

# THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

Sub Editor—J. M. Wheeler.

Vol. IV.—No. 23.]

JUNE 8, 1884.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.

COMIC BIBLE SKETCH. — No. 73.



JONAH ON THE STUMP.

“And he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”—JONAH III., 4.

## MR. PICTON ON BLASPHEMY.

MR. J. A. PICTON is the accepted Liberal candidate for Leicester, and he will probably represent that important borough in the next Parliament. His views on any public question are therefore of moment, and to Freethinkers his views on blasphemy are of special interest. He has not, that I am aware, expressed them openly to his future constituents, but he has stated them incidentally in a little volume of lectures he has recently published, called “Lessons from the English Commonwealth.” Oliver Cromwell, in one of his early letters, laid down the doctrine of “tolerance” as he understood it. He approved a larger measure of mental liberty than obtained at that time, and nearly approached the grand position maintained by Milton in his immortal and matchless “Arcopagitica.” But he guarded himself against too wide an interpretation of his principles by a very pregnant reservation which greatly nullified them—“If a man speak blasphemously, or to the disturbance of the public peace, let the civil magistrate punish him.” By disregarding the disjunctive “or,” Mr. Picton draws the conclusion that Cromwell “was inclined to regard this question of blasphemy as a matter, not of religion, but of social order.” Personally I consider this conclusion most unwarrantable. I feel sure that Cromwell would have regarded open, and especially aggressive, Atheism as a spiritual crime to be sharply suppressed; and that he meant by “toleration” no more than mutual forbearance among various sects of professed Christians. But I am willing to waive that objection in order to follow Mr. Picton’s view that Cromwell furnishes a “suggestion having a very obvious application to some difficulties of our day.”

To begin with, Mr. Picton does not show a practical knowledge of these difficulties. He says that “the civil magistrate has been more than once appealed to in our time to suppress or punish utterances described as blasphemy; but it has not usually been alleged in such cases that there was any danger to the public peace.” Now, although no attempt has ever been made to *prove* it, that has been *alleged* in every prosecution; and, indeed, the indictment would be

bad without it. I was charged with publishing certain blasphemous libels to the danger of the peace as well as to the great displeasure of Almighty God, and although no evidence of either of these statements was or could be adduced, I was found guilty and sentenced to twelve months’ imprisonment. Mr. Picton is therefore entirely wrong in this respect.

Mr. Picton allows that “blasphemy” is a very elastic term; “what is blasphemy in one age becomes fashionable liberalism in another,” and it is very difficult to lay down a general rule applicable to a term of such variable meaning. “But it is not impossible. The true principle is respect for social susceptibilities.” Here is Mr. Picton’s magical key to unlock every hard case to the satisfaction of all, including, we presume, the victim himself.

Before I test it, however, I would ask Mr. Picton a question. He adores Jesus Christ, and appears still to regard him as something more than a man. Now what does he think of those epithets which Jesus flung at the Scribes and Pharisees? Does he think that calling whole classes of men vipers, serpents, whited sepulchres and children of hell showed much respect for “social susceptibilities?” Does he think that these words justified the charge of blasphemy brought against Jesus by the respectable gentlemen whose “feelings” he had “outraged.” If he does not, why talk about “social susceptibilities” at all? Or why take one rule of judgment for Jesus Christ and another for George William Foote?

Now let us see to what lengths Mr. Picton’s accommodating theory leads him. He tells us that if, in a Catholic country, he met a priestly procession carrying the “host” to a dying man, he should take off his hat out of respect for the “religious feelings” of his fellow men, although he might have nothing but contempt for the superstition they were practising. Mr. Picton would certainly lay himself open to misconstruction if he did anything of the kind. The bystanders would regard his action, not as a mark of respect for them, but as a sign of reverence for the “host.” Further, why would Mr. Picton doff his hat in a Catholic country, but not in a Protestant one? Simply because he defers to the prejudices of the majority out of sheer weak-

ness, and then dignifies the submission with all sorts of fine names.

It is our duty, says Mr. Picton, to claim freedom of thought and speech; but "if we so use our freedom as needlessly to offend and wound the susceptibilities of our fellow men, then we overstep our right and sin against social order." *Needlessly!* But who is to be the judge of that? Every great reformer has been "needlessly" violent in the opinion of his contemporaries. Socrates was, Jesus Christ was, Luther was, Knox was, Voltaire was, Paine was, Shelley was, Carlyle was. And this "needlessly" becomes all the more absurd when it is the orthodox majority who are to be the judges. The mildest attack on their cherished superstitions is always reprehensible; and history shows us that they only took to punishing "outrageous" heretics when the "respectable" heretics had grown too numerous to be dealt with.

Mr. Picton is travelling over the same ground again when he says—"I cannot hold those guiltless who, by ostentatious caricatures or public jest, deliberately seek to hurt the reverential sentiments of their fellow men." Our illustrations are not caricatures, and they are only grotesques because they visualise the absurd stories of the Bible. Nor are they ostentatious. We sell the *Freethinker*, and have too good a circulation to give it away—except once a year, when we give a copy of our Christmas Number to any parson or pauper who likes to apply for it. People who are "shocked" by this journal are shocked by their own deliberate act. We do not "deliberately seek to hurt them" or anybody else. We simply publish what we think effective against false and harmful beliefs, and we deny that people have any vested interest in absurdity.

Most certainly, too, we do not ridicule people's "opinions on the ultimate power by which the universe is swayed," and it is highly disingenuous on Mr. Picton's part to talk in this way. What has the ultimate mystery of the universe to do with Jonah and the whale, or the beautiful story of Lot and his daughters, or any other of the silly and dirty tales with which the "blessed book" is crowded? We admire what is truly admirable everywhere, but we revolt against vicious fables palmed off as the word of God. This may seem very "vulgar" to Mr. Picton, but tastes notoriously differ. He may perceive some secret beauty in the falsest and uncleanest superstitions which is hidden from our "vulgar" eyes.

Mr. Picton's final word on blasphemy is, however, more reassuring. "Such an evil," he says, "is best corrected, not by force, but by the pity with which we treat blindness, deafness and every defect of faculty in body or mind." Yes, Mr. Picton, that is as sensible a view as you can possibly take, and that is all we ask of you. Leave us alone to our own "blindness," and don't seek to improve our eyesight with twelve months' residence in a dim prison cell. Our misfortune is already great enough. We lack your piercing and extensive vision, and your wonderful sensibility of hearing. Compared with you we are dull and senseless clods. But don't kick us. Enjoy the sense of your own superiority, and leave us to the tender mercies of the Lord. If you and your friends will let us alone in this world, we will take our chance with your superiors in the next when we get there. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Freethinkers now see that Mr. Picton will probably vote on the right side after all when it comes to that point. They will only regret that the new Member for Leicester lacks that sturdy sense of freedom which has made the name of its old member illustrious for a whole generation. Yes, it is too true. James Allanson Picton is not a Peter Taylor.

G. W. FOOTE.

A WILTSHIRE parson was reading for his lesson Acts xxi., which ends abruptly at verse 40. He rendered it thusly, "And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs and beckoned with the hand unto the people, and when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying, here endeth the second lesson."

A CERTAIN Dr. Sayers, an army chaplain, is the clergyman in charge of the spiritual interests of the soldiers in Fort St. George, Madras, and he likes to tell "his lads" occasionally a piece of his mind in the plainest terms from the pulpit. So he closed up a recent sermon with the following: "My brethren, this is a 'charity sermon' I'm preaching. I want rupees, mind you—I want rupees, and not dirty pieces of paper in the bag having written on them, 'Sayers, old cock, how are you?' I won't have it, mind you, I won't. I've stood it long enough!"

## THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

Held at Plymouth, Sunday, June 1, 1884.

PLYMOUTH is not the most favorable place for a national Conference. It is right up in the south-west corner of England, and is rather difficult of access. One delegate from the North had twenty-eight hours' travelling to reach it, and many more had to spend a long time on the road. Yet this year's Conference was, on the whole, a great success. It was numerously attended by delegates and visitors from all parts of England, and from some parts of Scotland and Wales; and although there were naturally differences of opinion on some points that arose for discussion, the unanimity of opinion and sentiment on all matters of importance was marked as the disposition to grapple in a thoroughly practical spirit with every detail of the Society's business.

The large St. James's Hall was tastefully decorated with flags, mottoes, and the names of great Freethinkers of the past and present, among whom were Socrates, Bruno, Spinoza, Vanini, Voltaire, Paine and Ingersoll. In front of the left side gallery, facing the platform, was displayed in large letters Mr. Bradlaugh's motto of "Thorough," and on the other side Mr. Foote's famous words to Judge North, "Thank you, my lord, the sentence is worthy of your creed." The Plymouth branch in this respect, as in every other, deserves the thanks of all who took part in the day's proceedings. All the arrangements worked without a single hitch.

Mr. Bradlaugh's presidential address was, as usual, a model of terse expression, and had almost the air of a protocol. We are sorry we have not room to print it in full. Those who desire to read it through will find it verbatim in the *National Reformer*. We found only one matter for regret in it, and that was the persistent absence of any reference to Dr. Aveling, whose connexion with the Science Classes, and his conduct of *Progress* and the *Freethinker* during our imprisonment, certainly merited an official recognition, besides the thanks we have had the pleasure of tendering him. No doubt this was an accidental oversight, and for that very reason we have less hesitation in drawing attention to it.

One noticeable feature of the Conference was the hearty welcome given to Mr. W. W. Collins, of Birmingham; and another was the enthusiastic applause which greeted Mrs. Besant when she broke through the silence which her doctor has recently imposed on her by rising to deliver a brilliant speech in favor of "blasphemy." We may say in passing that the Conference was unanimous on this subject, and Mr. Foote's resolution was carried without a dissentient voice.

Miss Hypatia Bradlaugh's bright little speech on the Science Classes also met with a warm reception.

[The following Report has been prepared by Dr. Aveling.]

At 10.30 the hammer of the President announced that the 1884 Conference of the N. S. S. had opened. Mr. R. Forder, the Secretary, called over the names; the minutes of the last meeting were most mercifully taken as read. Mr. Charles Bradlaugh, President, reminded the Conference that only Freethinkers should be present, and only members of the N. S. S. could vote upon business matters. Mr. R. Forder, Secretary, then read a letter from Councillor Thomas Slater, of Bury, explaining his enforced absence, and wishing the Conference and its attendants all good speed.

Mr. CHARLES BRADLAUGH then read the President's report—a report endorsed by the Executive; the reading occupied twenty-three minutes. The chief points dealt with were the imprisonments for blasphemy, the money contributed for the aid of and the testimonials to the prisoners, the petitions for release, the lie of Sir William Harcourt in Parliament, the Bill drafted by Justice Stephen, the formation of the Association for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, the meeting on May 13, the International Freethought Conference at Amsterdam, the Centenary of the death of Diderot, the oath question, Joseph Symes' journey to the Antipodes, the movement in Australia and India, the establishment of several limited companies for the acquisition of permanent halls for our work, the building society scheme, the burial of Freethinkers, the withdrawal of children from religious instruction, the science classes, the distribution of literature, the importance of local work, the enrolment of new members and of a new lecturer, and the Benevolent Fund.

As usual with the writer and reader, the interpolated phrases were among the most interesting. To wit, the statement that the Executive will always fight the cases in which principle is involved; the admonition to care upon the part of every branch, and every member of every branch to work not only vigorously but carefully; the suggestion that a register of the withdrawals from religious instruction of children in Board schools be kept, and that this be facilitated by every parent sending the particulars to Mr. R. Forder. The mention of the names of the Revs. Sharman and Headlam and Messrs. Symes and Collins met with especial warmth of applause. That in the case of the first-named was distinctly not a case of "local option" merely, and the applause with which every mention of Mr. W. W.

Collins was greeted was a delight to everybody who has noticed the steady and rapid advance made by this excellent teacher.

Mr. V. LE LUBEZ read the Treasurer's report, explaining that of the balance of £186 odd in hand, £100 were in the Birkbeck Bank in his name, and the rest in the Central Bank of London, where he also had a business account, under the name Victor Le Lubez, N. S. S.

Mr. NEWCOMB (Bootle) and Mr. Moon (Southampton) moved and seconded the adoption of the Treasurer's report, the former pleading on behalf of the Benevolent Fund. Carried.

Mr. BRADLAUGH then vacated the chair, and Mr. V. Le Lubez took it. In quitting *pro tempore* his place the President explained once again who only had the right to vote.

Mr. R. PORTER (Nottingham) proposed the re-election of Charles Bradlaugh. Referring to past times he told how the difficulties of seven years back had made him a member of the N. S. S. and a careful watcher of Charles Bradlaugh's actions. As he had been our leader in undermining the citadel of religion he proposed him as the leader still.

Mr. RIDGWAY (Manchester) seconded. He regarded the large audience present as in great measure due to the energy of their President. They ought still to march under the old banner carried by the same sturdy hands.

The proposition was supported by Mr. Bridges (Birmingham), who looked upon Iconoclast as now the good shepherd of Free-thought; Mr. Murray (Plymouth), who called to mind twenty-five years ago, when Charles Bradlaugh was arrested here; Mr. Sanderson (Newcastle), speaking for the men of the North, who had given him their representative *carte blanche* on every question but this.

Mr. TAMLYN (Burnley) was appointed to use his own judgment. He proposed Mr. G. W. Foote. The main reason for this appeared to be Mr. Charles Bradlaugh's objection to the holding of a public meeting on that Sunday evening. The President explained that his objection was made as the mouth-piece of the Executive.

Mr. G. W. FOOTE, whose rising was the signal for immense enthusiasm, pointed out that here was a useless waste of time on an impossible proposition. It was no good discussing if the nominee would not stand. If he were elected unanimously he would not accept. Indeed he had himself intended to propose Mr. Charles Bradlaugh had he not seen older men rise. He deprecated the allusions of Messrs. Potter and Tamlyn as unnecessary. They referred to past grievances. All would know that he was not likely to move or to support Mr. Charles Bradlaugh except on the ground that he was the fittest man. He hoped their President would for many years to come speak on behalf of Freethought in that position which was at present denied him mainly because of his position as President of the National Secular Society.

Messrs. Newcomb, Pomeroy (Cardiff), Lilly (Brighton) supported the original resolution, which was carried unanimously.

The PRESIDENT, thanking the delegates for the honor done to him, hoped that while he was thus trusted, no dishonor might ever befall the Society. He especially thanked Mr. Foote for the kindly fashion in which he, who had dearly bought the right to any honor that Freethinkers might offer, had supported the resolution. As to the proposed public meeting of that evening, his only duty was to see that the decisions of the Committee appointed by the Executive were carried out. He asked again for an Executive ready to work with him. Referring to his own Parliamentary struggle, he said that in that, as in the Freethought movement generally, other phases, hardly anticipated as yet, were coming. What had happened in regard to the blasphemy prosecutions might happen again. We needed to be even more united, to have a yet stronger organisation, branches that would not neglect their duty, individual work in every town. He hoped that before his life closed he might so efface from the statute-book and from the common law iniquitous enactments that it would be impossible to arrest any of our speakers. He then proposed the following as vice-presidents:—George Anderson, Edward Aveling, Annie Besant, Alice Bradlaugh, Hypatia Bradlaugh, G. W. Foote, George T. Foster, John Lees, P. A. V. Le Lubez, William H. Reynolds, Thomas Slater, Robert Owen Smith, George Stranding, Joannes Swaagman, Joseph Symes, and Edward Truelove. In mentioning the name of Mr. G. W. Foote, the President wished to mark the opportunity, the responsibility, the power that rested with him. There was none with greater promise, none who had bought more painfully the right to the position.

The resolution seconded by Mr. R. Cuerel, of Plymouth, was carried unanimously.

The list of Vice-Presidents was completed by the following names. Drs. Schlaeger and Büchner, of Germany (proposed by Mrs. Annie Besant, seconded by Miss Hypatia Bradlaugh), Messrs. Pratt, of New Zealand (R. Forder and W. Newcomb), A. Hilditch (G. W. Foote and Edward Aveling), W. J. Ramsey (J. Robertson, Central London, and E. Thomlinson, North Western).

Mr. J. HOPES (Kilburn) and Mr. Porter proposed and seconded Mr. V. Le Lubez as Treasurer. In putting this, which was carried *nem. dis.*, and with much applause, the President spoke of the time when the funds were often a minus quantity and Mr. Le Lubez used to advance them.

The appointment of auditors gave rise to some discussion. Mr. W. J. Ramsey, as a member of the Executive, in con-

sequence of his election as Vice-President that morning, was no longer eligible. Matters were complicated by the Huddersfield branch having a motion on the agenda that one of the auditors be a provincial member, and by the fact that all nominations to office ought to be given in one month before the Conference. After considerable discussion Mr. Hurley, of Brighton, was, on the motion of Mr. Lilly (Brighton), seconded by Mr. Nelson (Sheffield), elected along with Mr. C. Herbert (Messrs. Robertson and Thomlinson) on the understanding that the Brighton branch bore the expenses of his visits to London for official purposes.

Mr. R. Forder was then re-elected Secretary (Messrs. Thomlinson and Newcomb).

The order of the Conference was now modified for the purpose of introducing a vote of condolence in respect to the death of M. Goffin, of Belgium. This was moved as a brotherly action to his wife, family and party, by Mrs. Annie Besant, seconded by Miss Hypatia Bradlaugh and supported by Mr. V. Le Lubez and by the President. In putting it to the meeting the last-named bore witness to the fact that the whole life of M. Goffin had been identified with battles for the poor and oppressed of Brussels.

Two notices of motion on the subject of the balance-sheet of the National Secular Society fell to the ground, as no representatives of the two branches (Huddersfield and Brighouse) were present.

Mr. W. SCULLARD (Southampton) rose to propose the following resolution: "That there being no distinctive colors whereby Secularists are known to each other, and it being considered unfair to adopt the Northampton colors as a Secular badge, the Conference be requested to select a color or colors to be worn on occasions of our meeting in Conference and otherwise." He anticipated the objections likely to be taken, especially that which likened the project to a Salvation Army device. He only wished the wearing of a color or colors to be optional. The adoption of some plan of this kind would facilitate the meeting of stranger delegates at railway stations, and might even make railway journeys more pleasant to Freethinkers. He was willing to leave the choice of the actual badge to the Executive.

Mr. COWELL (Sheffield) seconded. At times such as Conference meetings he thought something of the kind would be useful. He believed that if all Freethinkers were not ashamed to wear a badge of Freethought the world would be astonished at their numbers.

Mr. R. PORTER said that his badge was always a Freethought publication in his hand.

Mr. G. W. FOOTE proposed that the Conference pass to the next business. It was not the first time that the question had arisen, and when it was discussed at Edinburgh he did think that the matter was settled for a generation. Every unnecessary rule was harmful. He objected to permissive legislation. Either the badge must be worn by every active member, and by no passive one, or it would become a question only for the individual. Those who object to wear it ought not to be accused of cowardice. For himself he should not wear anything of the sort if the non-wearing were made penal. With reference to the suggestion of Mr. Porter, there could be no mistake as to the nature of a Freethought paper, whilst the significance of a ribbon might be doubtful. He did not see any practical difficulty in the solution of the question without recourse to a vote of the Conference. Every branch had access to the papers of the party, and could intimate what color or favor was to be worn by delegates on the necessary occasions. There was a great difference between doing this and accepting a mark and party badge as the result of the vote of a Conference. This was to imitate a bad example, and he for one disliked the imitation of the enemy. The public think of the Freethought party as different from the Salvation or the Blue Ribbon Armies.

Mr. Alyward seconded. After some further discussion in which Mr. Dean, of Bermondsey, and Mr. R. Forder gave equally pathetic illustrations of the use and of the danger of a badge in a scription, the Conference adjourned until the afternoon.

The afternoon sitting at 2.30 was occupied for some little time with a further discussion on the question of labelling. Messrs. Ascher (London), Hopes and Thomlinson supported the idea, the last-named delegate opining that the opponents of the original motion were thin-skinned.—Mr. Lilly damned the proposition with faint praise. He would have a badge, but it was not to be compulsory.—Messrs. Newcomb, Morris and Barlow spoke against the measure. Mr. Morris regarded it as a going back to orthodoxy. Freethinkers had to put away childish things. Mr. Barlow declared that any resolution of the sort would be inoperative.—Dr. Edward Aveling pointed out that the very diversity of opinion on the matter settled the question. Unless there was entire unanimity the adoption of any device of the kind was not practicable. That Mr. Foote's motion was to pass on to the next business, and not a direct negative, was wise, inasmuch as it left every individual and every branch free to act as he or it liked in the matter. In view of the many matters of much greater moment yet to be discussed, he hoped that the Conference would pass at once to the next business.

In reply on his amendment, Mr. FOOTE thought "thin-skinned" one of those words that we use to show we do not agree

with one another, and ought to be used lightly after the events of the past year. It was clear that there was no general idea that a badge was needed. Childish things might be left for childish people.

Mr. SCULLARD, replying upon his original proposition, pointed out that there would be no compulsion in the matter, and that other people, such as the Northampton electors, did not consider it childish to wear similar distinguishing marks.

On a division the amendment—viz., that the Conference pass to the next business—was carried by about fifty votes to about eighteen.

A motion by the absent Huddersfield branch: "That the executive enrol Mr. W. W. Collins, of Birmingham, in the list of special lecturers" had to be ruled out of order, as at the last Conference a special method of choosing lecturers was determined upon by the delegates. Further, Mr. Collins himself had sent an excellent letter, that was read, in which he disclaimed any intention of becoming a special lecturer except on the terms that had been decided on. The letter was characterised as very creditable to the writer, and the hope expressed that he would soon win and wear his spurs as a recognised special lecturer.

The nineteenth item on the list was a notice by the Chatham branch: "That no person or persons be allowed to join the N. S. S. at headquarters without reference to the local branch from whose neighborhood the applicant may seek to join, seeing that such person may or may not have been expelled from the local branch." This was moved by Mr. R. Forder as delegate of that branch. He (the mover) declared with a charming frankness that he only did this under orders, and had personally a strong feeling against the motion. He remarked that for a branch to expel a member without informing the Executive of the fact was wrong, and that an expelled person had the right of appeal to the Executive, and even from the Executive to the Conference. After a brief conversation the motion was, by leave of the Conference, withdrawn.

A notice of motion from the Manchester branch: "To consider the advisability of printing new Declaration forms with the amount of subscription left blank (or printed to suit branches) so that branches can insert their own scale of contributions," introduced by Mr. Ridgeway, was also not pressed, as it was pointed out that this was a matter that every branch had in its own hands.

Mr. J. BRUMMAGE (Portsmouth) proposed: "That the Conference be requested to consider the advisability of ceasing to print in the *National Reformer* the list of renewals, but that in its stead the number of both sexes should be stated, the advantage of the latter plan being that a large quantity of unnecessary printing would be dispensed with." He thought that often more important matters were omitted because of the room taken up by these long lists. The motion was seconded by Mr. J. Crowther (Halifax) and, after some discussion, was lost by a very large majority.

Mr. LILLY (Brighton) moved that "the 1885 Conference be held at Brighton." It was explained that this could not be decided by the Conference, but by the Executive some months hence, when the claims of Brighton would be considered with those of other places that might then apply.

The last question for the afternoon sitting was that of the disposal of the balance of the Prisoners' Aid Fund. £109 15s. 9d. were left, and the Prisoners' Aid Fund Committee had reported this to the Executive. The President explained that the Executive had the right to dispose of this balance in their own discretion, but had felt that the fairest thing to do was to refer the matter to the Conference for consideration. Mr. Cowell proposed, and Mr. W. Newcomb seconded, that the sum be handed over to the Benevolent Fund Committee. Mr. Robertson proposed as an amendment that the money be divided as follows among the prisoners and Mr. J. M. Wheeler, who had suffered next to the men imprisoned more than any other:—Mr. G. W. Foote, £50; Mr. W. J. Ramsey, £37 10s.; Mr. H. A. Kemp, £12 10s.; Mr. J. M. Wheeler, £9 15s. 9d. The money had been given by all grades of people for the purpose of helping these men.

(Continued on page 182.)

## ACID DROPS.

Bass, the great brewer, spent during his life-time over £200,000 on religious buildings, and he has remembered the Lord in his will. He evidently believed in the Conservative cry of Beer and Bible.

A CLERGYMAN says that he converted a number of persons to Christianity through preaching a bad sermon. Having heard the sermon they were dissatisfied, and went to the Bible itself. We can assure the clergyman that we know a host of persons who have been converted to Freethought through that same bad sermon. Like bread cast upon water it returned after many days to be preached again.

THE Rev. E. J. Silverton, Baptist, being out of business in the "bread of life" trade, took to selling pills and tonics for

rheumatism, sterility, and other little troubles of the fair sex. His prices were so high and his cures so few that, despite all his pious advertisements in religious newspapers, his victims rounded on him. The result is that he has been charged, together with a surgical friend, with conspiracy to defraud. The case is still pending.

At the meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland Dr. Cunningham protested against the praise which had been bestowed upon the Salvation Army, and described the female captains and lieutenants that he had seen as "brazen-faced young women of low type." If the Hallelujah Lasses get near him they will prove that his face is made of a softer material.

THE Church of Scotland, according to the *Scotsman*, "appears to be much more interested in the imaginary conversion of Jews abroad than in the regulation of Christian life and work at home." During the year it has spent £5 54s. 16s. 8d. in compassing sea and land to make a few proselytes, and of some of these conversions it is doubtful whether the mission has the credit. The Free Church, however, shows even greater faith in this remarkably barren kind of propaganda. Last year its Jewish Committee spent £6,460, and had not a single conversion to report. If we were to imitate the courteous language employed by the meek and lowly Jesus, we should tell these Christians that when they succeed in making a proselyte they only make him twofold more the child of hell than themselves (Matt. xxiii., 15.)

THE Rev. E. Evans of Todmorden, has just preached a sermon on "Is life worth living?" in the course of which he claimed to be both an optimist and a pessimist—that is, he believes that everything is for the best and also that everything is for the worst. According to the report in the *Burnley Gazette*, he had come to the conclusion that "life without immortality is not worth living." We trust that these words do not convey his genuine sentiments, and that the only person to be blamed is the printer's devil, who, by direct inspiration from Old Nick, may have omitted the letter "t" from the word immortality.

THE Rev. Mr. Delo, of Brunswick, New York, having been forced to resign by his congregation, preached a farewell sermon in which, after bitterly assailing the members of the church council, he said, "I will be preaching the gospel when a majority of this congregation is in hell"—a remark which created a profound sensation. An old farmer, who had listened attentively, said, in a tone which caused not a few to smile: "This may all be so, and perhaps he will be preaching to his old congregation." There is a very bitter feeling against Mr. Delo, and threats are openly made that he will be treated to a coat of tar and feathers.

PEOPLE who read their Bible and really believe it must hold that it is a highly commendable act of faith to kill their children and offer them in sacrifice to the Lord. Abraham, for instance, was greatly honored by God for his piety because he was ready to murder his child and cremate him as a holy offering. God was also highly gratified by the bloody sacrifice of his own offspring. Among the recent cases illustrating the effect of biblical teaching on this point is that of Mr. and Mrs. John Emmous, of Ionia, Michigan, who on Sunday, April 20, were found to be suffering from religious excitement. The *Ionia National* says that they were among the first to join the Salvation Army, and have been regular attendants ever since. When found they were gravely discussing which one of their children should be offered up as a sacrifice to the Lord, and had progressed so far as to have carving-knives in their hands ready for the pious work. The children were immediately removed to a place of safety and the unfortunate couple taken to the gaol, where they will have leisure to reflect that, although the Bible is God's word, it won't do to follow it too closely in an age like this.

THE Rev. G. L. Campbell was charged by the Presbytery of Glasgow with having committed adultery, or, alternately, of having been guilty of improper behavior. In his defence he protested that he only addressed the woman with words of kindly interest, intended to lead up to words of Christian counsel. The assembly found him guilty of the minor charge, and sentence of deposition was passed.

A SQUATTER whose flocks and herds were dying off through want of water was visited by the minister of the district, who after hearing his complaint, invited him to pray. "What good will that do?" said the sufferer. "The Lord heareth prayer, and will pour bountiful showers upon the earth if we only ask him." This answer met with the smart rejoinder: "Then what were you thinking about to let the country get in its present condition before you prayed?" When we left, our friend the squatter was damming the country, and exhorting his neighbours to put their faith implicitly in the maxim that "God helps those who help themselves."

## SPECIAL NOTICE.

## MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, June 8, Claremont Hall, Penton Steet, Pentonville, at 7.30, on "Judas Iscariot."

June 15, Rochdale; 21, Sutton in Ashfield; 22, Nottingham; 29, Manchester. July 6, Claremont Hall, London; 13, Claremont Hall; 20, Milton Hall, London; 27, Milton Hall, London: 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; 21, Glasgow; 8, Edinburgh. Oct. 5, Liverpool.

## 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*, 28 Stonecutter Street, London.

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.

DR. EDWARD AVELING'S ENGAGEMENTS.—June 8, 15, Milton Hall; 22, 29, Hall of Science.

W. C. G.—We have unfortunately too much verse in hand at present.

W. E. BURGESS.—Write to Mr. Ramsey. There are several histories, and he may be able to procure you one second-hand.

J. WIDDICOMBE.—We have handed your letter to Mr. Ramsey, who will write you on the matter of business referred to.

MISS THORNTON SMITH asks us to state that a dramatic entertainment takes place at the Ball's Pond Secular Hall on Saturday evening, June 7, under the direction of Dr. Aveling. Eight o'clock. Admission free.

C. LOXSTONE.—When publications are sent to us for review we honestly say what we think of them. If criticism is objected to the publications should not be sent. We are glad to hear of the progress of Secularism in Wellinboro'.

E. DAWSON writes that the Sunday Cricket Club meets at the Hall of Science on Sunday at 9.30 p.m.

F. GODFREE.—Thanks. Cuttings are always welcome.

N. BROOME.—Received with thanks.

J. CLAYTON.—We do not know whether your Spiritist friends have seen vases move about the table or not. For our part we have often seen things move about the table without suspecting the action of ghosts. There were generally people near the table, and we dare say that was so in your friend's case. Our advice in these matters is, believe nothing but what you see yourself, and very little of that until you have examined into it. Your concluding question is meaningless.

C. M. MAKER.—Our readers cannot assist us better than by sending interesting cuttings or marked newspapers.

W. MACINTOSH.—Shall appear.

FAL.—We have not seen the book you mention.

IN consequence of Mr. Foote's absence from London, many correspondents remain unanswered this week.

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

IT is particularly requested that all orders for literature should be sent to 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.

MR. FOOTE will deliver a novel lecture at Claremont Hall this evening (Sunday, June 8) on "Judas Iscariot." This gentleman, who was so necessary to the Christian scheme of Salvation, has not had justice done to him. Mr. Foote intends to give a fresh view of this extraordinary man. The subject is very serious, and at the same infinitely comic.

THERE is a picture for sale at 55 Archer Street, Westbourne Grove (a picture dealer's shop) upon which is placed a piece of paper bearing the following:—"The Savior of the World. Slightly soiled. 14s."

TALMAGE says he believes in an "entire Bible." Americans always go the whole hog.

THE Rev. C. I. Engstrom denies that the Christian Evidence Society, of which he is secretary, gives secret instructions to its outdoor lecturers to vilify the leaders of the Freethought party. He asserts that, on the contrary, "the most emphatic instructions are issued that all personalities should be avoided, and that the lecturers should endeavor to manifest a forbearing spirit in dealing with opponents." We have pleasure in publishing this disclaimer, and we trust there will be no further reason for complaint. Mr. Engstrom has inquired into the statement we made about the gross language of one of his society's agents, and the accused person also denies that he ever used the language referred to. On the other hand, Mr. W. J. Ramsey asserts that he distinctly heard the words we printed, and is ready to produce a dozen corroborating witnesses.

THE ecclesiastical view of marriage as an inviolable sacrament is fast giving way to the more rational doctrine that marriage is a civil contract which may be terminated or otherwise dealt with on purely secular considerations. Acting on this principle, the French Senate, by 160 votes to 119, has adopted the motion for abrogating the law of 1816, which expunged divorce from the code.

THE Pope refuses to give red hats to any more French bishops unless the Government will grant the wearers the allowance which has hitherto been considered necessary to keep up the dignity of the cardinalate. His holiness thinks that such luxuries as cardinals should be paid for by the nation on whom he bestows them.

No. 6 of the Atheistic Platform is a lecture by Mr. A. B. Moss on "Nature and the Gods." It is pithy and eloquent, and is one of the best of the series.

No. 7 is "Some Objections to Socialism," by Mr. Bradlaugh. It is on the same lines as his speeches in the debate with Mr. Hyndman. We daresay that it will meet with a large sale, and, therefore, as the title of the series is the *Atheistic Platform*, we think it right to observe that Atheism is neither in favor of Socialism nor opposed to it.

ON Sunday, June 8, Dr. Edward Aveling lectures at Milton Hall, 7.30 p.m., on "Why I dare not be a Christian." He will also read the Murder Scene from "Macbeth."

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY CONFERENCE.

(Continued from page 180.)

MR. R. PORTER seconded. Every halfpenny ought to be disposed of for the benefit of the men directly injured.—Messrs. Bridges and Tamlyn thought an injustice would be done if the money were used in any other way than for the prisoners.—Mr. Ridgway, had been delegated to move that the money go to the founding of a fund for the like emergencies in the future, but had resolved personally to support Mr. Robertson's movement. After a proposition from Mr. Nelson that the money be equally divided between the Benevolent Fund and the Fund for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, the original motion was withdrawn, and that of Mr. Robertson (that the money be divided between the four men) became the substantive motion. Thereupon a shower of amendments poured in from all and sundry, as various in their nature as the proposers. Even whilst the cry was "still they come," Dr. Edward Aveling rose. He appealed in the strongest possible manner to the Conference to have nothing whatever to do with anyone of the amendments except in the way of rejecting them. The only right thing to be done was to pass the resolution for the division of the money amongst the four men who had suffered. The Executive had reserved to itself the right of disposing of the surplus as they chose, but it was clear that there was but one method of disposing of it equitably. 999 out of every 1,000 of the men and women who had given their pounds, shillings and pence to the Prisoners' Aid Fund meant the money to go to prisoners, and to these prisoners. He besought the Conference not to be led away from this intention by any one of the many amendments, but to decide unanimously that the balance of the Prisoners' Aid Fund go to those for whom the money had been subscribed.

Mrs. Annie BESANT, speaking as a member of the committee for the distribution of the fund, said that committee might have spent all of the money on the prisoners' families, and would have been perfectly within their right. To the committee as to the Executive, it seemed better to refer the matter to the Conference, where delegates from all parts of the country could decide. Other prosecutions might occur, and it was a question whether in view of this possibility the money should be kept in hand. The Conference would do what it thought to be right. To her Mr. Robertson's motion appeared to be the right one. The money should be given to those who had suffered, in the consciousness that the purses of the Freethought party would be as open, if need were, in the future as in the past.

Messrs. Le Lubez, Thomlinson and Sanderson having spoken, only the first mentioned advocating the maintenance of the money as a reserve fund for future emergencies, the President said that his opinion on this matter had been formed as he listened to the discussion. It would have been perfectly just for the committee to have done exactly what it liked with the money. They might have voted it even to some local charity. He would not have moved the resolution, but he would have voted for it. He believed that in the event of like cases occurring in the future, funds would be forthcoming. Not only was the proposal not objectionable; it was one of which the country would approve.

Some more desultory conversation followed, in the course of which Mr. W. W. Collins spoke vigorously on behalf of the utilisation of the money for the prisoners, and pointed out that the discussion could not have arisen the day after the last of them came out of gaol, and that the lapse of certain months could not affect the equity of the matter.

Finally, after the putting of the amendment that the money be equally divided between the three prisoners, the resolution

of Mr. Robertson was put and carried with only three dissenters.

Miss HYPATIA BRADLAUGH then gave a short address on Education. She spoke of the successes that had attended the work of the Science Classes in connexion with the Hall of Science, whose school was publicly noted as among the six good schools of London. Freethinkers in other towns should do likewise. The rich could help with money; those that had no money by attending the classes, and by teaching in them. The work did not end in the class rooms. As Freethinkers they should attend to science, as politicians study history, as Secularists teach or incite to the teaching of art. Thus life would become full of beauty, of knowledge, of all that makes life sweeter and happier.

After the President had remarked that the balance-sheet would have been much more satisfactory if all the branches had sent in their accounts, he called on Mr. R. Forder, the secretary of the National Secular Society.

Mr. FORDER, who has been elected to this post nine years in succession, spoke of the steady advance of the movement everywhere and of its progress in the south of England especially. If the Society was satisfied with his work in the past, he was ready to do anything that fell to his share in the future.

On the suggestion of the President, Mr. R. Cuerel proposed and Mr. J. Robertson seconded a motion that the Executive be authorised to choose representatives to attend the International Conference of Freethinkers at Brussels.

The afternoon meeting was brought to a close by the proposal of a vote of thanks to the Plymouth branch for their conduct of the Conference. Mr. G. W. Foote was the proposer, and in his speech referred to his own birth-connexion with the town, and to the loss sustained by the departure of the Rev. W. Sherman, and the death of Dr. Jones. Mr. W. J. Ramsey seconded and Mr. V. Le Lubez supported. The officials upon whom devolved the arrangements were:—President and Secretary, *ex officio*, James Rogers, W. F. Searle, J. Kneebone, J. Starns, J. Shafter, R. Manicom, S. Sowden, J. Briggs, G. F. Smith, R. C. Wylow, W. Stroud, C. N. Jones, T. Runnolls, G. Lucas, J. Murray, F. B. Hodge, Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Stroud, Mrs. Kneebone.

The evening sitting was opened by a graceful and earnest speech from Mr. R. S. Smith, president of the Plymouth branch, who returned thanks for the vote of thanks.

Mr. G. W. Foote then rose to propose "That the Blasphemy Laws are a serious danger to Freethought, and that the National Secular Society should make a special effort to procure their repeal." He said: Fellow Freethinkers,—Fortunately, or unfortunately, I can speak of these laws not only with interest, but from experience. The danger is even now greater than most Freethinkers think. The Blasphemy Laws are a more serious danger than even the arbitrary action of the House of Commons. If the liberty of the press is infringed, no place is left us behind which to retire as within a fortress to wait, to gather our forces, and thence make incursions into the enemy's country. So long as the laws exist, we are in danger, and therefore we must attack, defy, break down. Liberty has always to be conquered, not conceded. With tenacity, earnestness, determination we may win a permanent legacy for those that succeed us. As practical measures, I suggest: (1) Repetition of the demonstration of May 13 in other towns with the help of all not Freethinkers, who would join us in this fight. (2) Attendance on all meetings at which local M.P.'s are present, and the asking the position of the members in regard to the Blasphemy Laws. No Freethinker should vote for anyone who is not in favor of giving Freethinkers their rights. (3) Sending in petitions on the question whenever any religious topic, such as the burial question, comes before the House of Commons. (4) The formation of a special committee to draw up a manifesto giving the facts as to the prosecutions, and the sentences lately passed. By such means as these we may hope to stimulate that instinctive love of liberty that is in the minds of all men, only needing for its arousing the necessary appeal. Liberty must be defended at the point of attack, because it is the point of attack. Keep your vantage ground already won, and extend it until it becomes impossible to dictate to any man, and all are free as the air we breathe to enjoy that liberty which is the life-giver, the health-giver, the one thing worth fighting for in this world of ours.

Mr. W. W. COLLINS, who received a most hearty and enthusiastic greeting, said: I can add little to the eloquent speech to which we have just listened. When Miss Bradlaugh was speaking, I was much struck by her allusion to the necessity of studying the history of the past, so that we might avoid rocks and pitfalls in the present. Now what are these rocks and pitfalls to-day? We have these very Blasphemy Laws against which we protest to-night. What are they but the remnant of the past, of that unity of the civil and ecclesiastical powers which must cease? Our opponents say that we owe our liberty to Christianity. That is not true. Every measure widening liberty has been obtained in spite of Christianity, and the liberty we enjoy to-day has been won by the spirit of scepticism in the past, while each new liberty is won by the sceptics of to-day. About the twelfth century Rome was in tumult, and one voice was crying: "Teach the priests to attend to the Church and the magistrates to attend to the State." Arnold of Brescia thus

spoke, and he was met by the stake as reward for the blasphemy. They flung his ashes into the Tiber, that his memory might die, but like bread cast upon the water they were found after many days; the ashes were the seed of civil and religious liberty; the Tiber carried them to the ocean, the ocean scattered them over the world, and their fruit is in these (turning to those seated on the platform.) So the struggle for liberty might be traced all through history, in the Thirty Years war, in the story of the Albigenses and the Waldenses, in the Inquisition. Now they did not burn and rack, not because they had lost the will, but because they had lost the power. We appeal for human liberty, not for toleration but for freedom. Liberty can be gained only by the dissemination of truth and of knowledge. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up ye everlasting doors, and the king of glory shall come in. Who is the king of glory? It is Truth, it is Knowledge, it is Liberty born of Knowledge and of Truth, the only trinity in unity worthy the adoration of civilised man.

Dr. EDWARD AVELING said that the resolution was addressed to others than the declared Freethinkers present. It was the large number of careless, indifferent people who must be aroused. The three prisoners had declared their intention of blaspheming and fighting against the Blasphemy Laws as long as they lived. If they were thus determined, other Freethinkers would surely be hardly less resolved in the same direction, for every one of us had been imprisoned in the person of these three men. As blasphemy was the rejection of revealed religion and of the supernatural, their very meetings that day were all blaspheming. He would have every Freethinker work against the laws by every means in his power, but most of all by living a blasphemous life. By the side of the cradle, at the marriage feast, and at the open grave, let them blaspheme. Nor should they forget that in every one of the higher walks of life blasphemy would be their companion. Every scientific work was a blasphemy. All the best of literature was a blasphemy. Art even, for a long time hampered and debarred of its full beauty of expression by the religious element, was at last becoming free, and artists were learning that the one source of all true beauty was nature, and within it the life of man. There was a blasphemy against humanity against which he protested, noticeable in this very town, by those who coming inland from the glorious sea, and the sweet air of the Devon coast, found the streets of Plymouth thronged with women and children going with set faces and set book in their hands the set way to the set place of worship. The Blasphemy Laws were a danger to Freethought, and as such to the country at large. To fight against them was to strike off the shackles from the thought of man, and to give it freedom to pass whithersoever it would.

Mrs. BESANT said: I rise with very great pleasure to support this resolution. Those who have been working during the past year know even better than Freethinkers generally how cruel and wicked are the laws we denounce, and for whose overthrow we ask help. Mr. Collins has said that our persecutors no longer rack and burn. But they rack the heart with anxiety, burn our men's hearts with the brand of insult, of prison dress, of the authority of rough men over them, of treatment as criminals, of herding with felons. The mercies of the old days seem at times greater than those of to-day. Then they killed at once. Now they drag the lives out of men and women by slower torture. The method of persecution may have changed, but not its wickedness. This is a question for the election day. No Freethinker ought to vote for a candidate not pledged to the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. We have waited patiently long enough. This question can no longer be left an open one, and when men like Mr. Herbert Gladstone gave dubious answers our reply must be: "If you are in doubt about liberty we are in none about you." The cry of outraging the feelings is raised. But that cannot be called outrage which can only be bought at one penny, twopence or threepence a copy. No one need read our papers. We do not sing our views in the streets to the accompaniment of bands. There is no obtusion of them on our neighbors. We are not to joke on certain matters. They are to choose our pictures and our books. We must "outrage" them until they learn to respect that liberty in others which they claim for themselves. That a thing is persecuted is at once a reason for upholding it. I would urge upon you all individual exertion. If every one dared to speak none would be punished. It is the silent Freethinkers who sent our men to gaol. The Christians are not strong enough to do it if all that think with us only spoke out. The shame of the imprisonment belongs to these silent ones. I do not know how they can bear the remorse of seeing others in prison if they know that they themselves ought to be there, and yet not say a word. Silence and indifference are, in times like this, crimes. When, as result of silence, peril threatens, silence is treachery. It is worse than the Christian conduct, for they are under subjection, but we are free. We appeal to the silent ones that they come out, to you that throng the galleries to-night, that you give our imprisoned friends this much of recompense during the coming year. Their sufferings should make you brave; their prison make you free. Come and work now. Do not be content with coming in at the end of the fighting, like camp-followers. Join us whilst we are in the minority, and help to make our forlorn hope a victorious army. Blasphemy is to-morrow's thought spoken before the people are

wholly fitted to receive it. Socrates, Jesus, Bruno, Vanini, Richard Carlile—their and our tradition is one of blasphemy. The man with keen insight, brave heart, high courage and nobility speaks that after which thousands are striving, and syllables the hope they dream. Across the sea of humanity and time he looks to that haven of liberty that we know we shall reach if only our hearts be true.

The resolution was then put and carried unanimously.

The members of the Conference were then called upon to speak on any topic of general interest that they might desire to bring before the meeting. Mr. Lilly spoke on the advantage of light reading for the party generally, and for its children particularly. There was need for literature of a simple and instructive order from the pens of the leaders of the movement. The ordinary books for reading in schools were not very elevating. Could not better ones be provided? Especially was it the duty of those Freethinkers who might be members of School Boards to aim at the introduction of better matter in the way of reading books. In Brighton a bold bid had been made at the last School Board election by Secularists, and in every town the attempt should be made to return as members those pledged against religious education.

Mr. Pomeroy supporting Mr. Lilly, pleaded for a vigorous lecturing tour in South Wales, but felt that as yet the Welsh Freethinkers were hardly strong enough to take up the ball and keep it rolling unless they had more literature there on which to fall back. What was wanted was first men who would translate Atheistic books into Welsh, second the money to help in this good work.

Mr. MOON spoke of the utilisation of the resources of civilisation in the dissemination of literature. Bicyclists and tricyclists could make use of their jaunts to distribute Freethought tracts.

Mr. COWELL urged the necessity of working on the foundation, and getting early at the children. In Sheffield he knew of only three Freethinkers who withdrew their children from religious instruction.

Mr. HOPES pressed on the Conference the words of Dr. Edward Aveling—that they should be blasphemers in every relation of life. Marriage should be only a civil ceremony to all of this creed, and the christening of children and the burial of the dead with religious ceremonies should be discontinued, and where possible prevented.

Mr. R. S. SMITH thought that Mr. Lilly did not realise the difficulty in our educational system. He appealed to Dr. Edward Aveling whether there was not much odium attaching to children withdrawn from religious instruction in the school, and whether even the withdrawal from that instruction really kept the children quite free from the influence of the supernatural. They might be withdrawn at the beginning of the day, but in many cases prayer and the reading of the Scriptures occurred at other times than the beginning. Often, for a relaxation in the regular work, singing was indulged in, and the songs were frequently hymns. The whole of the education system was permeated with supernaturalism. He endorsed the remarks of other speakers as to the condition of children's literature. Could not the Executive issue a list of juvenile books that were free from the taint of religion, and was it not possible to publish emended versions of old standard books with the objectionable parts excised?

THE PRESIDENT rose at 8 p.m. to deliver the closing speech of the Conference. He congratulated the delegates present on its national character. He thanked the Plymouth friends for their unanimous and hearty way of doing work, and not least the proprietor of that hall, who had, in past times, when Freethought was not nearly so popular as now, shown a striking liberality and courage in letting the hall to the advocates of their cause. Their deliberations were growing annually more useful. Twenty-four years ago he had been tried in Devonport, not for blasphemy, for all that he had been allowed to utter of his lecture were the words, "Friends,—I am about to address you on the Bible." There was great growth since that time. At the court in Devonport and at the court in Exeter, twenty-four years ago the evidence of Freethinkers was objected to. This was no longer the case. It is true that judges might make it unpleasant for the Freethinker to claim his or her right to affirm, but the right existed. He desired always to fight by the law, and without the use of violence. Their appeals were always to be made to the brain. Wherever the Freethought movement exists the politics of the country are orderly, peaceful, useful. He was glad that the resolution of Mr. Foote as to the Blasphemy Laws had been proposed and carried. He had the right to be glad. He had stood alone in this matter for many years. Twenty-three years ago he had been rebuked for agitating against the Blasphemy Laws by the leaders of the party then. But bad laws are weapons in the hands of bad men. If he had not at that time won a victory, he had at least won friends who had helped the prisoners of last year when they were sent to gaol. He urged on every Freethinker present the necessity of joining the N. S. S. To be a Freethinker and not to be enrolled was treason. There would be fighting enough in the year coming. On June 13 he would himself be engaged in a contest in the law courts. We could not measure the progress of the movement by the last twenty-four years, however, nor even by the twenty-five years preceding that period. Richard Carlile went to gaol for nine years and eight months. Hundreds went to prison for buying

Freethought literature. Out of one shop nine men and two women went. Not even by the century must we measure the results. One hundred and ten years ago the writings of Diderot were burnt, and an edict went forth that it was death to publish a word calculated to disturb the public mind. Nonconformists were but recently in the same condition as ourselves. Lord Mansfield had taken occasion to denounce the persecution of the Nonconformists by the City of London. Persecution was petty, paltry, short-sighted. Nay, if we went back 300 years, the names of Bruno, Galileo, Spinoza rose into our minds. The state of things is not so bad to-day. All that we want is the authority of reason. That is why we war against ecclesiastical pretensions. He called attention to the two mottoes, Mr. Foote's words "I thank you, my lord, it is worthy of your creed," and his own name of "Thorough." They wanted education to be secular, that no social, political, or civil disability should exist for opinion's sake—fair play and free play for all. The morrow was full of promise for others if not for us. That which was now a difficulty with regard to children was in former times an impossibility. Endorsing the words of Mr. Foote on the wisdom of utilising the aid of the religious helpers in our struggles against the Blasphemy Laws, he ended with an expression of thanks to the people in Northampton who, differing from him on speculative matters, had yet supported him in his political fight.

### THE GOD WE BLASPHEME.

We blaspheme the God that the Christians adore—  
The infamous God of the Bible:  
Yes, him we blaspheme, for his ways we abhor—  
To say he is good is a libel.

We blaspheme the God who, as shown by his "word,"  
Was wicked, bloodthirsty and fickle;  
To call him all-wise we declare is absurd,  
Though for it in hell we may pickle.

We blaspheme the God who's the author of all—  
The God who created the Devil;  
The God who allowed him to tempt man to fall  
From his divine image and level.

We blaspheme the God who cursed children unborn  
Because of the sin of their father;  
We look upon him with disgust and with scorn—  
Dwell in hell than with him we would rather.

We blaspheme the God who on good men and true  
His hatred and malice expended;  
Who innocent Pharaoh first tortured, then slow,  
But murderer Moses befriended.

We blaspheme the God who without sacrifice  
And bloodshed is not satiated;  
Who let his own innocent son pay the price  
Of the sins of the men he created.

S. BELLCHAMBERS.

### PROFANE JOKES.

A LITTLE five-year-old could not quite understand why the stars did not shine one night when the rain was pouring down in torrents. She stood at the window pondering on the subject with as much gravity as Galileo when he looked at the swinging lamp in the cathedral of Pisa, and with equal success; for all at once her countenance lighted up, and she said, "Mother, I know why the stars don't shine. Heaven has pulled them all up so as to let water come through the holes."

IN Scotch churches, until recently (about 25 years since,) it used to be the duty of the precentor to read the verse before the congregation sang it. On one occasion the verse was the 14th verse of the 68th Psalm, "like Salmon's snow 'twas white," but the precentor, who was short-sighted, read to the general horror of his hearers, "like Solomon's snout 'twas white." At another time a precentor was reading a verse in the first Psalm, when the laird and his family were coming in late, one of the ordinary members had got seated in the laird's seat, and not offering to leave it the precentor stopped his reading. "Come oot the laird's pew Jock will ye, and let the laird and his daughters in," and then concluded the verse, "Nor stand in sinners' way." On another occasion the minister observed a large goose come waddling up the church aisle just as the precentor was rising to read the verse. The minister rose at once and said to the beadle who had been sleeping, "John! put out the goose." John who awoke with a start didn't see the goose, but the precentor who had just begun to brawl out the verse took his eye at once, and thinking he was the goose meant, John at once got him by the coat collar and proceeded to eject him till he was stopped by an explanation from the minister.

"My Bible, where is my Bible?" was Brown's morning cry. The leather covered school Bible was produced and Brown began to whet his blade with the remark, "that has been my razor strop for more than a dozen years. I cannot do without my blessed Bible."

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