

THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

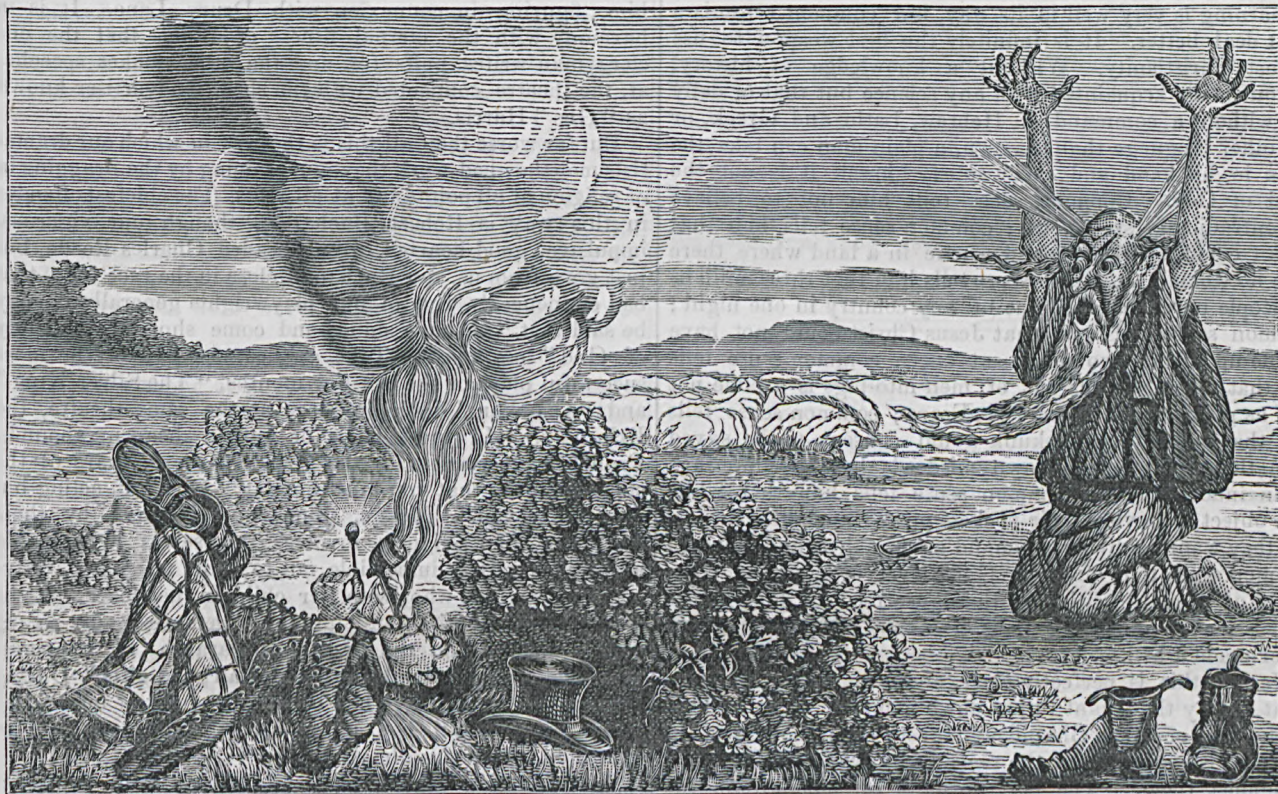
Sub Editor—J. M. Wheeler.

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.

COMIC BIBLE SKETCH. — No. LXVII.



MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH.

“ And he looked and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed..”—EXODUS II, 2.

“ Prejudice is a giant, against whom Truth and Humanity need to be defended with great spirit, and, in some desperate cases, with a tiger-like ferocity.”—CHARLES BEADE.

CHRISTIANITY AND COMMON SENSE.

THERE are two things in the world that can never get on together—religion and common sense. Religion deals with the next life, common sense with this; religion points to the sky, common sense to the earth; religion is all imagination, common sense all reason; religion deals with what nobody can understand, common sense with what everybody can understand; religion gives us no return for our investments but flash notes on the bank of expectation, common sense gives us good interest and full security for our capital. They are as opposite as two things can possibly be, and they have always been at strife. Religion is always trying to fill the world with delusions, and common sense is always trying to drive them away. Religion says live for the next world, and common sense says live for this.

It is in the very nature of things that religion and common sense should hate and oppose each other. They are rivals for the same prize— aspirants to the same throne. In every age a conflict has been going on between them; and although common sense is fast getting the upper hand to-day, the war is far from ended, and we shall see some fierce struggles before the combat closes. There can, however, be no doubt as to the issue; for science has appeared on the scene with the most deadly weapons of destruction, and Science is the sworn ally of common sense. Nay, is not Science the mighty child of common sense—the fruit of Reason from the lusty embrace of Nature?

Common sense is primitive logic. It does not depend on books, and it is superior to culture. It is the perception of analogy—the instinct of causation. It guides the savage through trackless forests, and the astronomer through infinite space. It makes the burnt child dread the fire, and a Darwin see in a few obvious facts the solution of a mystery. It built the first hut and the last palace; the first canoe and the last ocean steamer. It constructed docks, laid down railways, applied steam to machinery and locomotion, prompted every mechanical discovery, instigated all material progress, and transformed an ape-like beast into a civilised man.

Even the highest art is full of common sense. Sanity and simplicity are the distinguishing marks of the loftiest genius, which may be described as inspired common sense. The great artist never loses touch of fact; he may let his imagination soar as high as the stars, but he keeps his feet firm-planted on the ground. All the world recognises the sublimity of Greek sculpture and Shakespere's plays, because they are both true to nature and fact and coincident with everlasting laws. The true sublime is not fantastic; it is solid and satisfying, like a mighty Alp, deep-rooted first of all in the steadfast earth, and then towering up with its vineyards, its pastures, its pine-forests, its glaciers, its precipices, and last of all the silence of infinitude brooding over its eternal snows.

Common sense, the civiliser, has had an especially hard fight with that particular form of religion known as Christianity. When Tertullian said that Christianity was to be believed because it was incredible, he spoke in the true spirit of faith; just as old Sir Thomas Browne did when he found the marvels of religion too weak for his credulity. David Hume expressed the same truth ironically at the

conclusion of his "Essays on Miracles," when he said that it was not reason that persuaded any Christian of the truth of his creed, which was established on the higher ground of faith, and could not be accepted without a miracle.

Common sense is blasphemy. It is the thing which religion dreads most, and which the priests most mortally hate. Common sense dispenses with learned disquisitions, and tries everything with simple mother wit. If, for instance, it hears that a whale swallowed a man, and vomited him up safe and sound three days after, it does not want to know all the physiology of men and whales before deciding if the story is true; it just indulges in a hearty laugh and blows the story to Hades. Miracle-mongers are quite helpless when a man turns round and says, "My dear sir, that story's just a trifle too thin." They see his case is a hopeless one, and leave him to the tender mercies of the Lord of Hosts.

Learning is very well in its way, but common sense is a great deal better. It is infinitely the best weapon to use against Christianity. Without a knowledge of history, without being acquainted with any science but that of daily life, without a command of Hebrew, Latin and Greek, or any other language than his own, a plain man can take the Bible in his hand and easily satisfy himself it is not the word of God. Common sense tells him not to believe in contradictory statements; common sense tells him that a man could not have found a wife in a land where there were no women; common sense tells him that three millions of people never marched out of any country in one night; common sense tells him that Jesus Christ could not have "gone up" from two places at once; common-sense tells him that turning devils out of men into pigs is a fable not half as good as the poorest of Æsops; common sense tells him that nobody but a skunk would consent to be saved from the penalty of his own misdeeds by the sufferings of an innocent man; common sense tells him that while men object to having their pockets picked and their throats cut, they want no divine command against theft and murder; common sense tells him that God never ordered the committal of such atrocities as those ascribed to him in the Bible; and common sense tells him that a God of mercy never made a hell.

Yes, all this is perfectly clear, and the priests know it. That is why they want to put down common sense. That is why they cry out Blasphemy! every time they meet it. But that is also precisely the reason why we should employ it against them. The best antidote to superstition, the worst enemy of priestcraft, and the best friend of man, is (to parody Danton's famous formula) Common Sense and again Common Sense, and for ever Common Sense.

G. W. FOOTE

GOD AT THE THEATRE.

I DO not mean in the auditorium, but on the stage. I am considering the connexion between religion and the people who do the work on the other side of the footlights rather than between religion and the audience. Not but that it would be an interesting speculation whether God would attend the theatre. The solution of the problem would be in the main dependent upon whose God it was. The Rev. Stewart Headlam's certainly would, but Publican Booth's probably would not. Even if the Salvation Army deity, in consideration of the fact that he has frequented a tavern, did apply for a seat at any of our respectable theatres, he would probably be refused admission on the ground of his disreputable character.

A more profitable inquiry would, perhaps, be as to whether the Christ of the gospels would be a theatre-goer, were that vague personality in our midst. Supposing that Christ had an evening free from the police-cell or the lunatic asylum to which our modern society would probably condemn him, would he be likely to spend it at the Lyceum, or the Gaiety? In reality the question is not so absurd or so trivial as it may appear. It is only a special form of the inquiry into the artistic nature of the founder of the Christian religion. That artistic nature was, I think, a minus quantity. Truly, Christ lived in an inartistic time, among an inartistic people. But he never gave any of those hints that the true lover of the beautiful has always given that tell of the artistic faculty, even if it is in abeyance for dearth of opportunity.

Religion has been trying to spoil some of our actors and

actresses. It has succeeded in spoiling some of our plays. The Church and Stage Guild has made an unsuccessful attempt to link the rising fortunes of the drama on to the decaying fortunes of religion. This Guild is, to my mind, an insult to the theatrical profession. The insult is unintentional in the majority of cases on the part of the clerical members of the Guild. It is none the less an insult. Nothing that can be said or done will get rid of the impression that this abortive movement is of the same order as the tea and addresses doled out to ballet-girls and dressers by some fanatic (a Mr. Forbes, I think) out Holloway way. The Guild has failed, as of late no actor or actress of moment (or of the hour) has cast a slur upon "the profession" by taking any notice of its proceedings.

In keeping with this, we have the Rev. Walter Pennington and Canon Shuttlecock, as the irreverent call him, figuring in connexion with Drury Lane. It is in harmony with the eternal fitness of things that the one clergyman writes puffs for, and the other makes speeches at, the theatre connected with the shrewd advertiser known as "Gas" Harris.

But far worse than all this is the way in which our dramatists mar the good work they aim at doing by the dragging in of religion at all points and at all risks. The chiefest offender in this way is Robert Buchanan, though our vigorous, impulsive, good-hearted, wrong-headed Charles Reade, but just gone from us, ran Buchanan close in the race for "that bad eminence." But of our playwrights generally it may be said that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"-less plays. Take as instance two of the most successful plays of the last few months, "The Silver King" and "Claudian," both produced at the same theatre, the Princess's. In these God, or rather heaven, abounds. Probably, all readers of the *Freethinker* are aware of the stage tradition that you must not say "God" in acting but only "Heaven." Messrs. Jones and Herman, by their free use of religion involve themselves in palpable absurdities. It is impossible not to smile when a poverty-stricken mother who with her children has been on the verge of starvation and plunged in misery for years, calmly suggests on the first re-appearance of happiness that they should "thank the giver of all good gifts." During the time of sorrow there has been no thought of upbraiding "the giver of all bad gifts." This is not patience or gratitude. It is slavishness.

In "Claudian," again, as I endeavor to show at greater length in *Progress* for May, we have a benefit from heaven to one man conferred in such a way as to involve the destruction of hundreds. Possibly in this case, the authors were anxious to keep up the tone of their play, in which everything and every character is sacrificed to Claudian.

Dramatists collaborating, or working singly, will have to abandon this pandering to the religious sentimentality of the people. The stalls and boxes care little for it and the sturdy intelligence of pit and gallery is of that order which sees and smiles at the inconsistencies and absurdities of the dramatic deity. He is generally as absurd, if not as wicked, as his biblical *confrère*. In art, as in science, the best work of to-day, and the only work of the future, will be that which deals with the natural, and the natural alone. There are laughter, tears, passion enough to be obtained by the picturing of things that are, without the need for the introduction of an imaginary Deus who is very literally *ex machinâ*.

EDWARD AVELING.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.

(Continued from p. 127.)

CHAPTER IX.—In this chapter Jesus shows his contempt for popular opinions and sentiments by ostentatiously mixing with publicans (tax-farmers) and sinners. He had not come, he said, to call the righteous; thus admitting that there were some of that character. Paul, however, says: "There is none righteous; no, not one" (Rom. iii., 10); and it is no part of my duty to reconcile Jesus and Paul.

There came a certain ruler, and worshipped him (v. 18).—No such thing, Matthew! Had it been true, you would have given name and other particulars. He came to ask Jesus to restore his dead daughter to life! and Jesus goes to do it. On the way a poor woman is healed of a disease of twelve years' continuance by touching his garments. This beats Holloway's pills and ointment, and they will cure anything. The Palestinians were awful fools not to have

cleared their land of every disease while Jesus was with them! The Irish made a far better use of St. Patrick—he rid their island of all vermin, except assassins, etc.

When Jesus got to the nameless ruler's house, in the town of Utopia, in Incognita Street, he told the people the girl was not dead, but asleep; so he took hold of her hand and wakened her, and she arose. And the fame of it "went abroad into all that land." What land, Matthew? Fame of what, sir? Merely waking a girl out of sleep? A few cats might have done that.

He casteth out devils through the prince of devils (v. 34).—So said the Pharisees; Jesus never spared them, nor they him, according to the New Testament—though their account might have been exceedingly useful if we had it. The New Testament, unfortunately, gives only one side, a very partial and unfair one—when did saints ever do justice to their opponents? Not since grapes used to ripen on glaciers, I believe.

CHAPTER X.—*He gave them power against unclean spirits* (call them *dirty* spirits), *to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease* (v. 1).—Here this miserable superstition, that sickness was the effect of a Devil possessing the patient, comes again to the front. And your master gave you power to heal every disease, did he, Matthew? And you could do that, could you? Why did you not write an account of your cures, sir? And why did you yourself consent to die, with such a power at hand? It is a pity you were never whipped for lying, or not sufficiently.

Now the names of the twelve apostles are these (v. 2).—Here follow a string of names totally mythological, no more real than the twelve gates of New Jerusalem, or the twelve greater gods of the Greeks. Jesus and his apostles are as hopelessly beyond the reach of history as Hercules and his twelve labors.

Jesus sent them out, but forbade them to go to Gentiles or Samaritans! This gospel-monger was a Jew, though not of Palestine—a bitter hater of Gentiles, especially Samaritans. So he sketches a Jesus and twelve just after his own ideal.

Provide neither gold, etc. (v. 9, etc.).—Here we light upon a scrap of Buddhism, which no doubt penetrated early into Palestine and Egypt, etc. Buddhist monks and preachers had gone about begging for hundreds of years at this time, living entirely upon charity, and renouncing all the joys of life beyond the circles of their rigid religious duties. And here Jesus imitates Buddhism; but his followers have not imitated him—they grow as rich as possible, just as if he had taught them no other duty.

Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city (v. 15).—That is not Buddhism; that religion does not deal in such threats; it depends absolutely upon moral suasion. Jesus propagates his religion *only* by bribery and intimidation. A city that will not receive those beggars of his will be treated *worse* than Sodom, a city destroyed by fire from heaven! Brutality and egotism cannot exceed that. The blind, unreasoning fury of the text cannot be matched outside the Bible! It is utterly disgraceful and brutish.

I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves (v. 16).—A very unwise and unkind thing to do, Jesus. You had not much regard for your poor sheep. Perhaps you were tired of the breed, and wished to be rid of them. Most of Christ's real disciples have been wolves in the midst of sheep.

Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake (v. 22).—Why, Jesus? There must be some good cause for what "all men do." For your sake, too! Then you must have been, or must have thought, yourself the worst of men, or you could not, except you were very bilious just then, have expected all men to hate others out of spite to you. Besides, not a thousandth part of *all men* ever heard of you. And further, history has told us what you never knew, Jesus, that your followers have hated far more than they were ever hated by others. They have been, with your noble exception, a bad lot, I assure you.

The very hairs on your head are numbered (v. 30).—Pity the being who counted them had nothing better to do. A sensible God would never spend his time that way.

Him will I deny before my father, etc. (v. 33).—That is great weakness, Jesus! Your father had not trained you so well as he should have done. Petty spite of that sort is one of the worst traits in a man's character. You will

merely own those who own you! Poor Savior! You should have followed some other calling—that of a garulous scold would have just suited you.

JOSEPH SYMES.

(To be continued.)

THE REPLY OF THE ORTHODOX ONE.

"*The instruction of fools is folly.*"—PROVERBS OF SOLOMON, ch. xvi., v. 22.

You've shown all my beliefs absurd and ridiculed my creed, And of my former props of faith you've left me few indeed; I cannot answer what you say, nor shall I even try; But just you see how it will be when'er you come to die!

You've proved that what I once received, just as I heard it told,

Are fables mythological, and very, very old; You've superstitions overthrown, in which I used to revel; But still I trust you know you must be guided by the Devil!

You've shown that true religion has nought to do with creeds— That not with dogmas 'tis concerned, but with our lives and deeds;

You've pointed out these things, no doubt, both learnedly and well;

But then, you know, you'll surely go, when'er you die, to hell!

C. J. F.

ACID DROPS.

CHRISTIANITY is said to have a foundation of rock. Seeing that its supposed author was a carpenter, a more reasonable view seems to be that its foundation is of the same material as the heads of those who believe in it—wood.

We hear that an Independent minister in Cornwall, of tee-total principles, treats his communicants to a full-blooded and able-bodied god by the transubstantiation of rice-pudding and treacle. The happiest results are stated to have followed the regular use of this deity; the reverend gentleman's congregation growing not only in grace, but in all comeliness of person; while the offertory has increased each week by at least two-thirds. A non-intoxicating Savior is, it must be admitted, a novelty, and we welcome the innovation as a step in the right direction. Still, if we might be permitted a voice in the matter, we would suggest to nonconformist bodies the employment of oatmeal-porridge, which yields a highly nutritive god, and one that sticketh to the ribs closer than any brother.

THE Court of Common Council has met on the subject of the London Government Bill. The Court cannot be said to have deliberated. It orated, gesticulated, fulminated—did everything but deliberate. One Phillips was the most violent and virulent. Unfortunately, this Phillips was not "the only joy" of the Corporation of the same sort. There are plenty more who, like Mr. Phillips, care nothing for the order of debate, but only care for their own order.

THE soldiers in Egypt, in repeating the Litany, now pray "From battle, murder and Soudan death, good Lord deliver us."

THE advocates of stunted education for the people catch at any straw as their immoral opposition is drowned by the voices of an advancing nation. They either trump up or grossly exaggerate cases of "overwork." More than one of the "cases" got up by the anti-education party has turned out frauds.

A COMMISSION, issued by the Bishop of Salisbury, is being held at Weymouth, to inquire into the charges of misbehavior and drunkenness preferred by the parishioners of St. John's, Portland, against the vicar, the Rev. F. A. Otteley.

Was Shakespere prophetically dreaming of the primrose tomfoolery of the 19th April in our day when he made his Porter in "Macbeth" exclaim: "I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to let in some of all professions that go the *primrose* way to the everlasting bonfire"? Certainly last Saturday the innocent primrose in the buttonhole only showed off all the more glaringly the fire and brimstone looks of the present-day defenders of the Church and Constitution.

THE *Christian Globe* makes out that an individual rejoicing in the name of the Rev. J. Knaggs, has been successful in converting Secularists at Stratford. No particulars are given. Does anyone know as to the truth or falsity of the allegation?

THERE have been uproarious Easter Vestries at St. James's, Hatcham; St. Matthew's, Sheffield; and St. Paul's, Pendleton. At the latter place a vestryman asked the vicar "if Christ had ever promised to be at the table, under the table, by the side of the table, or anywhere about the table." At St. John's, Earlston, near Manchester, the minister refused to preach because he had the wrong organist and the wrong tunes.

THE Rev. P. Mackenzie, lecturing on "Satan: his Personality, Character, and Power," says: "The Devil had never been so useful since he had his existence as he had been lately; he had been the means of bringing large sums of money into the exchequer of the church." This was letting the cat out of the bag with a vengeance.

THERE are not many Jews in Ireland, and the proceedings of the pious Catholics at Limerick, who on Easter Sunday avenged their Savior by wrecking the Jewish synagogue, is not calculated to draw Hebrew capital to the country.

MRS. SYKES and others have again been fined for Sunday trading at Southend. Still more are summoned. Mr. W. E. Petherick, Secretary of the Sunday Defence Committee, has paid the first fines and costs, and appeals for aid in further fighting the bigots. We trust he will not appeal in vain. His address is 29 Osnaurgh Street, London, N.W.

MR. GREY, a member of the Helensburgh United Presbyterian Church, Dumbarton, who had been elected to the office of elder, was refused ordination by the session, because he had committed the atrocious crime of "taking a walk in the country on the Sabbath afternoon." In all other respects he was eminently qualified for the eldership. We think if an elder is wanted who won't take a walk in the country on the Sabbath, they had better have one about six months old. Perhaps it would be too young to be an elder—but still it wouldn't be Grey.

THE religion of gloom finds a worthy exponent in the Rev. G. M. Philp, of Forfar, who has been vigorously denouncing the various means of taking fresh air on the Sabbath, which happily are becoming common even in parson-ruled Scotland.

At the opening of a new Salvation blood and fire shop, the Eagle-nosed "Grecian" orator said he hoped that chapels had been warmed into life since he came to London. The place he was then speaking in had been a chapel, and on the wall was an advertisement of the Hudson soap description, worded as follows: "Christ's blood cleanses from all sin: Try it." After the "General" had spoken, Billy M'Leod, an "ex-champion prize-fighter," spoke for Jesus. Then "Geo. Leybourne No. 2" sang a hymn to the tune of "Up in a Balloon," accompanying himself on a pair of "bones" in each hand. The hymn was "We shall *meat* by and bye." No doubt the next step will be a Salvation big-boot dance.

A CORRESPONDENT thinks that the article on "Religion in the Army" might well be followed up by one entitled "Religion in the Police Force." He says that a few weeks ago, at St. Andrew's Chapel, Upper Tooting, a sumptuous supper was given to forty policemen of the district and their wives. The pious promoters thought this a means of inducing the bobbies to attend the chapel henceforth. A special service for the members of the force was held four days after the supper, and it was thought that at least 30 out of the 40 would attend; but, sad to say, only *two* put in an appearance. The pious chapel folks might have known that policemen prefer rabbit-pie and cold mutton to the Lamb of God—and naturally so, because if it be true that *he* "taketh away the sins of the world" *their* occupation would be gone.

MR. B. WHITWORTH, M.P., presided the other day at a temperance meeting in Marylebone. He said "he found that England spent 37 times as much money in strong drink as in missionary enterprise." Well, England might as well waste her money one way as another. But Mr. Whitworth does not take into account the millions of pounds that have been spent in Christian warfare with the heathens, chiefly for the sake of their conversion to the "true religion." He also seems to forget that missionaries are the first to introduce strong drinks to those they try to convert. If the account was properly reckoned, it would be found that he has made a sad mistake in his figures.

THE Bishop of Winchester is a thorough believer in Paul's saying that the man who does not look after his own house is worse than an infidel. The valuable living of Mitchelmars, near Romsey, being vacant, he has passed by the claims of the curate and the elder clergy of the diocese to present it to his son, Mr. Baring Gore Browne. The living is worth £900 a year, beside the house and glebe attached.

THE Rev. W. Venables Williams, vicar of Llandrillo, North Wales, wished to get rid of his curate. The Bishop of St. Asaph declined to be a party to the dismissal, whereon the

vicar appeals to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The bishop thereupon explains to the archbishop that Mr. Williams has been accused of not accounting for his collections. This Mr. Williams characterises as "nothing short of a downright untruth, to use the mildest term." In his letter to his bishop he continues: "The whole affair goes to prove how ready you have been to listen to gossiping, tittle-tattle and slander from this parish, which you have not the manliness to communicate to me, which, to say the least of it, is the act of a coward."

DR. DIPLOCK, coroner, seems to have a considerable amount of petty maliciousness. Mr. Hopes summoned on an inquest, declared himself an Atheist. Dr. Diplock pointed out quite accurately that a juror could not affirm, but must go through the superstitious rite called swearing. Mr. Hopes asked if he need remain. He was threatened with a fine for non-attendance if he left until the inquest was over, and actually had to sit doing nothing until the proceedings terminated. Clearly, Dr. Diplock ought to have done one of two things. He should either have insisted on the taking of the oath and made Mr. Hopes serve, which would have been legal behavior, or dispensed with his attendance. This would have been courteous behavior. To keep a man in a room doing nothing is the conduct of a spoiled child.

ENGLISH Freemasons, with their princely Grand Master and their Bible mummeries and invocations of the Great Architect, must be astonished to find the Pope in his Encyclical letter declaring that Freemasonry leads to the denial of God and the immortality of the soul, as well as to the subversion of the social order established by Christianity and the substitution of that founded on *Madre Natura*. His Holiness, however, knows what he is at. Secret societies, where men meet with new ideas and can ventilate their grievances, are, in Catholic countries, always a thorn in the side of the would-be omniscient priests. The ignoring of distinctions of race, rank and religion, which is of the essence of Freemasonry, is equally repugnant to priestcraft. It is, moreover, an undoubted fact that the lodges of Masons and Illuminati have, on the Continent, long been centres of Freethought in politics and religion. The Pope's proposal to restore the mediæval trades guilds and establish Catholic working men's societies is little better than a flourish of Mrs. Partington's broom.

UNDER the heading, "A Miracle-Worker of To-day," the *Pall Mall Gazette* for April 21 gives some account of Colonel Olcott, president of the Theosophical Society, who is at present in London on a mission from the Sinhalese Buddhists, who have reason to complain of the way in which they have been denied justice in their disputes with the local Roman Catholics. It is asserted by Mr. Sinnett, author of "Esoteric Buddhism," that Colonel Olcott, in the course of his tours in India and Ceylon, has performed more miracles—using that term in its popular sense, and not as supernatural—than are recorded in the gospels. The colonel places the number of his psychopathic treatments at 8,000 in thirteen months. During that period he is said to have performed almost every cure recorded in Old or New Testament. He has made the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, the blind to see, cripples have walked, and the paralysed have been restored to the full use of their limbs.

THE writer in the *P. M. G.* is careful not to endorse these accounts himself. He gives Col. Olcott's own theory, which is that almost all disease arises from deficient local vitality, and can be removed by an influx of fresh life from another person imparted by a species of magnetism. Apart from this "laying on of hands," it is quite credible that the influence of a person revered as something superior may be beneficial, especially in nervous diseases, and something of this may possibly lie at the root of the exaggerated records concerning Jesus.

A COMMISSION has been held at Lincoln to inquire into the charges of disgusting immorality against the Rev. W. J. Jenkins, rector of Fillingham. On the application of defendant's counsel the evidence was heard *in camera*. The charges were of such a gross and indecent character that it is impossible to mention them in print. The Commissioners were unanimously of opinion that there was sufficient ground for instituting further proceedings.

TWO raftsmen on the Mississippi, in a gale, expected instant destruction. One dropped on his knees and prayed with a *vim* equal to the emergency. On opening his eyes he saw his mate, not engaging in prayer, but pushing a pole into the water at the side of the raft. "What's that yer doin', Mike?" said he; "get down on your knees now, for there isn't a minit between us and purgatory." "Be aisy, Pat," said the other coolly, sounding with the pole; "be aisy now! What's the use of praying when a feller can touch the bottom with a pole?"

SPECIAL NOTICE.

In our next will appear a Letter from Mr. Joseph Symes to the Editor of the "Freethinker."

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, April 27, New Pavilion, Bow Street, Landport, Portsmouth:—Morning at 11, "How I Fell Among Thieves;" afternoon at 3, "Prison Thoughts on the Bible;" evening at 7, "The Gospel of Holloway Gaol."

Monday, the 28th, Ball's Pond Secular Hall, 36 Newington Green Road, London, at 8 p.m., "How I Fell Among Thieves."

Wednesday, the 30th, Henley Hall, Henley Street, Battersea Park Road, S.W., at 8 p.m. (for the benefit of the Battersea Branch of the N. S. S.)

May 1, Hall of Science; 4, Hall of Science; 11, Hall of Science; 13, St. James's Hall—Demonstration against the Blasphemy Laws; 18, Claremont Hall; 20, Walworth; 25, Leeds; 26, Bradford; 27, Bradford. June 1, Plymouth Conference; 8, Claremont Hall, London; 22, Nottingham. July 6, Claremont Hall, London; 13, Claremont Hall; 20, Milton Hall, London; 27, Milton Hall; 29, Manchester. August 3, Hall of Science, London; 10, Hall of Science, London; 17, Claremont Hall, London; 24, Milton Hall, London; 31, Milton Hall, London. Sept. 7, Hall of Science, London; 14, Hall of Science, London.

CORRESPONDENTS.

ALL business communications to be addressed to the Manager, 28 Stonecutter Street, Farringdon Street, E.O. Literary communications to the Editor of the *Freethinker*, 28 Stonecutter Street, London.

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DR. EDWARD AVELING'S ENGAGEMENTS.—April 27, Liverpool. May 4, 11, 18, Milton Hall; 25, Hall of Science. June 8, 15, 22, 29, Milton Hall.

RECEIVED.—C. Y., F. F. Haultaught, W. Searson, Personne.

B. A. WILKINSON.—Your verse is good for a first attempt, yet scarcely up to the mark. Try again.

ANXIOUS INQUIRER.—We believe we have seen the words you quote ascribed to Colonel Ingersoll.

A. MACKENZIE.—Although Paine's "Age of Reason" is superseded on some points of learning, it is always reliable on matters of common sense.

JOHN RICHARDS.—If you look you will find a report of the Conference in the same number, and you will then see that the article is satirical from beginning to end. Really, if readers are so dense, writers will have to put Artemus Ward's words under their articles when they indulge in irony: "N.B.—This is writ satirical."—The person who hawks about slips of paper, containing sentences cut away from their context, is probably a paid agent of the Christian Evidencers. These people simply live on defamation of Freethinkers, and haven't brains enough for any other occupation.

F. CLAYDON.—No doubt any Socialist scheme would have to take note of the population question.

A. MOONEY.—We are always glad of useful suggestions for pictures. WILLIAM.—The great fish mentioned in the book of Jonah is spoken of as a whale by Jesus (Matt. xii. 40).

W. V.—We can supply you with any quantity of Sir John Bennett's lecture on the "House of Lords," from our publishing office.

W. MARTIN, New York.—Many thanks. We are always glad of American cuttings.

FREETHOUGHT assures us that Durham is not so bad as A. A. W. makes out. Two newsagents sell the *Freethinker*, and there is in that city an active though small body of propagandists, who do their work quietly but effectively.

T. LONGLEY.—We cannot go back on the matter. It was the writer's own opinion, and the editor was under no obligation to give you the contributor's name and address.

R. WHITE.—Get "Flügel's Dictionary" and some of Bucheim's reading books for translation. Niebuhr's "Hereegeschichte" is a good one to begin with.

H. STRINGER, Brightside.—We regret that you should have had to stand after walking over forty miles to hear Mr. Foote lecture.

E. ELLSMORE.—We wish all Freethinkers would be equally careful in withdrawing their children from religious instruction.

O. ETHERIDGE.—Many thanks.

J. PAYNE.—Dr. Aveling is co-editor of *Progress* with Mr. Foote, but he is not co-editor of this paper. He is, however, on the staff; otherwise his list of engagements would appear in another part of the paper instead of where it does. We are not unmindful of Dr. Aveling's services, and if you have read the *Freethinker* you will have observed that his lectures for the ensuing Sunday have generally been announced in a special paragraph in "Sugar Plums." When the announcement has not appeared, it has simply been because Dr. Aveling has not sent us the information.

B. BYNE.—Shall appear.

OWING to Mr. Foote's absence in the north, some correspondence remains unanswered till next week.

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

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Philosophical Inquirer—Beverley Recorder—Christian Globe—Junior Liberal Review—Western Mail—Sheffield Independent.

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.

SUGAR PLUMS.

Progress for May contains some very interesting articles. There is one by Norman Britton on the burning question of "Cremation," and another by an Ex-Lunatic on "Lunacy and the Lunacy Laws." Mr. Foote writes on "Radical Prospects," and Dr. Aveling on "'Claudian' at the Princess's." Mr. Robertson contributes a well-written article on "The Orthodoxy of Women"; Mr. Temple a slashing critique on the Queen's book, and Miss Eleanor Marx a stirring paper on "The Irish Dynamiters." There is also an article on "The Growth of Music," by a professional musician, and another translation from Heine by James Thomson (B.V.)

MR. FOOTE'S lectures at South Shields last Sunday were a great success, and he was greeted with remarkable enthusiasm. Freethinkers attended from all parts of the extreme north of England. Some came from the coast of Cumberland, and one gentleman travelled from Berwick. Several friends drove down from Newcastle, whilst others journeyed down by rail; and Sunderland, Jarrow, Cramlington, Morpeth, North Shields, Blythe, and many other surrounding places sent in a contingent of visitors. There was as usual a very large sale of the *Freethinker*, and a good sale of other literature. Only one thing is to be regretted, and that is, that more active members do not join the South Shields Branch of the N. S. S. Mr. John Sanderson, of Jarrow, the secretary, is an excellent worker, and he is well supported by the small committee; but they would gladly have more help in their work.

THE Rev. A. A. Rees, whom we referred to last week, has suddenly died before he could deliver his advertised sermon against "infidels" in opposition to Mr. Foote's South Shields lectures. If Mr. Foote had died suddenly instead of Mr. Rees, the latter gentleman would have considered it an unmistakable case of providence.

MR. LABOUCHERE is on the war path again on behalf of his fellow half-member. He has moved that the proper officer do attend the court with "certain papers signed by Mr. Bradlaugh on February 11th and the certificate of the gentleman's return." It is refreshing to find that the House of Commons has some one "proper" about it after its improper behavior.

LORD THURLOW is a brick. In a letter to the secretary of the National Sunday League, he assures the working men's clubs and trade societies of London that he will not relax his effort to obtain for the poor, facilities for spending the Sunday afternoon in an intellectual and improving manner equal to those enjoyed by the rich, and that he intends making his annual motion on the subject until it is carried.

We have received the following further subscriptions towards the expenses of the Blasphemy Demonstration to be held in St. James's Hall, London, on May 13:—J. D., £2; J. King, 2s. 6d.; J. A. S., 1s; M., 5s; Collection at Mr. Foote's South Shield lectures, £1 4s. 2d; F. Smallman, £1 1s; J. Trollope, 10s.; W. N., 2s.; J. B. Anderson, 1s.; Mrs. France, 1s.; R. Whyte, 1s.; Mr. Cousins, 6d.; Collection at Mr. Foote's Newcastle lecture, 9s. 6d.

MISS CONSTANCE HOWELL, in sending £1 towards defraying the expenses of the meeting in favor of the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, on Tuesday, May 13, wishes us all success.

WE trust that our London friends will do their utmost to make the Demonstration a tremendous success. We want to see St. James's Hall crammed from floor to ceiling. There will be plenty of good speakers; the meeting, like all of ours, is sure to be at once enthusiastic and orderly; and a grand audience of five thousand will perhaps compel the newspapers to give our cause some attention.

WE rejoice to hear that the Rochdale Freethinkers have at last obtained premises of their own. The hall will hold a thousand people; there are other rooms convenient for all the Society's purposes. Mrs. Besant opens the hall on May 25, and the Rochdalers promise to turn out in strong force.

THERE are three London lectures by Mr. Foote next week that ought to be specially well attended. On Monday evening he lectures at the Ball's Pond Secular hall, which has been under a cloud lately. Freethinkers in the neighbor-

hood should look in and see if they cannot help in the work there. On Tuesday evening, at Marlborough House, Spa Road, for the Bermondsey Branch of the N. S. S. On Wednesday evening he lectures for the benefit of the Battersea Branch of the N. S. S., which is in need of funds just now. Bigotry has denied the Branch the use of a large hall in the neighborhood for the lecture, so they are obliged to fall back on their own.

SOCIETIES that complain that Mr. Foote does not visit them should just look at his table of work. Leave London at 10.35 on Saturday morning, reaches Newcastle at 5.14, lecture at 8. Sunday three lectures at South Shields. Monday all day editorial work for *Freethinker* through the post, and lecture in the evening at Newcastle. Tuesday morning editorial and other work; afternoon journey to Edinburgh, lecture in the evening there. Wednesday hard writing nearly all day, lecture in the evening; journey up to London afterwards by night mail. Thursday all day arrears of correspondence and general work at office, evening lecture at Hall of Science. Total eight lectures, eight hundred miles travelling, and editing a number of the *Freethinker*, with other literary work, in six days.

"HUMANITAS" has sent us a copy of his "Is God the first Cause," published recently. From the cursory glance we are able to give it we infer it to be well-written, and full of good sense and good feeling. We should say it is just the thing to lend an "inquiring" Christian for the benefit of his soul, or mind, or whatever he likes to call it.

A DERBY correspondent tells us some facts about Gaoler Harcourt's visit to that town that the newspapers did not report. One young man who got up to ask Harcourt a question at the public meeting, was asked to go on the platform, but when he had arrived at the foot of the stairs the "tip" was given to the police, and they threw him out into the street. Mr. Bradlaugh's name, on being shouted out in the hall, was received with deafening cheers. Then Mr. Foote's name was shouted from side to side. Harcourt thereupon frowned and then turned white, and in a minute or two he and his chairman disappeared, being guarded to their carriage by a double row of constables.

MR. FOOTE is anxious to visit Derby. Will some of the friends there see if a hall can be obtained for a free lecture on the Blasphemy Laws and Gaoler Harcourt's official conduct? The meeting would really be a public demonstration.

Truth says of Canon Liddon's pious opposition to the admission of women to the Oxford examinations: "It is surely rather late in the day to rely on isolated texts from the Bible as an argument against the higher education of women." True, but no more so than it is to rely on the Bible for argument against the civil rights of Freethinkers. The religion which sends men to gaol for disputing it may well oppose even political and social reform, and we don't see why *Truth* should be at all surprised at the fact.

THE beautiful Secular Hall at Leicester had an excellent week-night audience on Saturday night, April 19, at a lecture on the "Borderland between the Living and the Dead," by Dr. Edward Aveling. There was some opposition, more dignified and courteous than convincing, on the part of her Majesty's Inspector of Schools.

DR. EDWARD AVELING lectures on Sunday, April 27, at Liverpool (Camden Hall, Camden Street). Morning, 11, "Socialism and Freethought." Afternoon, 3, "Darwinism and Religion." Evening, 7, "The Gospel of Evolution."

THE *Philosophical Inquirer* of Madras (with its curious compound of Theosophy, seeking to revive the ancient beliefs of India and Freethought, destructive of all religious faiths), is an interesting product of the intellectual ferment seething in the keen minds of our Hindu brethren. The editor manages to reconcile Mysticism with Atheism, and a writer in a recent number points out the agreement of Atheism with the accepted maxim of Hindu philosophy, *ekam eva advaityam*. "There is one existence, no second."

THE Hibbert Lectures this year are being delivered in French by M. Reville. They are upon "The Ancient Religions of Mexico and Peru."

Knowledge contains a speech by Professor Marsh, of Yale College, on "Evolution." The professor says: "The battle has been fought and won. A few stragglers on each side may still keep up a scattered fire, but the contest is over, and the victors have moved on to other fields." Nobody, it seems, is going to stay and bury Moses.

WE are pleased to note that our good friend Mr. Sharman, on leaving Plymouth for Preston, has been presented with a testimonial in the shape of a cheque for £150. Mr. Sharman

has made many sacrifices for the freedom of which he is so staunch an advocate, and he carries to the North the good wishes of all Southern Radicals.

ANYONE who wishes to know what life in prison is like should invest a penny in the account of his prison experiences which Mr. Ramsey contributed to the four numbers of *Our Corner*, and which has been republished in the form of a sixteen-page pamphlet. Mr. Ramsey gives a humorous account of the sermons of the prison chaplain and his controversies with that worthy.

THE *Boston Investigator* declares Colonel Ingersoll's new lecture, "The Dying Creed," troubles the orthodox clergy in America more than any of his previous lectures. It is marked throughout with his characteristic eloquence, wit, humor, and sarcasm. It was gall and wormwood to the clergy who preach at him with all the slang, abuse, and misrepresentation peculiar to the *odium theologicum*. The *Boston Investigator* opines that if Liberalism only had three or four lecturers just like him, each gifted with his wonderful oratory, brilliant wit, and conclusive reasoning, the epitaph of orthodoxy in ten years would be—"It is all gone! Let mankind rejoice!"

SECULAR SERMON.—No. 2.

THE QUALITY OF GOD'S MERCY.

(Continued from p. 122).

THE Apostle Paul (Rom. ix.) makes a most impudent attempt to justify the wickedness of the ways of God with man. His performance is an artful anticipation of the argumentative tricks and dodgeries of our modern Christian evidence-mongers. He blasphemously compares God to a potter, and mankind to the clay which the potter may mould into vessels of honor or dishonor, and, accordingly, condones the wilful wicked act of the divine iconoclast as a lawful exercise of the sacred rights of property. The Lord of heaven, like the lords of earth, has a perfect right to do what he likes with his own. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" (verses 20, 21). The right divine of God to govern wrong is thus placed on the arbitrary, tyrannical, anti-human bases: Firstly, of God's proprietary interest in man, similar in kind to the interest which a man possesses in a piece of clay; secondly, of God's power and man's powerlessness. Having assumed this brutal attitude of God-hardened heartlessness, it is not marvellous that the fanatical Paul should view with holy complacency "the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (22), and give the lie direct to all morality, not to mention reason and common sense, by cynically and cruelly penning the following words, the first seven of which have a bitterly sarcastic sound and signification when compared with the shrieks of suffering of the "vessels of destruction" broken in pieces by the vindictiveness of the divine potter: "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. . . . Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (verses 14-18). The apostolic mind was evidently too much inebriated with Holy Spirit to perceive that which is apparent to the sober but carnal intellect—viz., that there is every difference between the right of the human potter, out of non-sentient clay, to make non-sentient vessels, and the right of God, out of the dust of the earth, or out of the purloined rib of unborn Eve's sleeping partner, to create countless generations of men and women who are deliberately "fitted to destruction" as fuel for hell-fire, the sport and toy of temporal and eternal misery. It is no excuse of brutality to plead that its perpetrator is omnipotent. The possession of such an attribute is an awful responsibility, and only renders less justifiable the despotic conduct of God, for, as sentient beings, we have plainly the right to expect that a God, who is not also a fiend, would infinitely prefer to condemn himself to eternal isolation in the universe rather than conjure beings into existence who are doomed "to hideous ruin and combustion." Paul's excuse is therefore as contemptible as the conduct he excuses is cruel. Brute force is the justification of brutality, according to this pious apologist of tyranny. Man is too weak to "kick against the pricks;" ergo, there is no "unrighteousness with God" when he gives man

"more kicks than ha'pence." God made man; man is God's; can't God do what he likes with his own? Such is the mental wriggling of the gentle apostle to the Gentiles in attempting so to cleanse the character of the divine Ethiopian that, though his sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool!

The loudly-trumpeted mercies of the Lord nowhere exist but in the self-conceit of God, or its equivalent—the pious hatchet-throwing of his priests and partisans. The truth of this statement will leap into prominence by an examination of God's dealings with the three orders of his victimised creatures—viz., devils, man, and "the lower animals"—for whom he has mercifully established three respective classes, or gradations, of cruelty. The devils are the worst treated. They were graciously predestined to commit sin, and to endure eternal suffering as punishment for a crime of which they were designed and doomed to be guilty. From their utterly damned and damnable condition they are not permitted, by the inscrutable mercy of God, any faintest hope of redemption or remotest chance of salvation. Mankind fared a little better. They, too, were foreordained to the same dismal doom of sin and suffering; but, in their case, God was mercifully disposed—though on conditions absolutely unacceptable by any reasonable man—to redeem from damnation a few select mortals. The lower animals are more fortunate still. God was so bounteous with mercy towards them that he forebore to inflict upon them the blessing of immortality, with its manifold chances of damnation. When they die their miseries die too. It is true they have hosts of trouble to contend with during their brief existence, what with internecine warfare, the cruelty and carnivorousness of man, and (in more barbarous times) the sacrificial requirements of God. If, in lacking immortality, their dignity is beneath man's, their liability to misery is infinitely smaller. Even towards Jesus Christ, his son and self, God's mercies were parsimoniously scanty; for, contrary to all sane notions of justice, the son of Joseph, or God the Father, or God the Holy Ghost (which?) was brought (by God) to an unmerited death, in order that, by the sufferings of innocence, the sin of the guilty might be washed away, and that the unjust fires of divine revenge might cool down to the temperature of mercy. Thus, heaven, earth and hell have each had abundant cause, in mingled wails of God, devils, man and beast, to mourn the mercilessness of God.

We have tasted and seen how ungracious the Lord is. Stupid is the man that trusteth in him! God's mercies are, as we have seen, the messengers of woe to man. They are curses christened as divine blessings. By their fruit, which is human misery, we may know that the tree which bears them is not the Tree of Life, but a poisonous plant which blossoms in human death and woe. It is a blasphemy of the name of mercy to place that sweet gem of all the virtues in the diadem of deity. As soldiers of Freethought and loyal servants of Truth, be it our endeavor to pluck out the stolen jewel, and reset it, as a trophy of man's triumph over the dark tyranny of gods and priests, in the crown of Humanity. Let the story, told by the cruel creed of Christianity, of God's inhumanity to man, be the incentive and justification of our untiring attacks on the merciless mercies of God!

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

THE EARLY DAYS OF CHRISTIANITY.

A SUFFICIENT disproof of the Christian miracles is the fact that they arose in a time of great religious excitement among a people devoid of critical faculty and the slaves of superstition. The scepticism and enlightenment of Athens and of Rome never penetrated to Palestine. There is abundant proof that Asiatics in general, and Jews in particular, were predisposed not merely to accept, but to look for marvels of theurgy and new religious developments. In Josephus we have a picture of the fierce religious fanaticism seething in the Jewish mind from the time of the Maccabees and cultivating at the period of the fall of Jerusalem. This historian, though obviously checked by his fear of Greek and Roman criticism, could not resist the temptation of inserting some prodigies of his own in addition to repeating most of the stiff yarns of the Old Testament. The Talmud is full of evidence of the superstition and ignorance of the Jews. Angels were as common as pigeons, and devils as familiar as figs. In the gospel falsely ascribed to Matthew, Jesus is made to put his works of healing on a level with

the performance of the Jewish exorcists. "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out?" (Matt. xii., 27). That he recognised the casting out of devils by others as genuine miracles appears also from Mark ix., 38, 39.

Sufficient evidence is given in the New Testament itself of the superstition of the apostolical era. Take for instance the fact that when Herod the Tetrach heard of the fame of Jesus, he said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead" (Matt. xiv., 2, and xvi., 14). And that this John the Ducker was, despite his own contradiction (John i., 21), declared by Jesus to be Elias (Matt. xi., 14); while God himself in human form was thought by the Jews to have a devil who went about to kill him (John vii., 20). Take also the numerous references to sorcerers (see Acts xiii., 6; xvi., 16; xix., 13-16; Gal. v., 20; Rev. ix., 21; xxii., 15, etc.) Elymas the sorcerer was termed a child of the Devil, and smitten with blindness by his rival Paul. Simon Magus (Acts viii., 9-11) is declared to have bewitched the people of Samaria with sorceries. According to the Clementine Homilies, said to have been written by Paul's fellow-laborer, mentioned Philip iv. 3, and the alleged successor of Peter at Rome, this Simon Magus actually had the power of flying, of making statues walk, and of transforming himself into a goat or a serpent. The parties who believed the gospels were quite as ready to believe the Clementines. Justin Martyr tells us that this Simon was worshipped by nearly all the Samaritans as the supreme god. We read also in the Acts of the Apostles that when the inhabitants of Melita saw Paul shake off a viper into the fire without taking harm, they thought he was a god (Acts xxviii., 6.)

Modern Christians feel themselves only called upon to believe the miraculous stories related in the books declared canonical at the Council of Nice. The early Christians were not so particular, and as readily believed that Jesus made sparrows out of clay, as related in the Gospel of St. Thomas, as that he cured a blind man by putting clay and spittle on his eyes, as related in the Gospel according to St. John, who, by the way, tells that if all the things which Jesus did were written, the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. None of the Apocryphal Gospels makes a stronger demand upon credulity than the legend of the birth from a virgin mother, or contains a more improbable story than that of the sun being darkened and the saints rising out of their graves at the crucifixion.

Not only did the early Christians believe in all the prodigies ascribed to their founder and his apostles, but they one and all believed that the heathen deities wrought miracles and that the heathen oracles prophesied truly. Only they believed that these had been inspired by demons. They never thought once of questioning such stories. Anything like critical examination was unknown. The literature of the world might be ransacked without one being able to find parallels to the gross credulity and superstition of the early fathers of the Christian church.

The story of Apollonius of Tyana, with his many miracles strikingly similar to those of the gospels, as given by Philostratus, and of the false prophet Alexander, as related by Lucian, further show the ignorance and credulity of the time. The latter author, indeed, informs us a dextrous juggler, turning Christian, was sure of making his fortune. Celsus represents the wonder-workers of the original Salvation Army as "vagabonds and common cheats who rambled about to play their tricks at fairs and markets—not at the resorts of the wiser and better sort, for among them they never venture to appear."

There could be no greater mistake than to suppose that what is called the historical evidences were the subject of investigation in the early days of Christianity. Nor is there the slightest proof that any of the alleged Christian martyrs ever died giving his testimony to supernatural occurrences of which he had been eye-witness.

J. M. WHEELER.

WHERE is the wicked reporter who wrote—"The funeral procession was very fine and two miles long, as was also the discourse of the preacher."

SCENE: Noah looking out on the weather from a window in the ark. An outsider swims up and remarks: "Happy mornin', Noah?" Noah (very curtly): "Yes." Swimmer: "It's roughish work out here, you may depend." Noah: "Very like." Swimmer: "You couldn't let a fellow in, could you?" Noah: "No! you should have come in with the procession! Japhet, shut the window. Ham, don't stand staring there, but mind the pigs."

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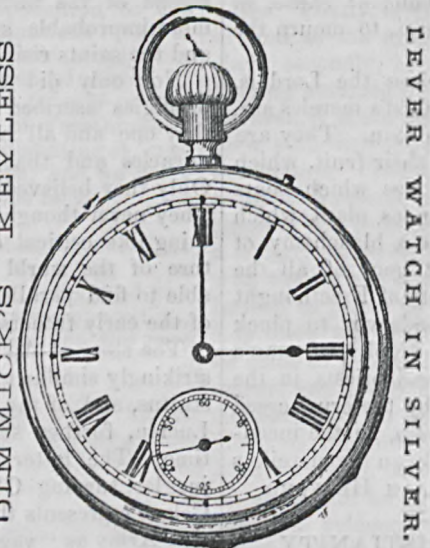
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