, the motion to close was carried by fifteen votes against nine. The majority evidently think that the people of Aberdeen can get enough refreshment by partaking of the holy sacrament.

A JEWISH girl, named Chanarebeka Philipp, the daughter of a Prague merchant, has been baptised into the Roman Catholic Church in spite of the energetic protests of her family. The girl was only fourteen years of age. Archbishop Sembratowicz performed the ceremony notwithstanding the protests of the chief rabbis of Lember and Prague. This is the usual way converts to Roman Catholicism are made.

A RONDEL.

(After Swinburne, though a long way, I admit).

The hand of the lord, so the parson preaches,
O'ershadows us all as the sky doth the sward;
In evil or good his theology teaches,
The hand of the lord.
In battle the stroke of the swift, gleaming sword,
The stout ship that sinks as the wild sea-bird screeches,
Weak bridges and other disasters deplored—
All these are ascribed to his hand that o'erreaches.
Let reason demolish this doctrine, abhorred,
Nor find in men's faults what our good sense impeaches—
The hand of the lord.

D. EVANS.

A RECTOR required his pupils to read from the New Testament every evening. One lad frequently neglected orthography for emphasis, and on coming to the verse, "And Herod laid hold on John," mistook the "I" for "s," and thundered out: "And Herod said, Hold on, John!"

SPECIAL NOTICES.

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

February 27, Hall of Science. March 2, Claremont Hall; 5, Hackney; 9, Milton Hall; 12, Hall of Science; 16, Manchester; 23, Plymouth. April 3, 6, 10, 13, 17, 24, Hall of Science. May 4 and 11, Hall of Science.

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. Jan. 27 (at 11.30), "The Darwinian Theory: its history;" at 7.30, "Origin of Life."

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.—February 3, Milton Hall; 6, Hackney Radical Club; 18, Luton. Open for engagements any Saturday or Sunday in the provinces, or any night, excepting Wednesday, in London and vicinity.—Applications to W. J. Ramsey, 28 Stonecutter Street, London, E.C.

RECEIVED.—A. Thuin, Henri Roche, A. W. Hunter.

T. PARSONS.—You must not be disappointed if your jokes do not appear for some time after they are sent. All in good time.

J. S. CAPE.—Mr. Symes was a regularly-ordained Wesleyan minister. He renounced the ministry about eight years ago.

J. KAY.—Your original joke was sent to us years ago, as having been discovered with a portion of the Ark on Mount Ararat.

LIBERAL.—Mr. Conway is abroad. The services at South Place Chapel are of a broad but Theistic character. You should give Milton Hall a visit.

R. S. JOHNSON.—Please send us three or four more copies of your prospectus.

F. CLAYDON.—Your sentiments are good, but the writing is hardly up to the standard.

R. F.—Certainly.

INQUIRER informs us that Saphir, the witty Israelite alluded to in last week's "Acid Drops," died a few years ago in Vienna. We shall be glad to hear from you at the time you mention.

O. WESTON.—The story of the man struck blind is another pious fraud. See "Acid Drops."

J. WATTS.—It is now unusual at the police courts, when an Atheist claims to affirm for the subject, to raise any discussion. Most of the magistrates, clerks and ushers have the matter cut and dried.

ED. DALE.—We expect all the London branches will organise brake parties to Holloway on the morning of the 25th.

X.—Thanks for jokes.

R. LUBBOCK.—The number of Episcopal clergymen in last census was over 21,000.

W. S.—The passage alluded to is 2 Sam. xii., 11—"Thus saith the lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of the sun." It refers to David, the man after god's own heart.

T.—Cuttings received.

J. SHERWIN.—Richard Carlile was born at Ashburton, in Devonshire, in 1790.

C. A. TRAU sent a subscription for twelve weeks and only gave "Chelmsford" as address, which is insufficient. Please send full address to Mr. Ramsey.

WANTED Nos. 1, 3, 5, 7, 38, Vol. II. of *Freethinker*. Send price to Mr. Ramsey.

J. C. S. is earnestly requested to return home. Mr. G. will forgive everything, and has cancelled account due, and waits for return.

G. DOWLING, Gosport; W. Venton, Christchurch; and R. Wallis.—Many thanks for your inquiries into the case.

R. S. MANSURGH.—Our terms of subscription are announced above.

J. B. HIBBERT.—A printed cutting, giving a different version of the affair, was sent to our office.

VERITAS ODIUM PARIT.—In our next.

It is particularly requested that all orders for literature should be sent to Mr. W. J. Ramsey, 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.

MR. FOOTE'S RELEASE.

We believe that, according to the prison arrangements, Mr. Foote will be liberated soon after 8 a.m. on the morning of Monday, February 25. He will proceed to the Hall of Science, where a breakfast will be provided. A banquet will be held, and the testimonial presented to Messrs. Foote and Ramsey on Wednesday, March 12, Mr. Bradlaugh in the chair. Intending subscribers should send their contributions to Mrs. A. Besant, 17 Avenue Road, St. John's Wood, London, N.W.

SUGAR PLUMS.

THE February number of *Progress* is now ready, and contains, among other matter, an important Note on Shelley by the late James Thomson (B.V.); the conclusion of Dr. E. B. Aveling's paper on "Henry Irving and his Critics;" a second instalment on "The God-Idea," by J. H.; "Zaleen," a most interesting and affecting story of a Shan girl, by Captain Bingham; a paper on "M. Emile Zola and the French Stage," by Norman Britton, certainly one of our ablest English dramatic critics; a paper on "Two Superstitions," by C. J.; and an account of the Sanskrit book, the Bhagavad Gita, which expounds the religion of Krishna, the god incarnate of the Hindus, by J. M. Wheeler.

We have had forwarded to us the balance-sheet of the Liverpool and Bootle Secular Sick and Tontine Society, which we believe is the first undertaking of the kind among Secularists. The healthy state of the balance-sheet might certainly encourage the promotion of similar attempts in other Secular societies.

THE activity of Secularism is being well displayed in the many attempts to promote the building of Secular halls. This week we have had sent to us two new prospectuses—one of the Northampton Secular Hall and Institute Company, Limited, with a capital of £2,000 in £1 shares, of which Mr. R. S. Johnson, 58 Wellinborough Road, Northampton, is the secretary. The other is that of the South London Secular Hall Company, Limited, the secretary of which is Mr. Chas. Griggs, with a temporary registered office at 23 Russel Grove, Vassal Road, Brixton. In the prospectus of the latter, the desirability of opening the hall to commemorate the release of Mr. G. W. Foote from Holloway Gaol is urged.

SUNDAY science classes in connexion with the West Central branch of the N. S. S., commence on February 3, at Mr. Aimer's, 47 Huntley Street, Tottenham Court Road. Gratuitous instruction will be given in biology by L. Fraser from 3 to 4 p.m., and in physiology by A. C. Varley, from 4 to 5. Intending students are requested to sent their names to Mr. Aimer, or to Mr. L. Fraser, 42 Gerard Street, Soho.

A BRANCH of the National Secular Society is being formed at Harrow Green, where the friends have in contemplation the building of a small hall. Freethinkers in the district, including Leyton and Leytonstone, are desired to meet at Mr. Macdonald's, Market Place, Cuttall Road, Harrow Green, at 8 p.m. on Sunday.

THE January number of the *Westminster Review* has another paper on the Blasphemy Laws, urging their total repeal, which we shall bring before our readers notice shortly.

MR. W. J. RAMSEY lectures twice on Sunday at the Claremont Hall, Pentonville. In the morning on "Prison Labor;" in the evening on "Imprisoned for Blasphemy."

A NEW Freethought lectress, Miss Helen H. Gardner, has been introduced to a fashionable New York audience by Col. R. G. Ingersoll. Miss Gardner, who is described in the *New York Truth* as a small but good-looking young woman, declares herself a believer in the religion of humanity, and in one world at a time. Supernatural religion, she says, makes woman a fool and a slave. Every time woman is mentioned in the bible her purity is insulted and her dignity outraged. If there is such a crime as blasphemy, it is the infamous stuff told in the bible, a good book to keep on the top shelf of libraries, out of sight. As a divine revelation it is monstrous. We hope shortly to let our readers hear further of Miss Gardner.

"NOTHING succeeds like success," and, judging by the rapid strides the N. W. London Branch of the N. S. S. are making in Camden and Kentish Towns, there is much truth in the old adage. At the present time the committee have the following extra work in hand. A children's party, free

science classes on Sunday afternoons (commencing Feb. 3), and the free Sunday library which it is intended to open on the same day. Last Sunday evening witnessed the commodious Milton Hall densely packed, many having to be turned away for want of room. It is surely time such an enterprising branch as this took up the question of "Why pay rent?" and secured a house of its own. On Sunday the platform will be occupied by Dr. Aveling, who will lecture in the morning (11.30) on "The Theory of Darwinism: its history," and in the evening (7.30) "The Origin of Life."

BIBLE BLASPHEMY.

THERE is good reason to believe that the resuscitation of the cruel and infamous blasphemy laws will be strikingly characterised in the annals of history as a vain attempt to impede the onward march of Freethought. This, however, will add no credit to those semi-barbarians who instigated the prosecution, or to that harsh, bitter judge who barbarously sentenced three honest men—men honest, braver than he—to gaol for deservedly ridiculing and exposing some old Jew-Books in all their glaring hideousness. This was their only crime. If, then, to speak or write against the gross absurdities and immoralities of Christian theology be a crime punishable by law, which evidently it is, let the Christians be consistent and hasten to imprison the numberless writers who daily treat their creed with contempt and derision.

It is with a deep sense of duty that I now write a few words on the bible—a book which I hold to be the most blasphemous work extant. Christians with unmitigated audacity ignorantly tell us that it is the word of god given *verbatim et literatim*. Undoubtedly they are either extremely ignorant of its contents, or else their god is a very bad god indeed. I had rather presume they are guilty of ignorance than believe them to be so uncivilised as to knowingly worship a deity whose acts of rash vengeance and deliberate cruelty are unequalled.

Now, what does the bible tell us? It says that god is jealous and revengeful; that he is a consuming fire, a man of war; that he allowed two she-bears to devour forty-two playful children for simply calling Elisha "bald head;" that he told men to take their swords, and every man slay his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor; that he smote all the innocent first-born of Egypt because the deluded king would not let the Jews go; that he told Moses to vex the Midianites and smite them; that he smote one hundred and four score and five thousand Assyrians, who arose early in the morning and found themselves "dead corpses;" that he, when reasoned with by man, abandoned, *pro tem.*, his jealous and murderous projects with abhorrence; and that he mercilessly murdered man and woman, child and suckling, fowl and beast, etc., in order to gratify his insatiable desire for human blood. Can you believe, reader, that a "god of love" was so cruel, so murderous, and, in fact, so mad as to extinguish almost every spark of human existence? Can you believe that a "loving father" had no other means of appeasing his fearful wrath than by drinking the blood from the veins of his own children? Oh, what blasphemy! The moral sense of man shudders at it. And yet, alas! the common law of England—yea, civilised England!—has caged G. W. Foote in Holloway Gaol for honestly expressing his unbelief in this self-criminated, wholesale murderer.

Thank man! the power of the church is dying. Though it is supported by legal props, it dares no longer to carry on its former work of cementing the crumbling walls of its tottering edifice with the blood of Freethought martyrs. This being so, the monster's downfall is inevitable. Let us fearlessly labor to accelerate it. Let us dissipate from the minds of our fellows the black clouds of ignorance and error by the brilliant rays of Freethought. Let us vigorously and unceasingly show our undying abhorrence of the kings and priests of the past, who only succeeded in painting the pictures of misery, superstition and despotism upon the canvass of the human heart.

JOHN GRANGE.

TALMAGE says that the church-members embrace three times as many women as men. That is probably correct. There is not more than twenty-five per cent. as much fun in embracing men as women.

A RELIC OF THE PAST.

THAT the laws relating to blasphemy are a relic of a barbarous age, is I think, a fact that should be brought plainly to the public notice, and with this view I now shall place before the readers of the *Freethinker* a few of the Acts made by the old Scotch Parliaments, which are well calculated to give some little idea of the intelligence and liberal-mindedness of the men who are responsible for the Blasphemy Acts, and consequently for the imprisonment of our friend in Holloway Gaol at the present day. These wise and benignant legislators enacted—

"To put down the abominable superstition of witchcraft used by divers of the lieges of this realm against the law of god,* it is ordained that no manner of person or persons, of whatever estate or degree, take in hand in any times hereafter, to use any manner of witchcrafts, sorcerie, or necromancie, nor give themselves forthwith to have any such craft or knowledge, thereby abusing the people, under pain of death."—9 Mary, 73.

These same delightful, loving, and gentle Christians who would put a poor fellow creature to a cruel death because of their own dense ignorance and black superstition also passed the Act that follows—

"Forasmeikle as there are diverse printers in this realm who daily and continually print books concerning the faith, ballates, songs, blasphemations, rimes, as well of kirkman as temporal, and others, tragedies in Latin and English tongue, it is devised, statute, and ordained that no printer presume, attempt, or take in hand to print any books, ballads, songs, blasphemations, rimes, or tragedies in Latin or English in any time coming until the same be seen, viewed, and examined by some wise and discreet persons, depute thereto by the ordinaries whatsoever; and thereafter a license had and obtained from our sovereign lady and the lord governor [Earl of Arran] for imprinting of such books, under the pain of confiscation of all the printer's goods and banishing him of the realm for ever."—5 Mary, 27.

The authority from which I selected these imbecilities adds: "This Act was passed in the heat of the Reformation, when the Church was exposed to all manner of ribald pasquinades. As an Act establishing a censorship which proved unavailing, it is curious in the present age of free printing." Surely not so curious to the intelligence of such men as Newdegate and Tyler. They are over 400 years behind the times, and class themselves with the block-heads and bigots who made it law that, "All gentlemen, householders, and substantial burgesses are ordained to have a bible and psalm-book in the vulgar language in their houses under the pain of six pounds of fine. Magistrates to search houses and apply the fines, a third of each fine to be their own, and two-thirds to go to the poor of the parish," 6 James VI., 72. "There shall be no working, holding markets, gaming, nor playing, passing to tavern or ale-houses, or selling of meat and drink, or wilfully remaining from the parish kirk in time of sermon or prayers on the Sabbath under pain of a fine of twenty shillings."—6 James VI., 72.

By these same parliaments Acts were passed regulating the food, drink, and dress of the people. Any man who lives not by merchandise may not "wear clothes of silk, nor scarlet gowns, or furrings." And shall "make their wives and daughters in like manner be apparelled." These same wives and daughters are to wear on their heads short curches with little hoods, and are only allowed to wear tails to their gowns, with furs on holidays. Laborers are restricted to grey and white clothing on week days, but may dress themselves in light blue, green, or red on Sundays.

Strange as it may seem, these Acts are even to-day unrepealed. All Freethinkers might be fined twenty shillings each under one of them. This suggestion is offered free to Sir Henry Tyler and his co-bigots. He managed to make one rusty old wheel give a last groaning turn, perhaps he would like to try another. Suppose he prosecuted someone, by way of a change, for sorcery.

EDGAR J. BENTON.

* "Suffer not a witch to live," Exodus xxxii, 18.

DEMANDS OF THE AMERICAN LIBERALS.

MONROE'S "Ironclad Age" gives the following *resumé* of the constitutional demands of the American Liberals:—

- "1. We demand that churches and other ecclesiastical property shall no longer be exempt from just taxation.
- "2. We demand that the employment of chaplains in congress, in state legislatures, in the navy and militia, and in prisons, asylums, and all other institutions supported by public money, shall be discontinued.
- "3. We demand that all public appropriations for educational and charitable institutions of a sectarian character shall cease.
- "4. We demand that all religious services now sustained by the government shall be abolished; and especially that the use of the bible in the public schools, whether ostensibly as a text book or avowedly as a book of religious worship, shall be prohibited.
- "5. We demand that the appointment by the President of the United States, or by the governors of the various states of all religious festivals and fasts shall wholly cease.
- "6. We demand that the judicial oath in the courts and in all other departments of the government shall be abolished, and that simple affirmation, under the pains and penalties of perjury, shall be established in its stead.
- "7. We demand that all laws directly or indirectly enforcing the observance of Sunday as the Sabbath shall be repealed.
- "8. We demand that all laws looking to the enforcement of "Christian" morality shall be abrogated, and that all laws shall be conformed to the requirements of natural morality, equal rights and impartial liberty; and that no privilege or advantage shall be conceded to Christianity or any other special religion."

FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

MIRACLES.—The early history of all religions and of all people is crowded with marvellous, miraculous stories, to which no rational men in their advanced stage can give the smallest particle of faith.—*Rev. James Cranbrook*, "The Founders of Christianity," p. 147; 1860.

THE consequences of the triumph of Christianity were, in fact, the closing of the schools of philosophy and the strangling of science; a view of nature and of humanity which led to fanatical asceticism and hateful intolerance; the domination of superstition and debasement by supernatural terrors. For all these mischiefs can be so clearly shown to be not only logically, but historically, connected with the fundamental intellectual conception of Christianity, that it is impossible truly to argue that they were subsequent only to, not consequent on, the establishment of that religion.—*J. Stuart Glennie*, "In the Morning Land," p. 273.

BIGOTS.—In all persuasions bigots are persecutors; the men of cool and reasonable piety are favorers of toleration; because bigots, not taking the pains to be acquainted with the grounds of their adversaries' tenets, conceive them to be so absurd and monstrous that no man of sense can give into them in good earnest. For which reason they are convinced that some oblique bad motive induces them to pretend to the belief in such doctrines and to the maintaining them with obstinacy. This is a very general principle in all religious differences, and it is the corner-stone of all persecution.—*Edmund Burke* (quoted in preface to Evans's "Sketch of all Denominations.")

IRELAND.—Religion is the curse of Ireland. To the rival churches of that country may be traced nearly all the oppressive suffered by its people, who can never be materially improved till purged of their faith in priests. When that salutary work shall be accomplished Ireland will indeed be "a nation" in the secure enjoyment of political liberty. The priest-ridden may talk of freedom, but can never secure it; for, as truly said by one of our most admired poets—

"'Tis man's base grovelling nature makes the priest,
Who always rides a superstitious beast."

And he is a poor politician who expects to see political liberty achieved or enjoyed by nations made up of "base grovelling" human nature.—*C. Southwell*, "Apology for Atheism," p. 6.

SCEPTICISM.—By scepticism I merely mean hardness of belief, so that an increased scepticism is an increased perception of the difficulty of proving assertions; or, in other words, it is an increased application and an increased diffusion of the rules of reasoning and the laws of evidence. This feeling of hesitation and of suspended judgment has, in every department of thought, been the invariable preliminary to all the intellectual revolutions through which the human mind has passed; and without it there could be no progress, no civilisation. In physics it is the necessary precursor of science; in politics, of liberty; in theology, of toleration.—*Buckle*.

PROFANE JOKES.

WHY was the giant Goliath very much a-stone-ished when David hit him with a stone?—Because such a thing had never entered his head before.

WHY is your thumb, when putting on a glove, like eternity?—Because its ever-last-in.

WE hear pleasant people speak of "the land of the living." What do they mean?—Why the parson's glebe, to be sure.

"MAMMA dear, Jacob says that he saw the angels go up and down a ladder to heaven. As the angels had wings why didn't they fly?" "I suppose the angels were moulting, my dear," replied the mother.

"TRIM your lamps and be ready for the midnight cry!" sung a profane young husband, who was getting the food-warmer ready whilst his wife put their six-weeks-old baby to bed.

NAOMI, the daughter of Enoch declared that she would not marry anyone who was not "just perfect," and she did not get a husband until she was 580 years old.

A YOUNGSTER, while perusing Genesis vi., turned to his father and asked if people in those days used to do their sums on the ground. He had been reading the passage—"And the sons of men multiplied on the face of the earth."

A TEACHER, hearing his class upon words and meanings, came to the word "grace." He said, "Can anyone tell the meaning?" At last he said to a boy, "What did your father say before breakfast?" Boy: "He said, Darned if these eggs aren't bad again!"

"WHERE," observed a Roman Catholic in dispute with a Protestant; "where was your religion before Luther?" "Did you wash your face this morning?" asked the other. "Yes." "Where was your face, then, before it was washed?"

ONE morning an undergraduate, hurrying into Durham Cathedral, was making great haste to get to his seat. As he passed his gown caught, and began to tear. The students were in a titter, and the undergraduate, becoming confused, rushed on, splitting his gown in halves, the noise attracting universal attention. Just then the canon rose abstractedly, and commenced the service with—"Rend your hearts and not your garments." The whole congregation burst out laughing.

At a certain Sunday-school the scholars were taught to repeat the creeds, etc., bit by bit in turn, as they stood in class. Thus the top boy led off with, "I believe in the father;" the second followed with, "I believe in the son;" and the third with, "I believe in the holy ghost." It happened one Sunday that the top boy was absent from the class. Accordingly, when the teacher called for the usual confession of faith, the second boy began, "I believe in the son;" and the third followed with, "I believe in the holy ghost," as they were accustomed to do. "You are not saying it at all right," interrupted the teacher. Whereupon a dirty hand was held up, and a voice exclaimed: "Please, sir, the boy what b'lieves in the father ain't 'ere to-day; I'm the boy as b'lieves in the 'oly ghost!"

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