

THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

Sub Editor—J. M. Wheeler.

Vol. IV.—No. 29.]

JULY 20, 1884.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

COMIC BIBLE SKETCH.—No. 78.



THE REIGN OF TERROR.

"Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem; and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord."—2 CHRON. xxxvi., 9.

ARE WE OBSCENE?

We referred last week to Sir J. C. Lawrence's foul libel on the *Freethinker*, which he impudently classed among "the filthiest and most obscene publications." This week we think it necessary to write at greater length on the subject, and, so far as we are concerned, to dispose of this nonsense once for all.

Sir William Harcourt was the first person who preferred this charge against us, and his motive was obvious and notorious. He simply wanted to excuse, and if possible justify, his disgraceful inaction as a Liberal Home Secretary in respect to our imprisonment. He had been memorialised by half the leading writers and thinkers in England for our release, but he preferred to gratify his own private malignity, which has made him one of the most cordially detested of men. Finally, when the great St. James's Hall meeting showed the strength of public opinion on our side, he was startled out of his malicious inertia; and then, acting the part of a political ruffian, for which Nature has so splendidly qualified him, he had the consummate impudence to state that we were sent to gaol for "obscenity" and not for "blasphemy," although he knew perfectly well that we were summoned for blasphemy, indicted for blasphemy, and sentenced for blasphemy, without an insinuation of obscenity from the moment when we first appeared before the Lord Mayor to the moment when Judge North passed upon us the most infamous sentence in English history for a hundred and twenty years. And it must also be remembered that Harcourt had before him Lord Coleridge's explicit and emphatic language, clearly exonerating us

from the charge, as though in anticipation of Harcourt's brutality.

This unscrupulous official libeller gave the cue to all his fellow bigots in England, and forthwith they proceeded to drop the cry of "Blasphemy!" with which they hounded us to prison, and to shout "Obscene, Obscene!" That is, they got us locked up in felon's cells as blasphemers, and then piled up against our cell doors a huge heap of filth of their own creating, in order to scare away all those who might come to our relief. The most abominable lies were circulated about the *Freethinker* by people who had never seen it. After our release one gentleman actually wrote to ask whether it was true, as his brother-in-law had informed him, that our prosecuted Christmas Number contained a picture of a man openly committing a nuisance. Another person stated that it contained a picture of two Bible characters in the act of adultery. Another person, this time a Unitarian, told Mr. Sharman that it contained a picture of the Virgin Mary being confined. The illustration entitled "A Back View," representing, in a far more decent way than the writer of the story ever contemplated, what Moses saw in the cleft of the rock, passed through all kinds of metamorphoses in the hands of Rumour. As Mr. Moncure Conway said at the time, in addressing the congregation of South Place Chapel, it was simply absurd to call the illustration "indecent." All it represented was Moses with an eye-glass, examining a huge figure, properly clothed in trousers, beginning at the waist and ending at mid-thigh. The prosecution never had the audacity to call this indecent, and the people who do call it so are irresponsible hypocrites. Our Home Secretary calls a pair of plaid trousers "obscene." Another Government official, the Lord Chamberlain, allows on the stage the most lavish exposure of female charms. In opera-bouffe and pantomime the public may gaze on half-naked women, whose dresses begin too late and end too soon, and whose very business it is to leave as little as possible to the spectator's imagination. The masher in the stalls, at a licensed theatre—sanctioned, that is, by the Government—may feast his eyes on female nudity, and the performance is perfectly moral; while a Freethought paper cannot picture a pair of trousers without being considered "obscene." Was there ever grosser hypocrisy than this?

When we showed our prosecuted Christmas Number to an eminent barrister in South Lancashire, who had heard all sorts of stories about it, and was prepared for something dreadful, he exclaimed "Good God! Is that all?" "Yes," we replied. "What," he rejoined, "do you really mean to say you went to prison for that?" "Yes," we answered. "Good God, Good God!" he ejaculated, and he seemed unable to believe the evidence of his senses.

Since that Christmas Number was published we have issued over eighty numbers of the *Freethinker*, and we defy anybody to put his finger on a single sentence that a mother need hesitate to read to her children, unless, of course, she objects to "blasphemy" in any form. We have always been carefully reticent even when dealing with the filth of the Bible; and if a questionable passage can be found in the whole of our pages, it can only be by importing into our guarded language the vileness of the "holy Scripture" itself. Yes, there lies the secret of all our "indecentcy." We have to expose a holy book which reeks with obscenity as it teems with falsehood and absurdity, and its blind worshippers and hypocritical time-servers call us dirty because we point to their own filth. Thomas Paine's "Age of Reason" was once stopped at an American custom-house, because the official eye had detected some "obscenities" in it; but on investigation it turned out that every one of these passages was a quotation from the Bible.

G. W. FOOTE.

THE RICH MAN IN HELL.

THE REV. J. HASLOCK POTTER, M.A., has been preaching a sermon on the well-known story of Dives and Lazarus, which he describes as "a parable so rich in teaching concerning this world and the next, that the danger is lest its very wealth of meaning should cloud our minds, and prevent our grasping any one definite truth." To assist us in acquiring "definite truth" he at once without the slightest warrant from the scriptural account, imports his own far-fetched idea that the great object of the parable is to unfold the consequences of unbelief and selfishness, and the blessedness of faith. Nothing whatever is said in the Bible concerning the unbelief of Dives or the faith of Lazarus. Dives might have been the orthodox believer and Lazarus the infidel for aught that Christ says or hints to the contrary. And it is inconceivable—except to modern clergymen—that Christ should have been utterly silent concerning that which he intended to be the chief lesson of his striking parable. The simple and obvious fact is—but ministers, if they would be successful, of course must not recognise it—that Christ's story deals only with wealth and enjoyment on the one side, contrasted with poverty and consequent suffering on the other. No ethical considerations are imported into the narrative. Christ thought that it was immoral to be rich and happy, and that the highest morality included destitution, beggary and misery. It was the poor, both in worldly possessions and in spirit, whom he blessed. Riches he always denounced. It was easier, he said, for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. A rich man could not possibly be saved except by a special miracle. It is solely against wealth that the parable is directed, and not against unbelief. Those who urge the latter can only support their view by round-about reasonings, based on assumptions quite foreign to the original parable; for the reference to Moses and the prophets is not accompanied by the slightest hint or supposition—which, indeed, would have been incredible and intolerable in the eyes of a Jewish speaker and a Jewish audience—that the rich man's brothers rejected or doubted in any degree the sacred writings.

Neither is the parable specially directed against selfishness, as the reverend gentleman alleges. He practically contradicts this convenient assumption, when with commendable fairness he gives Dives credit for "his princely hospitality." No charge of harshness or selfishness is brought against Dives in the parable. It is not said that he refused to help Lazarus. Lazarus was laid at his gate for the purpose of receiving the remnants of his feasts, and to all appearance these remnants were given to him from day to day. It was not Dives, but one of our bishops, who gave a beggar in charge for sitting on his door-step.

When Dives was finally punished with fiery torments for his prosperity on earth, he displayed a very unselfish anxiety on behalf of his five brethren, and besought Abraham to send Lazarus to them from the dead to warn them against a fate similar to his own. No wickedness is alleged against Dives except the unpardonable sin—in the eyes of Christ and of Socialists—of being rich.

On the other hand, no virtues whatever—except the supreme Christian virtue of poverty—are attributed to Lazarus. He gives no crumb out of his scanty supplies either to the dogs or to a beggar worse off than himself. If Lazarus had given his last morsel to a dying child, as Sir Philip Sidney perishing on the battle-field handed the draught of water untasted to a wounded soldier who he considered needed it still more, there would be good grounds for urging that so magnanimously benevolent a beggar was rewarded for his unselfishness with everlasting life in paradise. But we hear of nothing of the kind. Lazarus appears to have been simply a pauper entirely dependent on others for the necessaries of life. Because suffering usually deserves sympathy, Christ with the exaggeration common to so many of his doctrines, makes the wretched beggar receive a heavenly reward which is apparently quite unmerited by any positive virtue and is in no sense proportional even to the temporary suffering he has endured. If pain deserves reward and happiness deserves punishment, then after a time the tormented souls of Dives and his companions would have to be translated to heaven as a compensation for their sufferings, while Abraham and his fellow saints would be plunged by a sympathetically

indignant Christ deep into the waves of liquid fire. God himself should even be treated similarly if such ideas were just, and the inhabitants of heaven and hell would continually be changing places with each other.

For our own part we fail to see either merit or demerit in pain and poverty. Poverty in our eyes is a foe whom we would attack and destroy; not a friend who brings heavenly consolations and divine approval, but a Devil whom we, in the name of Malthus and of Mill and of humanity at large would exorcise once and for ever.

Poverty and misery, while sometimes honorable in the highest degree and often practically unavoidable by the individual sufferer, are also frequently the result of reckless dissipation and culpable imprudence. For aught we are told to the contrary, Lazarus may have been a ruined spendthrift or prodigal son reaping the harvest of his sins and vices, while Dives was enjoying the results of an honorable career of useful and profitable industry.

If this parable were intended to teach humanity, why is God, whom we are often told to imitate, depicted as torturing human beings for ever in the fierce flames of hell? Why are the residents in heaven represented as enjoying themselves while their fellow beings are writhing in fire? Why do they refuse even a drop of water to cool the tongue of a wretched sufferer, and calmly carry on with him instead an argumentative conversation in which they defend their fiendish heartlessness? Nothing that the rich man ever did or neglected to do to Lazarus on earth could possibly be a tenth part as cruel and as wicked as this conduct on the part of the redeemed saints in heaven and their diabolically vindictive God.

This mischievous "parable" has been a perfect godsend to the priests. With it they have terrorised rich dupes out of their money and estates. Dying men have given away the property of their children and widows to purchase their own escape from the everlasting pangs of hell. The widow's mite and the monarch's treasures have alike been thrown into the coffers of the Church through the fear caused by this detestable piece of Christian fiction, this awful falsehood of a being, who, if he were divine as alleged, must have knowingly intended that its forcible word-pictures should be believed in as realities, and who, if he were not divine, had no right to put forward the cruel workings of his own debased imagination as facts or as fictions which mankind in its ignorance would inevitably regard as realities unless he warned them—which, of course, he most dishonestly failed to do—that the "parable" meant something different from what it seemed to mean. If so, he should have explained matters, so that mankind need not have fallen into the trap which he set for them.

W. P. BALL.

THE INSIGNIFICANCE OF GOD.

If an instance were required of the facetious greatness which the servility of superstition has ascribed to little things, that muchly magnified atom of pettiness, the Christian God, might furnish an interesting case in point. View him on all sides, top and bottom, before and behind, and all you can see—providing you regard him from the vantage ground of common sense and morality—is a minute speck of immense moral insignificance. Even if you put on the spectacles of Faith and take your intellectual stand on a miscellaneous accumulation of Bibles, Prayer-books, Thirty-nine Articles, *War Cries* and Spurgeon's sermons, your mental vision, obscured by the fog of mystery which haunts such giddy and godly heights, merely perceives the magnified non-natural man of Matthew Arnold—a curious compound of brutality and ignorance, created out of the faith-bemuddled brains of brutal and ignorant superstitionists. There is nothing more and nothing less to be seen, and this fact is but poorly disguised by the patched and tattered veil of pious apologetics so clumsily hung by traders in Christian defences and God-drapery, whose business it is to conceal the palpable truth that the holy of holies of our common and somewhat vulgar faith is nothing after all but a whitened sepulchre, strewn with the bones of the murdered victims of God.

"These be thy gods, O Israel!" Before the altar of such an idol of dross and tawdry tinsel, adored with ceremonial fank and blood-curdling sensations of superstitious horror, do the people of this country of boasted enlightenment pour forth their gifts of gold, frankincense

and myrrh. That the "wise" men of the East should have so wasted their treasures is excusable, having regard to the prevailing ignorance of the time, but that their sapient descendants in the West should go and do likewise is a sight to make angels, or some one "lower than the angels," weep!

If men will have a God, let them in the name of goodness choose one worth having and keeping. That gods are expensive luxuries and imperatively require, on the *sine qua non* principle, the maintenance of costly priestly establishments, that they are not in the least self-supporting institutions, nor kept afloat without money and without price, but have their very *raison d'être* in tithes and offerings, in church rates, pew rents, and similar swindles or artful impositions, are indisputable facts, which enforce with unanswerable logic the right of man to have, in return for his pious lavishness, a thoroughly good all-round God, warranted to work miracles of kindness and return a handsome profit on the sum invested in the business. How little these great expectations have been verified the history of Christianity affords melancholy testimony, written in the tears and blood of the fold of Christ, who have been mangled and murdered by the ravening wolves of priestcraft.

All this prodigious tide of blood and bullion has been unstintedly poured forth—for what? For the honor and glory of a God who is greedy, like an Eastern despot, of the flattery and adulation of the slavish pensioners of his capricious favor! For a God whose recorded crimes are as the sands on the sea-shore in multitude, and whose life and adventures would be ridiculous if they were not revolting. A monster in vice, a pigmy in virtue—such is the summary or abstract of the "divine" character! Yet we are gravely told by certain bigots, whose insolence is only equalled by their ignorance, that the Shadrachs, Meshachs and Abednegos of Freethought, who worship not the image of God and Mrs. Grundy, shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace! We pity the God who can find no richer reward for honest opinion, and no better use for his coals and firewood. But we more than pity, we despise him!

If we cannot reach the reason, we would fain appeal to the dignity of the true believer, and entreat him, even from motives of self-respect, to give immediate notice to quit to all Christian flummery and mummery. We would ask: Is it manly to worship a God whose preferences were always for the basest of mankind; whose friends were the drunken, indecent Noah; the lying, mercenary, would-be child-murderer Abraham; the cheating, lying, cowardly Jacob; the murderer Moses; the butcher Joshua; the brutal unclean beast named David; the harlot and traitress Rahab; the treacherous Jael, and the universal thieves and cut-throats of ancient Judæa, besides a long and unlovely string of villains of all shades, shapes and sizes? Again: Is it not too absurd for the rational man of to-day to pretend to accept as the *beau idéal* of moral perfection the character of a God whose attributes are demonstrably the reflex of a barbarous and superstitious tribe? Further: Is it not an irresistibly comic thing to suppose that wife-beating and measles, together with all other crimes and diseases, are effects of which the pilfered fruit which Adam and Eve so much enjoyed, is the cause, and that we shall all be eternally roasted alive if we do not believe the thousand and one absurdities which make up the romantic biography of the late lamented J. C.? We venture to predict that if every believer would so divest his mind of the trappings of superstition as to honestly face the difficulties raised in these questions, the detestable delusion of Christianity would soon be dead, and all that would remain to be done would be to secure for it a decent burial in the graveyard of oblivion, where so many similar superstitions are peaceably slumbering.

God and his affairs are only regarded as of paramount magnitude when men and their rights are pooh-poohed as of little concern. But to-day the growing attractions of humanity enforce a daily increasing detachment from the fast deserted temples of Deity. The pious flummery which loves to lavish wealth and worship upon one who (by the hypothesis) is sufficiently well-to-do without our bounties, is gradually being swept away before the rising tide of devotion to that humanity in whose sacred presence the gods are all unholy and shrink into their native insignificance.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

ACID DROPS.

At the Govan Police-court a witness, before taking the oath, was asked by the magistrate what religious denomination he belonged to. He replied that he was a Protestant. "Then," said the magistrate, "what do you protest against?" The witness replied: "Against the Bible." We are at a loss to conceive what church this funny person belongs to. Is he a Catholic after all? Or is he a Horse-Protestant caught on the hop?

SCENE: A well-known London thoroughfare. Time 7 p.m. Boy vending colored oleographs.—Clerical-looking person (picking out picture representing the crucifixion): "Have you the companion to this?"—Boy: "Yes, sir," (handing picture with gambling scene).—C. L. P.: "My boy, this is wrong. Haven't you heard of the crucifixion?"—Boy: "Well, sir, I have heard other boys talking about it."—C. L. P.: "And do you know who Jesus was?"—Boy: "Well, sir, from what the other boys say it seems he got his living 'on the cross.'" Exit C. L. P.

We have just received a bill from our rate-collector which includes 2s. 3½d. for one year's "vicar's maintenance." If the vicar of St. Bride's has any conscience, the vicuals he purchases with that sum ought to lead to a coroner's inquest. We pay the School Board rate with far greater satisfaction, for in the long run it will choke all the vicars on earth.

THE mouth of the Amazon River in South America is one hundred miles wide. Now see Talmage turn green with envy.

FREETHOUGHT is spreading in America. "The entire Western portion of this country seems to be honeycombed with infidelity," says the Rev. J. Hyatt Smith, adding: "Live missionaries must be sent there; it won't do to send fools; I, myself, came back after being there three weeks!"

A LADY asked a bare-footed boy why he was looking so wistfully into a shop window. He said he was asking God to give him a pair of shoes. The lady bought him a pair, whereupon the *Christian Commonwealth* says he exclaimed, "Are you God's wife?" "God's wife," being humane rather than Christian, did not have him arrested for blasphemy. The remark is supposed to be a very touching one, but primarily it illustrates the low anthropomorphic idea that people have of God.

CHRISTIANITY is supreme in Russia. Not only does it lead to the persecution of the Jews, of whom nine more have been killed at Nijui Novgorod, but it also weeds out such Russians as venture to teach any of the innumerable kinds of Christianity except the one which happens to be infallible in Russia. For this offence Count Koiff and the wealthy Colonel Paschkoff have just been banished. One favors the Church of England and the other Lutheranism. It is illegal to distribute the publications of the Religious Tract Society. The *Universe* complains that while British Protestants are virtuously indignant over these tyrannical proceedings, they had not a word to say when seven years ago Russian Catholics were shot down in cold blood solely because they would not join the Greek Church. How good these gentle Christians are to one another! No wonder they have no kindness left to spare for us.

THE Young Men's Christian Association at Portsmouth had a rather stormy meeting the other night. The secretary was accused of obtaining a "hole and corner meeting," but he indignantly denied the charge. Various members protested and expressed disgust at each other's behavior, and the proceedings grew "noisy and unruly." Mr. Birch proposed that only those "who could tender proof of conversion to God" should be admitted to membership. The debate thereupon became more furious than ever. The religious squabble was suddenly terminated when at its greatest height by the gas being turned completely out. The happy family of Christian Young Men had to find their way out in the darkness as best they could. The quarrel is postponed till their next meeting.

ANOTHER genuine Messiah has appeared—and disappeared—at Kjöri bu da, in Sweden. He made converts of a number of the villagers, who, as Good Friday approached, prepared and erected a large wooden cross in order to carry out the biblical programme and secure salvation. He asked his congregation what the cross was for. They told him that of course they would have to crucify him on the following Friday. This answer made him rather meditative, and the next day he was nowhere to be found. Probably this time when he prayed that the cup might pass away from him the old governor up in heaven acceded to his request. What mountain he ascended from is not known. Nor is it known how many hundred disciples witnessed his ascent. But in two hundred years' time, if his sect flourishes, there will be infallible gospels proving all this, and everything else that

is necessary. Pious people must be content to wait for information, which will be vouchsafed in due time.

THE Roman Catholics are not getting on very well in France just at present. Two of their most distinguished prelates have gone over to Protestantism and the Pope has excommunicated them. This little mishap has been supplemented by more bad news for the interests of the Church. Bishop Freppel's attempts to conceal his defalcations have failed, and the Council of State will insist on his accounting for the large sums which have been abstracted from the fund for aged and infirm priests. This disgrace has been followed by another clerical fraud. A fund amounting to millions of francs had been subscribed by the faithful for the construction of the church of St. Martin, at Tours. The priest entrusted with the administration of the fund has absconded and migrated to Geneva, whither he has carried off the fairest of his faithful flock. An inquiry has been instituted, which, it is said, the Archbishop of Paris has vainly endeavored to stifle.

THE Roman Catholics, according to a report of a sermon at Brompton Oratory, have a saint who from his earliest years gave evidence of his religious tendencies, so that at four years of age he was a most devoted Christian, and at seven years of age he became so holy and immaculate in his virtue that he would not even so much as look at a woman. He actually carried out his sanctity to such a degree that even at this early age he made a covenant with his eyes and would not look at his own mother. That boy wants a good spanking.

THERE are many persons who want to know definitely what Christianity is. The *Christian Commonwealth* supplies the lacking information. It says that "Christianity is God's polyphony," and "the Church of Christ is the polyphone of Truth." Then it asks sadly, "When will the polyphone be in tune?" and replies sorrowfully, "Not till Christ's people are one." This is followed by lamentations over the "incoherent, discordant, and doubtful proclamations, contradictions, competitions and confusions in declaration concerning religion in all its realms." Then the *C. C.* prays for "an era of humility, of obedience, of consistency, of simplicity." "Many of the religious voices of to-day," it declares, "are those of passion, pride, ambition for power, love of pre-eminence. The polyphone is out of tune." Hadn't these Christians better try converting themselves before they try to convert us? If they can't get their polyphone into tune they certainly shouldn't annoy other people with its discordant noises. Still less should they collect compulsory subscriptions for the support of their miserable band, and pop hostile critics into stone cells as a convincing proof of the exquisite harmony and perfection of their hideous Dutch medley.

EDUCATED people usually attach some rationalistic explanation to Biblical miracles. In the Weldon case Dr. James Edmunds accounted for St. Paul's vision as the result of sun-stroke or an epileptic fit. Balaam, he thought, was not insane in believing that he heard the ass speak "if the ass had actually spoken." John Wesley, in times of religious exaltation, he regarded as insane for a time. Dr. George Wild acknowledged that it was common for insane people to believe that they heard supernatural voices. Christians laugh at Mrs. Weldon for believing that the spirit of her late lamented favorite pug "old Dan" was seen roaming about under the mulberry tree. Their own beliefs are quite as ridiculous and often, as witness the doctrine of eternal torment, not nearly so kindly or excusable.

A GOAT noted for its powers of digesting old tin cans and china, got into a country church lately and ate the manuscript of the clergyman's sermon. The poor creature expired in fearful agony.

THE sale of fruit and watercress has been interdicted in Portsmouth on Sundays. The street vendors now cry—"Fresh-gathered glory" and "fine ripe hallelujah."

At a meeting of the British and Foreign Sailors' Society the Bishop of Truro, whose Resurrection of the Devil was adverted to in our columns about a year ago, is reported as declaring that "Satan was aware that if Truro Cathedral was finished his power in Cornwall was broken." Of course the gift of the Holy Ghost imparted at the consecration of a bishop confers the power of Satanic thought-reading, but nevertheless and notwithstanding, statistics do not show cathedral towns to be particularly immaculate. On the contrary, they are noted as the resort of prostitutes, panders, parasites, parsons and prigs.

MOODY, delighted that London shelled out £16,000 for his recent mission, declares that it is the most religious city in the world. Why, then, does he not transfer his attention to his native Chicago which has been pronounced the most Godless city in the world. Moody and Sankey's success is easily accounted for. Largely advertised and well provided

with sensuous hymns and good popular tunes and humorous anecdotes, they gave a cheap and "respectable" entertainment. They abstained from attacking any of the established iniquities of the land and pandered to the snobbery of all classes. Their avowed mission being to show people how they could attain comfortable quarters eternally hereafter by the simple profession of a belief here, it would have been surprising if such an appeal to natural selfishness did not awaken a considerable response.

IN the account of the atrocious slaughter of the Midianites, given in Numbers xxxi., it says that the Lord's tribute of asses was threescore and one. It has long been a question what the Lord wanted with asses, but a solution to the conundrum has been offered by the Salvation Army.

ALTHOUGH the Old Testament Revision is finished, it will not be published till next Easter, because it has to be submitted to Convocation. To put the work of Hebrew scholars before Convocation is as absurd as allowing the Lords to decide as to the composition of the Commons. We have no faith in the work of the Revisers, and still less in their version after it has undergone this supervision, but when the result appears it shall have our best attention.

SOME unknown idiot has sent us a long riband of paper, on which he has painfully written in big letters with red ink "Why smitest thou me?" and a reference to the work of a person called John. We were quite ignorant of our having committed any assault on this scribbler, and we can only ask "Did it hurt you much?"

"JEHOVAH ROPHEKA—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"—is the heading of a semi-medical handbill, which at first led us to think that the old fellow had gone into the quack business. Further perusal, however, showed us that it came from one of his friends in that trade. The Rev. John Allen, of Trinity Church, Hackney, publishes a list of 155 cases of "Healing through simple Faith in Jesus" and himself. He has successfully treated (J. C., or J. A., which you please) all sorts of maladies—consumption, lumbago, bronchitis, rupture, epilepsy, cancer, cataract in the eye, and so on. We recommend this benefactor of his species to quit Hackney, and take his cheap recipe to Marseilles or Toulon. But perhaps he is afraid of Asiatic cholera.

B. B. (Baldwin Brown?) asks in the *Christian World*, and answers in a long article the question "What lies behind the Cross?" Our answer is much briefer. Mystery, priestcraft, imposture, persecution, cruelty, plunder, and oppression. Short and sweet.

JAMES MEATYARD, who kept a beerhouse near Blandford in Dorsetshire, and who suffers from religious mania, has murdered his little son, aged eighteen months, and has stabbed his wife in five places. Just before he committed the crime he had been reading the Bible to his family. What does the Christian Evidence Society say to this?

CERTAIN Roman Catholics have been proving the superiority of their creed by raising a religious riot in Regent's Park last Sunday. Mr. William Locke having committed the grievous offence of asking some respectful questions of one of their open-air lecturers in answer to the challenge thrown out, was mobbed, knocked down, and kicked as he lay on the ground. Michael Lynch and five women were taken into custody and brought before Mr. de Rutzen, who only fined the man 40s. and let the women off on their own recognisances to the extent of £5 to be of good behavior. Michael Lynch, at any rate will think twice before he goes in for Lynch law again.

THE religious bigotry of the country sadly requires tempering down with the leaven of Freethought. M. Alphonse, an ex-monk, ran the risk of his life by venturing to lecture on Romish errors at Newcastle the other day. Windows and doors were smashed, and the lecturer only escaped the same fate by hiding under the platform. Surely there is something rousing in religion.

A GOOD minister prayed fervently for those of his congregation who were too proud to kneel and too lazy to stand.

"A CIRCUS was recently in our city," says an American paper, "and the ministerial curiosity was so awakened that an outside view of the canvas would not suffice. One minister had compunctions of conscience against the ratification of what he fancied to be a questionable desire. However, his liberality of belief would allow the children to go, provided they had some good-sized masculine protector. But, unfortunately for him, he had no children. He went therefore to his brother preacher and tried to borrow his five-year-old boy as a companion to the circus. But the other preacher remarked, 'I have waited a long time for my boy to get big enough to go to a circus, and now I want to use him myself.'"

SPECIAL NOTICE.

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, July 20, Milton Hall, Hawley Crescent, Kentish Town, London, N., at 7.30, on "Bible Blasphemy."

July 24, Plumstead; 27, Milton Hall, London. Aug. 3, Hall of Science, London; 10, Hall of Science; 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; 28, Edinburgh. Oct. 5, Liverpool; 19, Manchester. Nov. 16, Nottingham.

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.

W. CALLAWAY.—Notice will be sent when your subscription expires. The tract, "What becomes of the Infidel Leaders?" has been exposed again and again. Refuting these people is like punching a feather bed.

SIDNEY ADAMS.—Cuttings are always welcome, but orders for literature should be sent to the publisher.

E. HOPES.—Your suggestion has already occupied our attention. We note your announcement that Freethinkers in the district, who wish to assist in forming a branch of the N. S. S., should apply to Mr. Lyne, 23 Johnson Street, Notting Hill Gate, W.

J. HOCKIN.—The pamphlet is on sale at our office as advertised, and can be obtained direct. Postage, 1d.

F. J. S.—The work has been out of print for several years. It is superseded by Mrs. Besant's "Law of Population."

W. H. BARBALET asks Mr. Smith and his dozen friends to leave their names and addresses with the secretary at the Ball's Pond Hall, when "united action may be taken to further the Secular cause." He adds that Kingsland Green is not an open space, but private property.

ARGUS.—Paper and jokes received with thanks.

H. RIBBY.—Thanks for the scraps. No doubt some of them will be useful.

W. LITTLEJOHN.—The matter shall not be forgotten.

T. SKINNER asks us to state that the adjourned meeting of the West Hartlepool Branch of the N. S. S. will be held on Sunday, July 20, at 6.30, in the Citizens Club.

J. B. B.—That "local anecdote" is borrowed from Mark Twain.

E. A. V.—Jokes received with thanks. It is pleasant to hear from an Atheist who is the son of a clergyman. It is pleasant also to know that you, like many others, think *Progress* good value for the money.

W. A. NEWCOMB.—Your letter is interesting, but you know our space is very limited. The swearing-in business was a farce in your case, although you were complimented by the coroner; and we agree with you that the sooner we get the law altered the better. But, alas! the world moves so slowly.

J. S. THORNES.—Received with thanks.

W. J. K.—The joke is an old one, but we dare say it was quite new enough for an antiquated paper like the *Family Herald*.

DEVIL'S HOOP.—No. 10 of the *Freethinker* for this year is out of print. The others are sent.

J. THOMLINSON writes that the first ordinary general meeting of the N. W. London Secular Hall Company will be held in Milton (Lower) Hall next Monday at 8.30.

F. BADHAM.—Tracts forwarded. On what subjects do you want the questions? Perhaps the Liverpool Secularists are a little slack in their lecturing work just now through the heat of the weather.

G. MCD.—Josh Billings on infidelity is a joke, which on other subjects he very often isn't. We noticed the thing some weeks ago, and it is really not worth returning to.

W. E. PETHERICK.—We are sorry to hear you have been laid up. We hope your committee will persevere in its work. The refusal of assistance by the Sunday League is surprising. Organising for Sunday pleasure and refusing aid to Sunday freedom strikes us as disgustingly selfish.

W. PRICE.—It appears to be a domestic squabble about pew rents. We can scarcely make head or tail of it, and despair of its interesting our readers.

R. HARDY.—Paper to hand. Thanks for the good work you are doing for your cause in the neighborhood.

J. C. DRENON.—Accept our best thanks for the very interesting enclosure. We shall deal with the subject as soon as it is safe for the persons concerned. The Christians abroad seem almost a greater pack of wolves than they are at home.

G. DRIVER.—Yes, Mr. Foote is in excellent health. Thanks for the cutting.

We shall feel obliged if our readers will send us any references to the *Freethinker* or *Progress* they may see in their local press.

SHAKEN ONE.—The verse Matt. iv. 5. was illustrated in the "New Life of Christ" series in the Christmas Number for which we were imprisoned. Vanini was sentenced to death as an Atheist. There have been few Atheists burnt to death because thorough-going Atheism has emerged since the youth of modern science, in other words since the Church has practically lost the power of roasting people for the glory of God. But imprisonment is still possible, and three Atheists recently spent (between them) two years in the Lowy Gaol, locked up in felons' cells for "Blasphemy," which of course is only the old Heresy under a new name.

EDITORIAL.

OUR Summer Number is now ready. It is an extraordinary publication, and we believe it will have an extraordinary sale. The Christian thieves who stole a year of our life, can now, after an interval of eighteen months, study and groan over and swear at another special number of the *Freethinker*; and we trust it will show them how beautifully they have succeeded in their efforts to convert us. Freethinkers will see that now, as of old, we stand to our guns and mean business. Our Summer Number will go into every part of the world where the English language is spoken, and in some parts where it is not, where a stray English Freethinker happens to be among "the heathen." Laughter is good for digestion, digestion is good for health, and we expect during the next few weeks a sensible decrease in the death rate. We shall consider this a sufficient reward without another invitation to Holloway Castle.

Mr. Wheeler continues to gain strength, and in another week or so he will probably resume his sub-editorial duties. He has already been using his pen, and our readers will be pleased to find his first contribution in our Summer Number.

SUGAR PLUMS.

THERE was a very large audience at Claremont Hall last Sunday evening to hear Mr. Foote's lecture on "The Devil." Next Sunday evening, July 20, Mr. Foote lectures at Milton Hall on "Bible Blasphemy."

MR. E. T. CRAIG, the founder of the Ralabine community, who is now verging on four score, has just published a little In Memoriam volume on his old friend, the late Dr. Travis, whose name will be familiar to many of our readers. There is a judicious mixture of verse and prose, a portrait of Dr. Travis, and another of Mr. Craig. Copies can be obtained of the author at 3 Andover Road, Hammersmith, in paper covers at sixpence, or in cloth at a shilling.

It is intended to start a branch of the N. S. S. at Basford. Freethinkers in the neighborhood are desired to attend a meeting at Newton's Temperance Restaurant, North Gate, New Basford, July 19, at 8 o'clock.

OUR Freethinker Tracts, just published, are the very thing for general distribution out of doors in this fine weather, when people are sauntering about and have plenty of leisure. A specimen copy of each of the sixteen tracts can be sent to any address post-free for twopence.

THE Religious Tract Society, in its *Boys' Own Paper*, has been teaching our juveniles to catch water-fowls with baited hooks. It gives minute instructions, accompanied by illustrations, on the art of making traps and devices for ensnaring or killing or torturing birds and other animals. Why, however, should Christians trouble about kindness to animals? They tell us that all things were sent for our use, and Christianity is the only religion in the world which has always ignored the rights of the "brute creation."

MR. REMSBURG, the American Freethought lecturer, has in his possession a relic of Lincoln, in the shape of a leaf of an old copy-book, on which is written in the martyred president's schoolboy hand:

Abraham Lincoln, his hand and pen.
He intends to be good, but the Lord knows when.

THE Maori chiefs were taken to St. Paul's Cathedral on Sunday morning, and were so charmed with the sermon that they fell into a deep slumber. All savages, if properly dealt with, soon fall into civilised ways, and probably if they would take the Maori chiefs to church regularly, they would get their snoring apparatus tuned down so fine that it couldn't be told from that of a Methodist deacon.

THE Sunday Society have for the first time secured the opening of the Institute of Painters in Water Colors on Sunday. Any of our readers desirous of seeing the exhibition should send an application, with stamp directed envelope, to Mr. Mark H. Judge, 8 Park Place Villas, W.

THE American Freethinkers' convention, which will be held at Cassadaga Lake in the beginning of September, promises to be a large affair. Most of the Freethought lecturers of America will be present.

M. RENAN, in his latest work, "Studies in Religious History," takes a very optimistic view of the decline of superstition and fanaticism. "Belief in the supernatural," he observes, "will be slowly mined by primary instruction and by the

predominance of scientific education over literary education."

At a garden meeting in support of the Bishop of Bedford's enterprises in East London, the Rev. Mr. Bevey said: "Infidelity is being spread broadcast. In Bethnal Green there is hardly a man not tainted with it." He attributed this largely to the freely distributed tracts with such headings as "Was Jesus Christ a Madman?" "A Godless Life the Most Useful," etc. The only thing that would mend matters was the "power of true religion." There were plenty of churches he acknowledged, but unfortunately they were empty. We hope they may remain so till the time comes for converting them to some useful purpose. By-and-bye they will make good Secular lecture halls and political meeting-places.

We are every day receiving proof that our policy of ridicule is a sound and efficacious one. One of the most energetic Freethinkers in Wellingborough assured Mr. Ramsey that his conversion from red-hot Calvinism was entirely due to the sketches and comicallities of the *Freethinker*. He was so impressed in this way with the intrinsically ridiculous nature of various Biblical stories that he often found himself laughing in chapel when the subject dealt with by the preacher had been previously caricatured by the *Freethinker*. A young man who walked over from Northampton to hear Mr. Ramsey lecture also attributed his conversion solely to the same cause.

THE great demonstration on the Franchise Bill on Clerkenwell Green last Monday evening was a striking success. By some mysterious agency all the speakers belonging to the Freethought party found themselves on one platform, and all the "respectable" politicians on another. But curiously enough there was a constant hubbub, to put it mildly, round the orthodox platform, while the heterodox platform was surrounded by a huge crowd of orderly people, who listened to the speeches with remarkable attention. While at the one meeting Lord Salisbury's effigy was burnt with smoke and stink, at the other the speeches were continued without any disturbance. Messrs. Forder, Grout, Cobham and Hilditch delivered effective speeches, and Mr. Foote was greeted with tremendous applause.

SPURGEON tells a story of a clergyman who, on being transferred to a new parish, asked one of his parishioners what his occupation was. "I am the village rat-catcher," the man replied; "and what are you?" The clergyman answered that he was the village parson, whereupon the considerate rat-catcher observed, "Well, I suppose we must all get a living somehow." Spurgeon goes on to advise men whose object is to get a living (no pun intended) to take to rat-catching by all means rather than to preaching. We thoroughly agree with this recommendation, for the one calling is an honest and useful one and the other decidedly isn't; but Spurgeon has done so well for himself out of the latter kind of business that his advice can hardly be regarded as *bona fide*.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT.

(Concluded from page 223.)

WE will change the scene. Not now the Christian, but the infidel, awaits his sentence. He does not cry for mercy. With honest pride he stands erect, and demands his right. He is charged with want of faith, and he speaks in his own defence. Listen to his pleading. "O God," he says, "in that other world in which you placed me, I doubted your existence, because of that existence you vouchsafed no proof, or if you did, my intellect was unable to discover it, and so it was no proof to me. But when I looked upon the face of that world, when I mixed in society with the men and women who dwelt upon it, even when I studied the nature and the habits of the lower animals, along with much that was evil, which I loathed and shunned, I discovered much that was good, much that was grand, much that was beautiful, much that was loving, pure, true, honest and just. These qualities I admired and worshipped, and so unknowingly admired and worshipped you, their infinite source. The love of these qualities you implanted in my breast, and I strove to cultivate them in my daily life. So I grew more and more like unto you. And now that all this has passed away, that unbelief and faith alike are swallowed up in sight, I ask as you are merciful that you will pardon my human frailties and shortcomings, and demand as you are just that that virtue which I sought through ill report and good report, through light and darkness, through joy and sorrow, sometimes grasping it in a bright flash of truth, sometimes groping for it in a thick mist of doubt, may now be mine—that I may dwell in its presence and drink of its fountain for ever."

We may dare to sit in judgment on this great Judge.

We may without presumption ask ourselves how he would act in this case or in that, for justice is justice, whether exercised by God or man. We may say without fear that a good God would not sentence to everlasting torments one of his own creatures merely for a mistake. Justice requires the punishment of wilful faults alone, and in no sense is a man's belief the act of his own will. All that can be required of him is not blind faith, but an honest, impartial search after truth. If in this search a man sees reason to believe, he must believe; if no such reason appears to him, he cannot. There is no volition in the matter. Therefore if we ever stand for trial before a good and perfect God who has to determine for us a future lot of reward or punishment, it is not on account of our faith or our unbelief that we shall be saved or lost, but the measure wherewith we measured to others in this life shall be meted out to us again.

We will for a moment take up the other supposition, too horrible and too absurd to be dwelt upon for any length of time. We will imagine ourselves placed upon our trial before a God guilty of all the monstrous iniquities charged upon him in Scripture. From a judge who knows no principle of right or wrong, but who acts only according to the blind impulse of an idiotic caprice, no one would expect either justice or mercy. The being who created race after race, knowing they would depart from the object for which he created them, who in his rage punished the innocent with the guilty and in his more amiable moments rewarded the guilty with the innocent, whose goodness was displayed most in showering blessings upon his special favorites, selected certainly on account of no special merit, might just as likely as not take a wild delight in raising hopes only to disappoint them, and reserve his most exquisite tortures for those who thought themselves most secure of eternal bliss. With such a God, better to join the chorus of the damned in shrieking curses than blow his praises through a silver trumpet, sitting on a purple cloud.

But what if, after all, the Atheist is right, the Christian wrong? What if this life is the whole of our existence? How thoroughly and irreparably, then, has the Christian wasted his entire substance! Those few years that flitted so rapidly away, and yet were all his share in the history of the world—years that might have been used in adding to the general stock of truth in elevating the intellectual and moral nature of the human race—were utterly cast away in pursuit of a phantom, worse than lost in keeping alive the errors of a system fruitless in good. He is like the dog of the fable, that grasped at the shadow and lost the substance. The world was here before him. There was good in it and there was evil. He might have done his part to develop the one and crush the other. But he chose the wrong path. That which was honorable, truthful and noble, he shunned. That which was mean, false and treacherous, he submitted to. He it was who made the tyrants of the earth, for he was in heart and soul a slave, and kissed his chains. He it was who kept alive the old spirit of hatred that set nation against nation, class against class, family against family, the members of the same family against each other. He it was who, adhering to a false standard of morality, ignored the true and tried to square his conduct by the supposed requirements of a myth, instead of recognising the great fact that the best man is he from whose life the greatest number derive most benefit.

We now come back to the question with which we started—"Is it a fact that the believer is none the worse for his belief, the Atheist none the better for rejecting it?" We have considered the position of both with a good God, with a bad God and with no God at all. In each case we find the chances of the Atheist as good as the Christian—in some respects better. But wherever the shadow is inferior to the substance, wherever fanciful theory is of less value than known truth, wherever there is less virtue in crooked ways than in honest, straightforward conduct, there the believer is at a disadvantage. Good cause have we all to rejoice that our lot has been cast in days when Christianity can no longer crush those it cannot rule, but is stretched sick and helpless upon its dying bed; when we can stand around and gaze upon the expiring monster as it hourly changes color in its agony, each change assuming more and more the pallid hues of death, when its weakened stomach rejects the filthy mess that was its food in the days of its strength, vomiting up the Bible bit by bit from Genesis to Revelations, and casting forth the silly rubbish that was its glory in a bygone age but now covers its last hour with ignominy and shame.

E. J. BOWTELL.

A CHAT ABOUT GOD.

In the eyes of the devout Christian nothing is more virtuous than to meekly submit to the will of divine Providence. God can do no wrong. If things go well with us we should thank him. If things go ill with us we should still thank him—for not making them worse. If God sends whooping cough we ought to thank him for not sending small-pox; and if, in his infinite wisdom, he afflicts us with small-pox, we have a clear and perfect proof of his loving mercy in the fact that he has not exterminated us by cholera.

The favorite prayer of the Christian is "Thy will be done." At the risk of having to undergo eternal combustion, I venture to question the wisdom of this supplication. Why should God's will be done? Whatever is just and moral ought to be done, whether it be god's will or not. Whatever is unjust and immoral ought not to be done, even if it be the will of all the gods in the universe. God—assuming that there is such a being about—either is or is not a moral agent. If he is not a moral agent then he is to all intents and purposes a devil. If he is a moral agent, then we must judge of him according to his conduct. When he does what is right he merits our good opinion. When he does what is wrong he deserves our condemnation. When he favors us with a good harvest we should thank him. When he inflicts upon us a famine we should curse him. There is nothing like being perfectly logical with your God if you have got one.

The Lord has had an easy time of it too long. For eighteen hundred years the Church has been telling us that God is going to sit in judgment on man. To-day we venture to tell the Church that the time has come for man to sit in judgment on God. That the result of that judgment shall be condemnation there can be little doubt. God has never done any good to anybody. The world, as he originally made it, was not a fit place of abode for anyone with the slightest pretensions to respectability. If it is worth living in to-day it is because man's labor has altered and improved it. God made the barren desert; man turned it into smiling villages and busy towns. God made the wide seas that separate land from land; man builds the mighty ships that speed from shore to shore and help to weld the nations into one. God sends the lightning; man makes the lightning conductor. God made us naked; man invented trousers. God sends the storms; man builds the lighthouses. God made us savages; man has worked out his own civilization. For all the benefits and blessings he enjoys man has to thank—himself. Blind belief in God is infidelity to man.

Professor Clifford once said that there was no room in nature for God. Whether there is room for him or not, it is quite certain that there is no use for him. Nature—by which I mean the sum total of matter and force—eternally works its own mighty wonders, and if there is a God about anywhere he must be out of employment. God no longer regulates the motions of the heavenly bodies; gravitation has taken the job out of his hands. He no longer creates the different species of animals and plants; nature's selection saves him the trouble. He no longer amuses himself by sending disease and pestilence to afflict humanity; dirt and bad ventilation free him from the responsibility. In a word, the Lord has no regular occupation, and people are beginning to suspect that he is also without any fixed place of abode. Science has dethroned God, and the world's foremost thinkers are spreading the glad tidings that no almighty tyrant rules this wondrous universe.

WALLACE NELSON.

REVIEWS.

The Peers and the People. H. Cattell and Company.—A cheap pamphlet, written with considerable vigor, and particularly opportune in the present crisis. It merits and will doubtless obtain a wide circulation.

Bruno, and other Poems, by RED FERN; John Heywood.—The author's Preface shows that his prose is better than his verse. His poems, however, display much sympathy and affection, and the sentiment is always admirable, whatever we may think of the execution. No one could be the worse for reading this little volume, and many might be the better. "Bruno," we may add, is not the great Freethought martyr, but a good faithful dog.

To-Day, July.—The Socialist magazine reaches us this month. "Stepniak" concludes his story of the Russ an Political Prisons, some incidents of which are unspeakably revolting. J. Sketchley contributes some interesting "Personal Experi-

ences of the Chartist Movement." E. Belfort Bax writes on "The Modern Revolution." Eleanor Marx contributes her usual bright monthly notes on the international popular movement. Mr. H. M. Hyndman reviews Professor Rogers's last book with his usual air of infallibility and superciliousness; and William Morris writes on the Exhibition of the Royal Academy. This last is an article which all might read with pleasure and profit.

THE CHRISTIAN'S HEAVEN.

"Curse God and die."—JOB.

THE mother through fever and famine
Her offspring in tenderness nursed;
But Death with gaunt hand snatched the younger,
And Providence darkly she cursed.

She stood at the door of her cabin,
Her face ploughed with sorrow and care;
In her eyes the wild look of the maniac,
Placed there by the hand of despair.

To the westward black thunder clouds gathered,
While the wild winds were hushed to a breath;
Till a red bolt sped out from the darkness
And shrivelled her form in death.

In death, and her soul was with devils—
Else false are the Bible and God;
But her child?—he had passed thro' the portals,
And now with the blessed abode.

And down from his throne in high heaven
He peered thro' the darkness of hell;
And he saw the fond mother who bore him,
At the stake in her agony yell.

He saw the fond mother who nursed him,
Who cooled the fierce fire of his brain,
Who laid the fell thirst of his parched lips
Through long sleepless vigils of pain.

Who pleaded and prayed in her anguish,
As only a mother can plead,
That heaven would spare her heart's darling
And accept her own life in his stead.

He saw her—and yet was it human
All earth's dearest ties to disown?
He pitied her not, but despised her;
So selfish his bosom had grown.

Ah, well! let them prate of their dogmas,
Their realms where the blessed rejoice;
But nowhere to me would be heaven
Save engirt by the friends of my choice.

J. MORRISON.

PROFANE JOKES.

THE religious press—Hugging a Sunday school teacher.

"WHAT? you don't believe in Jonah and the whale and the blessed Trinity? Why, you used to boast of your orthodoxy." "Yes," said Robinson, "I used to believe everything—indeed was the most credulous fellow alive. But since I have had this confounded sore-throat, it is hard for me to swallow anything."

A LADY who superintends a Sunday-school having occasion to interrogate one of her pupils as to the cause of her father's non-attendance at church, received the following innocent reply, prefaced, of course, by a sweet little drop of a curtsey:—"Please, mem, my father says he isn't coming to church any more, t'parson hollers out so he can't get a bit of sleep."

A GOOD IDEA.—"Mamma," said a little girl, "do all the wicked people go to the bad place?" "Yes dear." "And all the good people go to heaven?" "Yes." "Ain't some people wickeder than other people?" "Yes, I suppose they are." "Well, I think that the people who are not so very, very wicked, ought to go to the bad place only in the winter time."

A WORTHY old deacon told his pugnacious son that God would not love the combative child, and if he was smitten upon the one cheek he was to turn the other also. "Au' let him hit me on t'other one?" "That is holy writ," solemnly replied the good deacon. "I'm durned if I do. Not if I can knock the stuff'n' out of him afore he does it," replied his young hopeful. The good deacon sighed sadly, but at the same time felt a greater confidence in his son's success in life.

A LITTLE boy awakened his mother early the other morning, to ask her what God is, and whether he has eyes, and a nose, and a mouth. "My child," replied the mother, half asleep, "God is everything, the heavens, the infinite—everything you can't understand." "Then," said the child, "God must be a Dutchman, for there are some little Dutch boys at school, and I can't understand them at all!"

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