

THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

Sub Editor—J. M. Wheeler.

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COMIC BIBLE SKETCH.—No. 100.



HEAVENLY FIREWORKS—(see p. 406).

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing, mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”—Acts ii., 2-4.

SHELLEY'S ATHEISM.

FREETHINKERS having vindicated Sunday freedom by long defiance of tyrannous laws, more timid heretics are venturing to imitate their example. Sunday lectures are being delivered all over the country to large audiences; and with a curious ingratitude, the lecturers too often indulge in insults and sneers at the very men who have won for them a freedom which their own pusillanimity would never have achieved.

A course of Sunday afternoon lectures is being delivered in the Bradford Temperance Hall. One of these, briefly reported in the local press, is on “Shelley the Poet of Democracy,” by Mr. C. A. Vansittart Conybeare. This gentleman rails at Atheists, and applies to them the epithet of the Psalmist, probably because he is utterly unable to give them any more reasonable treatment. He is evidently a heated partisan, and, as Dryden says, every man is a fool or rogue to the other side. Mr. Conybeare also carries a big bucket of orthodox whitewash, which he daubs over Shelley until he is unrecognisable. Under this treatment the Atheist poet comes out a model Christian, a kind of gushing curate without a pulpit, or a Sunday-school teacher wandering in search of his proper scholars. According to this critic, who translates Shelley after the fashion of Bottom the weaver, the passionate poet of revolt against the altar and the throne was a “most practical Christian,” and “certainly in no sense whatever an Atheist.” This remarkable declaration, which might make Shelley's old critics of the *Quarterly Review* turn with horror in their graves, was lustily applauded by the audience. Of course they knew nothing about the question, and perhaps to

most of them Shelley might be a Parsee or a Muggletonian; but it was pleasant to be told that a famous genius was a very good Christian like themselves. Whether true or false, it was at least consolatory, and they naturally expressed their satisfaction in the usual way. As Hume remarks, it is so easy to believe what is so agreeable to our feelings.

What a *practical* Christian is we are at a loss to conceive. We always thought that a Christian was one who believed certain dogmas about the Bible, Jesus Christ, the fall, the atonement, the redemption, and so on. But perhaps all these are unnecessary trifles; or perhaps the term Christian is like a proper name, which denotes anything and connotes nothing. Shelley certainly denounced all the cardinal doctrines of Christianity; but perhaps one may be a Christian without believing any of these things, and perhaps without even being aware of the fact. It is related of George Eliot that after a gentleman had extensively held forth on the beauty and beneficence of Christianity she quietly replied, “My dear sir, you mistake me; I have only one objection to Christianity.” “And what is that, pray?” “It is not true.” Yet Mr. Conybeare would probably reckon her within the pale of grace. “What is truth?” asked Pontius Pilate. “Ay, what?” echoes Mr. Conybeare—“Let us claim as a good Christian every man and woman of genius and high virtue, however they may have disbelieved and derided our faith; and when we have stolen from the Freethinkers all their brightest jewels, we can twit them with their barren dullness, and vaunt our own splendor.”

Mr. Conybeare proves by syllogism that Shelley was no Atheist. All Atheists are fools: Shelley was not a fool;

In regard to Paine the testimony of Mr. Walter Morton of New York, one of Paine's executors, who visited him constantly in his last illness, is as explicit. He wrote:

"In his religious opinions he continued to the last as steadfast and tenacious as any sectarian to definition of his own creed. He never indeed broached the subject first; but to intrusive and inquisitive visitors who came to try him on that point, his general answer was to this effect: 'My opinions are before the world, and all have had an opportunity to refute them if they can; I believe them unanswerable truths, and that I have done great service to mankind by boldly putting them forth. I do not wish to argue on the subject. I have labored disinterestedly in the cause of truth.' I shook his hand after the use of speech was gone, but while the other organs told me sufficiently that he knew me and appreciated my affection, his eyes glistened with genius under the pangs of death." (See the letter in the *Philadelphia Correspondent*, April 25, 1829).

The persistence with which Christian bigots lie about Paine and Voltaire is wonderful. They do not venture to give modern sceptics a turn. Lies about such men as John Stuart Mill, Professor Clifford, Professor Draper, Buckle, Lewes or Strauss could be refuted by living witnesses.

On the death of David Hume an attempt was made by the Scotch fanatics to create an impression that he had recanted his opinions. It was fortunately defeated by the publication of a letter from his friend Adam Smith, giving a circumstantial detail of the manner in which the philosopher supported his last illness. In one of his last conversations with his friend he diverted himself by inventing jocular excuses which he supposed he might make to Charon when he should come to ferry him across the Stygian river. Among other things he said he would urge: "Have a little patience, good Charon; I have been endeavoring to open the eyes of the public. If I live a few years longer I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of the prevailing systems of superstition." But," he continued, "Charon would then lose all temper and decency. 'You loitering rogue, that will not happen these many hundred years. Do you fancy I will grant you ease for so long a term? Get into the boat this instant, you lazy, loitering rogue.'"

Adam Smith says Hume expired "in such a happy composure of mind that nothing can exceed it." The orthodox Dr. Robertson said: "Oh, what good Christian would not wish to die such a death?" J. M. WHEELER.

ACID DROPS.

THE Mayor of Portsmouth says the Bible, being the word of God, is the best book we can place in our houses, and its contents are the best we can place in our hearts. With all its filthy stories, with all its pious atrocities, with all its glaring immoralities, we find him so possessed with the religious delusion or hypocrisy that he wants his divine Newgate Calendar read alike by rich and poor, and in every house and every school. Perhaps he will issue an expurgated edition. Probably, like most Christians, he knows next to nothing of the book he praises so highly.

TALMAGE says no man ever did wrong who first consulted his wife. How about Adam?

THE Church-going advocates of public-house closing, who seem to think intemperance is worse on one day than on another, should remember they are in a minority. What would they think of a proposal to stop the mental debauchery and spiritual inebriation that goes on in churches and chapels?

THE London *Figaro* is quite rabid over our Christmas Number. It calls us "fellows," and dogmatically informs the Home Secretary that his duty is "to immediately suppress the disgraceful print." The *Figaro* man should pay six-and-eightpence for legal advice before dictating to Government officials. The Home Secretary has no more power to suppress the *Freethinker* than he has to fly over the moon. We must be prosecuted, and the jury must return a verdict of guilty, before a copy of our Christmas Number could be seized; and the whole edition will be sold out long before that process could be completed.

THE bigots are just as rabid at the antipodes. Mr. Symes's *Liberator* has been brought under the notice of the Attorney-General by a defeated and disgusted Christian, who bears the appropriate name of Walker. Mr. Kerferd agreed with Mr. Walker that many of the articles were "unquestionably blasphemous." The question then arose, What is to be done? A sum of money was supposed to be deposited by every newspaper as a security against the publication of "improper matter," and Mr. Kerferd thought the best plan would be to forfeit the deposit; but on inquiry it turned out that nothing of the kind exists.

They are now in a fix. If the *Liberator* goes on unmolested it will propagate blasphemy. That is dead certain. If they prosecute it they will advertise it, and help to propagate blasphemy themselves. That is also dead certain. And so they stand, grinning with spite, anxious to kill and yet afraid to strike.

A CATHOLIC repudiates Mr. Foote's suggestion in his article on "God in a Cradle" in our Christmas Number, that Jesus troubled his mother in the ordinary way of children. He cites in proof from the "Life of Christ" by St. Bonaventure, which says (p. 16): "Nor was she, like other women in her condition, in the least encumbered by the Divine Infant she bore within her; for the Lord Jesus was no burden to His Mother." This only refers to his pre-natal stage.

THE son of a clergyman in Dorsetshire eloped a few days ago with a cousin, and the couple were married in the chapel of the neighbouring workhouse. The reverend sire vented his fury by having his son's two ponies and favorite dogs shot. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." The Dorset sky-pilot had better be careful not to infringe this monopoly too flagrantly.

A BRIGHTON preacher tells young men to beware of the attempt to be wiser than the Bible. But politically, scientifically, socially and morally, the present age is far wiser than the Bible. The young man who relies on Moses for his science will get plucked, and prayer and faith will avail him naught. Biblical morality will prove still worse, and will land him into the Divorce Court or on to the gallows.

JESUS is coming! It must be true, for it is given on "the solemn testimony" of his own Apostles, who, it seems, are still existing and preaching in Camden Town. Some of them even expect not to taste of death until he actually reappears. It is true he is somewhat overdue, having promised his second coming in the lifetime of his own generation; but the accident arose in this way. In those days the kingdom of heaven was much nearer at hand, being just above the clouds, so that the angels could easily drench the earth by emptying the cistern. Since then, however, the earth has been receding from heaven at such an enormous rate that, although Jesus started over eighteen hundred years ago, the distance is now so great that he not only has not finished the journey, but is supposed to be further off than ever.

THE *Christian Commonwealth* speaks of Mr. Bradlaugh's "appeal to a non-existent God." The *C. C.* should be more careful in its language, for as the words stand they convict the paper of Atheism. The *C. C.* really means an alleged-to-be-non-existent God. Surely a cumbersome compound word in the German style would be better than a breakdown over such an important dogma as that of the existence of deity.

OUR pious contemporary is not altogether deficient in conscience over Mr. Bradlaugh's wrongs. While condemning his "masquerade with the oath," it actually ventures to hint that "many may agree with Mr. Bradlaugh that oaths should be abolished as political tests." Bold outspoken advocates of justice, these Christian papers, are they not?

WE are warningly told that "the Romans lost their military virtues when they lost their belief in the gods;" and the *Rock* thinks this a strong argument against Atheism. But the decadence was simultaneous with the spread of Christianity, and although—or as we might more justly put it, *because*—Christianity became supreme, the degeneracy continued, and the Romans certainly never recovered their military virtues. So that this argument tells against Christianity and in favor of idolatry, and not against Atheism, which really had no trial.

WE are in for it. We have wounded the feelings of Prophet Howell, who thus relieves himself:—

"4 Barton Street, Bath, Dec. 12, 1884.

"MR. G. W. FOOTE,—Is it really possible that such a blasphemous scoundrel, as you print yourself to be, inherits the earth? Ere long you will swell the chorus of the damned. You have blasphemed the Holy Ghost, and your damnation is sealed. I pity you.

"WILLIAM HOWELL."

CHRISTIANS have agonised sweat and have worried themselves into lunatic asylums trying to determine what is the sin against the Holy Ghost. Mr. Howell can instruct them. It is editing a Freethought paper. What would Mr. Howell say of James Hinton's suggestion that the Holy Ghost means Nature? In his last book, "The Law Breaker," Hinton says: "If the Holy Ghost in Christian mouths meant Nature, the unpardonable sin is clear. It does not matter how you regard me or what you say of me; I shall not mind; you will be forgiven. But if you contradict Nature and will not be guided by her, how can good come to you? There is never any forgiveness for that. Who can forgive you? Can you get to a mountain's top by walking down it?"

At the Conference on "Unbelief and How to Meet It," a speaker (Mr. Dowsett) advocated giving lectures in private drawing-rooms without discussion. He had himself tried this plan with eminent success. The reverend gentleman flourished a

copy of the *Freethinker*. and exhorted Christians to start an opposition paper to meet it. Why don't they? They have the money. Or do they think the gaol affords the most convincing evidence of Christianity?

HERBERT WANKLYN, a Sunday-school teacher, was charged at Hammersmith police-court with having struck one of his pupils on the head with a poker. The prisoner said that while he was reading prayers some of the boys began mewing like cats. He told them to be quiet, but the boys began kicking him, and he took up the poker to keep them off. He used the poker because he didn't happen to have a cane. Prisoner was reprimanded and discharged.

"PUBLICAN" BOOTH has just put out another begging letter in aid of the Corps Debts Extinction Fund, asking the reader to "put what you think your Savior will be pleased with in the enclosed envelope and then pass it on to your Captain who will send it to me." Not a word of passing it on to the Savior.

THE Dean of Hereford has been restored to the bosom of the Church, not only with his sacred character untarnished, but with his reputation for charity enhanced—for was he not giving the poor young "carman out of employment" half-a-crown out of sympathy for his distressed condition? He selected a late hour and a lonely spot, probably that he might the better carry out the scriptural command: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." But his reverence had better far do his deeds openly like the Pharisee than expose himself to such cruel misconceptions.

THE Bethnal Green Guardians are indignant at the conduct of a Roman Catholic priest who has baptised one of their pauper lunatics and insists on having him registered as a Roman Catholic. But why should Christians be blamed for converting lunatics? How else are they to make proselytes nowadays?

"YOURS in the Lord Jesus," William Catlin, has issued a circular stating that he and Joseph Phillips will be pleased to visit any town in the country, bringing with them "the Gospel Banner." "We make no charge for this kind of work; but during our absence from home and dependencies, any hospitality in the shape of board and lodging will be thankfully accepted, as our means are exceedingly limited (Phil. iv., 19). We offer ourselves to the work of the Lord, if you will grant us the use of your chapels and school-rooms for a night or a week of special services. Collections may be made towards the printing of bills and travelling expenses." Should any of our friends avail themselves of the services of Messrs. Catlin and Phillips, we should recommend them to look carefully after the lodgers and keep their eye on the collection boxes.

A CORRESPONDENT at Leith assures us of the truth of the following incident. A well-known surgeon was called to the house of a poor and infirm old woman, and after examining her wrote out a prescription, when the woman expressed her thanks, but stated her inability to pay for it. He thereupon handed his patient half a crown, and calling the next day inquired if she had got the medicine. The woman replied in the negative, stating that her priest had taken it for saying mass. For some time our lively practitioner expressed his feelings in several languages, and sat down to await the arrival of the heavenly messenger. Half an hour afterwards the servant of God was being vigorously slammed from wall to wall, throttled, kicked, and punched till he disgorged his ill-gotten gains, and finally picked himself up at the bottom of the stairs and limped home with a broken arm. The doctor was summoned to the police-court, but the feelings of the Bench seemed to be with the defender as he was only fined £1.

THE Rev. R. J. Ward, Congregational minister, Liverpool, has been warning his congregation against "the spirit of the scoffer and the reviler of sacred things." He does not mind their reading Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, and even Herbert Spencer, probably because nine-tenths of them would never understand those writers; but he advises them not to go reading the *Freethinker*, one number of which actually contained "a vile parody" on the child's hymn "Gentle Jesus." Mr. Ward says that a man who could read such atrocious stuff is "hardly fit to be admitted as a decent member of society." We suppose his opinion of the man who could write it is too awful for expression. No doubt Mr. Ward means by "decent society" his own pious circle, and banishment from that is a punishment that we and our readers can bear with the utmost equanimity.

THE *Jewish World* is having a discussion upon the mysterious Urim and Thummim used in "inquiring of the Lord" by his priests. According to some of the rabbins, the breastplate of the high priest was engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the letters comprised in these names arranged themselves in form of an answer to the oracle to any inquiry. The *J. W.* says the Talmud does not endorse this fanciful interpretation. We guess we are pretty safe in putting down the Urim and Thummim as a contrivance of the priests for their own benefit.

THE introduction of new pews in Fahare Catholic Church, Dublin, has caused a fatal encounter between Manus O'Donnell, a seat-holder who opposed the innovation, and Patrick Breslin who favored it. The former was struck with a stick and killed.

A CHURCH OF ENGLAND "mission" has been endeavoring in a very weakly and inefficient manner to outdo the Salvationists in the East of London with the help of services in marquees and the presence of real live bishops. A religious contemporary now complains of the "grievously objectionable" papers containing "questions of a most undesirable nature" which were "distributed indiscriminately to young girls by one of the clergy." It warns those whose common sense and common modesty are perverted by the corrupting influence of certain teaching, that if English fathers of families find this kind of thing associated with the Church missions, there will be a reaction against them with which their advocates will struggle in vain.

THE *Rock* says: "Far more courage is required in these days, we believe, to avow faith in Christ than was needed half a century ago." Courage to avow a faith which sends its assailants to gaol! Is there no courage required to attack it, pray? But the *Rock* declares that "the changed tone of society. . . now permits the most sacred things to be freely ridiculed or contemptuously sneered at in the most general company." Then how unfair to retain Blasphemy Laws. Dr. Liddon suggests that "many unbelieving men now show themselves in their true colors who were then afraid to do so. If there is more open infidelity there is less hypocrisy."

WE are supposed to be a Christian people and our laws uphold the Christian faith. But the *Rock* very sensibly says: "Select at random any man from the ordinary crowd of the working classes, and ask him if he can give an intelligent explanation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It would astonish those who have never made the experiment to find what crass ignorance prevails among the masses upon the simple facts of religion."

THE Rev. Samuel Cox has been dismissed from his position as editor of the *Expositor*, the publishers, Hodder and Stroughton, not considering him sound on the hell-fire and brimstone doctrine.

THE *Church Times*, in an article on "Church Missions and Infidelity," after accusing Matthew Arnold of "falsehood" for using the words of Jesus to illustrate his own ideas, goes on to advocate Ritualism as the best antidote to scepticism. It says: "The ravages of infidelity will not be stayed till the Altar be more fully recognised." Doubts on the Trinity are to be met by Gregorian chants, Atheism is to be overcome by albs and chasubles; sense and science are to be defeated by postures and impostures.

THE proposed new cathedral for Liverpool is still exercising the minds of some good people in the "good old town" once known as "the black spot on the Mersey." They want it "orientated!" This has no reference to sun-worship. Oh, dear, no. One writer in the *Liverpool Mercury* described Liverpool as the "ecclesiastical glory-hole of England." Dry-land sailors may not be aware that "glory-hole" is a contemptuous epithet applied by naughty nautical men to a certain portion of a ship.

FETISH priestcraft was at the bottom of the riot at Winnebah in which over a dozen persons lost their lives. As among Christians, the priest fanned the flame of dispute. Over one hundred prisoners were captured and all the fetish drums. In the fetish house was found a kind of pie with human remains.

THE West African negroes take all sorts of objects as fetishes, and when they don't turn out lucky, cast them aside or beat them. So Italian and Spanish sailors have been known to beat the images of their saints when they did not avert bad weather. During the recent cholera at Naples, some saints were prayed to and others reviled. "We make and break our gods daily," was the pleasant philosophy of a Guinea negro; "and so are the masters of the sacrifice and what we sacrifice to." The Christian believer in transubstantiation, who thinks that in taking the consecrated wafer he is digesting the divinity "bones and nerves," as the Council of Trent expressed it, might say the same:—

"The heathen has a fetish and he beats him,
The Christian has a deity and eats him."

"JOHN," said a gentleman to the beadle of a country parish, "ye has been sae lang about the minister's hand that I daresay you could preach a sermon yersel' now?" "Ah, no, sir," replied John, "I couldna' preach a sermon, but maybe I could draw an inference." "Weel John," said the querist, humoring the quiet vanity of the beadle, "what inference would you draw frae this text—'A wild ass snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure?'" "Weel, sir, I wad draw this inference—he would snuff a long time before he would fatten upon't."

SPECIAL NOTICE.

Owing to the Christmas Holiday, next week's "Freethinker" will be published on Wednesday instead of Thursday. It will contain an article by Mr. Foote on "Christmas in Holloway Gaol," one by Mr. Wheeler on "A Row in Heaven," and a poem by H. G. Swift, entitled "God in a Manger."

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, Dec. 21, Hall of Science, Old Street, London:—At 11.15, "The Latest Political Shuffle," at 7, "The Star of Bethlehem."

DECEMBER 28, Milton Hall, London.
 JANUARY 4, Rochdale; 11, Huddersfield; 18, Milton Hall; 20, Walworth; 25, Milton Hall; 27, Walworth.
 FEBRUARY 1, Claremont Hall, London; 8, Hall of Science, London; 15, Milton Hall; 22, Liverpool.
 MARCH 1, Manchester; 8, Claremont Hall; 29, Glasgow.
 APRIL 19, Hall of Science; 26, Hall of Science.

CORRESPONDENTS

- ALL business communications to be addressed to the Manager, Mr. W. J. Ramsey, 28 Stonecutter Street, London, E.C. Literary communications to the Editor, 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. 3s.; Three Months, 1s. 7½d.
- SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS:—Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 3s.; Half Column, 15s.; Column, £1 10s. Special terms for repetitions.
- RECEIVED WITH THANKS.—A. Pomeroy, Everton Toffee, R. Jacques, W. H. A., A. H., W. Grayson, C. Boler.
- ATHEIST.—We expect there are some Secularists in Merthyr. Thanks for your good wishes.
- AN ATHEIST LIBERATIONIST.—Practically the Church of England did not exist before the Reformation, though our insular position made us less dependant on Rome than other European countries were.
- DEUX JEUNES HOMMES.—Thanks for the jokes, etc. Glad to hear there are thirty known Freethinkers in a town like Forfar; and as much surprised to hear there are "another thirty good Christians." That's more than we have met in the whole course of our life.
- W. FURNESS.—Your criticism is well meant, but we always write deliberately, and we have long recognised the impossibility of pleasing all our friends in every particular. A journal that absolutely satisfied a single person in every sentence would have only one reader.
- J. S.—Scarcely up to the mark.
- G. MILLS.—Not bad, but the lines do not rhyme.
- H. WOOTON.—It is a favorite trick of the sky-pilots. They answer criticism or questions with prayer or the gaol, according to their opportunity. Anything but reason. Their addresses to "men only" are worthy of showmen. The very phrase is full of prurient suggestion, for the purpose of tickling dirty ears. Glad our Christmas Number gives you such amusement.
- H. BANNISTER.—We are quite unable to assist you in the matter. London is a very large place, in which it is very difficult to trace people in poor circumstances.
- S. J. (Pimlico).—We think Yes, but Mr. Bradlaugh is a better authority on legal matters.
- W. HART.—"Gospel Contradictions" can be sent you post free for three halfpence.
- F. A. V.—Thanks. It was noticed last week.
- A. J. S.—Man has the same number of ribs as a woman. The Christian who tried to befool you has the same number of ribs as a Freethinker, but he is short of something inside his skull. The next question is too silly for an answer, and all the rest are nonsensical except that which relates to the Jews. They are a scattered people, but very little more so now than they were before the time of Christ. Read their history and you will then understand their present condition.
- J. CRANTREE.—Your generous offer shall be remembered, but we are pretty firmly on our legs now.
- J. SWAINY.—We understand. Thanks.
- S. BROWN.—Max Müller ("Lecture on the Vedas," p. 15; "Chips from a German Workshop," vol. i.) traces the Rig Veda to a period anterior to B.C. 1000. According to Professor Douglas (art. China, in *Encyclopædia Britannica*) the "Book of Changes" was written in the year 1150 B.C. The Shoo-King, books of history extending from the middle of the 24th century B.C. to 721 B.C., was edited by Confucius, B.C. 543, from very ancient materials. The Tripitakas, according to T. W. R. Davids, were written in the fourth century B.C. No Hebrew writing can be shown to have existed prior to the eighth century B.C. The Egyptian Book of the Dead and part of the Avesta are older.
- J. BREWSTER.—Pope Joan is said to have succeeded to the papacy disguised as a man in the year 854, and to have ruled for over two years.
- J. BIDDLE.—The earliest identification of the Serpent of Edon with Satan is in the Apocryphal Book of Wisdom ii., 24.
- W. THOMSON.—All scholars are agreed that the passage in Josephus (Antiq. xviii., 3, § 3) is spurious. Lardner, Warburton and De Quincey may be mentioned as authorities in the matter.
- E. PARKE.—Many thanks. Some of the matters had been dealt with. Always glad to hear from you.
- L. MOORE.—September, 1833.
- LOVER OF TRUTH.—We made no reflection on Miss Fortescue. The idea never entered our head. Earl Cairns's son was the subject of our remarks.
- J. BRUMAGE.—Glad to see you are keeping the ball rolling. We reciprocate your good wishes.

ARGUS.—Received with many thanks. We will forward the paper you desire if you send on your full address.

W. H. A.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

G. VOSS (Leicester) writes that the motion as to the sale of the *Freethinker* at the Club was not put to the vote.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Lucifer—Church Reformer—Boston Investigator—Truthseeker—Sussex Daily News—Herald of Health—Liverpool Echo—Hull Express—Truth—Portsmouth Evening News—Liberal—Eastern Post—Railway Signal—Herts Observer—Glasgow Mail—Liberator—Philosophic Inquirer—War Cry.

EDITORIAL.

THE January number of *Progress* will begin a new volume. The reduced price of threepence has been tried for six months, with results that are in some respects satisfactory. There has been a considerable increase in the circulation, and at the same time a greater variety in the contents. But I find that the jump from sixpence to threepence was excessive. The price was reduced by one half, while the matter was only reduced by about a seventh. At this rate *Progress* cannot possibly pay its way without it enjoys a circulation which it is absurd to expect for so advanced a magazine. Henceforth, therefore, the price will be fourpence. I do not think this change will materially affect the sale, and I shall see that the quality of the articles suffers no deterioration. The January number will be an especially bright one.

G. W. FOOTE.

SUGAR PLUMS.

LAST Sunday Mr. Foote visited Oldham for the first time since his imprisonment. The heavy rain somewhat thinned the morning and afternoon audiences, but there was a large and enthusiastic gathering in the evening. The Monday lecture at Mossley was a source of great annoyance to the local bigots. They resented the idea of a man discoursing on Why he was not a Christian, and efforts were made to induce the committee of the Liberal Club to close the Hall against those who had engaged it, a rumor to that effect being published in the *Ashton Reporter*. Fortunately, however, the bigots were defeated, and the proceedings went off without any hitch.

SUNDAY, December 21, being the last before Christmas, Mr. Foote will take a reasonable subject for his evening lecture at the London Hall of Science—"The Star of Bethlehem."

MR. W. ROSSITER is so much struck by our Christmas Number that he is going to make it the subject of a lecture in the Free Library, New Road, Battersea, this evening (December 21) at 8.30. Admission free.

THE *Herald of Health*, speaking of toleration, says, "Three men, it is true, have been recently imprisoned for blasphemy; but many thousands, equally guilty, in fact if not in form, are freely tolerated even in pulpits."

THE *York Herald* is wroth against the "caricature of the most solemn events in the history of the Christian religion" in our Christmas Number; but it thinks we had better be left alone, not out of any consideration for us or any love of liberty, but because "prosecution would not, it has not, put an end to the scandal." True, and it never will.

MR. R. A. PROCTOR, writing in *Knowledge on Science and Theology*, in reply to the contention that scientific men should not meddle with religion, asks if a man who had been all his life a fisherman might be worthily selected to become a fisher of men, why not one whose life had been spent in the study of nature?

MRS. BESANT'S "Law of Population" has reached its ninetieth thousand. It has been before the public too long to need reviewing now. Its extraordinary circulation shows that it deals with a problem of the deepest interest.

MR. F. GOULDING, the Atheist blacksmith, who has just done three weeks in Holloway Gaol under the abominable Vaccination Laws, called a few days ago to thank us for our efforts on his behalf. Mr. Goulding says it is a great treat to get the *Freethinker* again after being deprived of it for three weeks. While in prison he suffered dreadfully from the cold, as well as from diarrhoea through the diet, and wondered how ever we managed to pull through our twelve months. Parson Playford called on the Atheist blacksmith in his cell, but sheered off on finding him too tough a customer.

THE *Rock* thinks it would be a terrible calamity if Atheism gave the working classes fifty-six bank holidays in the year, instead of four bank holidays and fifty-two sanctified sabbaths as now. We think the change would give them a vast amount of healthy pleasure and would prove a benefit in innumerable ways.

THE same paper acknowledges that "Infidels" are numerous and fair spoken, and "that men who have renounced the Christian name are often found to practise many of the Christian virtues, and that in a degree which might put to shame not a few professed believers." It explains this "perplexing anomaly" as the result of the "inheritance" of Christian modes of thought and feeling. If, however, as the *Rock* quotes Miss Cobbe, "It would take several thousand years to make a full-blooded Atheist out of the scion of forty generations of Christians," ought not Christians (we retort the capitalisation as well as the logic) also to argue that it would take several thousand years to make a full-blooded Christian out of the scion of forty generations of Pagans, and that consequently no genuine Christian can be expected till Paganism has been increasingly eliminated for three or four thousand years more.

THE HOLY GHOST AS A PYROTECHNIST.

It is usually assumed that Satan is *the* pyrotechnist *par excellence*, his underground displays being unapproachable in one sense though only too easily approachable in another. Hence people smile at the simplicity of the pyrotechnist's widow who, according to a story which is as true as gospel, imitated an epitaph describing an eminent musician as "Gone where alone his harmonies can be surpassed," and placed over the grave of her departed husband the solemn assurance that he was "Gone where alone his fireworks can be surpassed." But in justice to the memory of this apocryphal widow, and also in vindication of the professional reputation of the least honored member of the Holy Trinity, we must urge that the epitaph may fairly be defended as being in accordance with biblical teachings. The Trinity, or the portion of it which was known to the early Hebrews, frequently, or even usually, appeared in the form of fire or accompanied with lightnings (Psalm xcvi., 2—5). Hence we read of the "burning bush;" of the convenient heavenly fire that on various occasions descended and utterly consumed Sodom and Gomorrah, Nadab and Abihu, Korah and his 250, the fifties sent to apprehend Elijah, and various other too prominent anti-clericals; of the peculiar fire that "ran along upon the ground" in Egypt; of the blinding flashes and "Sinaitic detonations," as Talmage calls them, of Mount Horeb; of the chariot and horses of fire that carried Elijah to heaven (for the orthodox will hardly be likely to concede that this was a Satanic display in honor of Elijah's deportation to Pandemonium, although Jesus Christ subsequently went there as a warm and enlivening temporary refuge from the cold grave up above); and of the fires that at various times consumed sacrifices offered by Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Manoah, Elijah, David and Solomon. Heaven must contain vast reservoirs of fire, for the fire and brimstone that destroyed the cities of the plain were rained down direct from heaven. During their forty years wanderings, the Israelites were led by the Lord in the form of a pillar of fire. Isaiah tells us that the Lord will come with fire (lxvi., 15, 16), and Paul, who apparently saw a too brilliant display on the occasion of his own conversion, tells us that Christ will come in flaming fire taking vengeance (2 Thess. i., 8).

The Book of Revelation strongly confirms our ideas of the fiery phenomena so intimately connected with Christianity. Falling stars, comets, meteors, lightnings, thunders, blood-red suns and moons, and similar pyrotechnic or quasi-pyrotechnic manifestations, are evidently stage properties, so to speak, of the Holy Ghost who has the whole sky wherein to display them, rather than of Satan, who in his overcrowded underground bakeries has little room for showing off his incandescent material to advantage—red fire and blue-devils, being it is supposed the only *feux d'artifice* in which this decidedly over-praised designer can maintain his ground against the more finished aerial work of his great rival.

Among minor incidents of scriptural pyrotechny we may perhaps notice that "fiery serpents" attacked the Israelites in the wilderness; and that the Star in the East floated through the air, like a pyrotechnic device attached to a parachute rocket or a magnesium balloon, till it stood over the cradle of the infant Jesus; and that Elisha showed his servant that "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings vi., 17). Shadrach and his companions, moreover, appear to have distinguished themselves as fire-kings. The earliest instance of the

artistic employment of celestial fire was probably in the garden of Eden where God guarded the tree of life "with a flaming sword which turned every way"—the latter peculiarity being perhaps specially indicative of the treacherous nature of fireworks in the hands of those who let them off.

But the most effective exhibitions of divine work in fire, the most sacred manifestation of harmless and ornamental, and therefore more purely pyrotechnic power, took place on the day of Pentecost, when the promised "Comforter" or Paraclete signalled his arrival on earth with appropriate signs and wonders. First, amidst the preternatural stillness and the solemn gloom of that dark *séance* in an upper room—a sky-parlor being, of course, most convenient for the expected visitant from above and for the accompanying display—the anxious apostles heard a rushing, hissing sound, such being, in fact, the usual and natural preliminary to the higher mysteries and more artistic development of pyrotechnic art. Then God the Holy Ghost descended and displayed the fulness and richness and majesty of his celestial glory to mortal eyes in the form of myriads of living tongues of fire* and leaping coruscations. Words we may be sure, can never adequately describe the wonders of that remarkable scene. Worldly similes are in vain. The pyrotechnic devices, the glowing lights, the incandescent Niagaras, the clouds of floating stars, the flights of rockets, of the Crystal Palace, are as childish trifles besides the glowing splendor of the fittingly-manifested presence of the great Lord of a thousand *auroræ boreales*; for the beauties of a thousand rainbows, the tails and the terrors of a thousand comets, the mysteries of a million meteors, the variegated and ever-changing brilliance of a billion flashing Siriiuses and milky ways, are his from everlasting to everlasting. Brock and Co. are nowhere by comparison. The pottering of their smartest crackers and the banging of their loudest maroons and most expensive shells are as nothing to his aerial volleyings and "Sinaitic detonations." Doubtless, too, the hissing of Pain's fiercest clouds of serpents and the whizzing of Brock's biggest wheels are but as whispers besides the impressive "sound as of a rushing mighty wind," with which Jehovah, scrupulously imitating the course of events in earthly pyrotechnics, introduced the ineffable glories of the divine display. So overpowering, we presume, must have been, or at least ought to have been, the magnificence of the spectacle of God made manifest in the form of pyrotechnic splendor, that only the brush of a Turner, dipped in molten rainbows, or the pen of a Shelley, spluttering forth huge constellations of jewelled flame, could catch the subtle artistic glories, the rich color harmonies, the Will-o'-the-Wisp vagaries, of incandescent deity—the flashes of inspiration and the fire of genius made literally and triumphantly visible to the sceptical eyes even of doubting Thomas. So hopeless is the task of adequately depicting the scene to our jaded and imperfect human vision, that inspiration itself has not attempted the task. With a modesty and a brevity equally commendable, the Holy Ghost has only recorded the barest possible outline of his own unrivalled pyrotechnic achievement at Jerusalem. He has not even told us whether the roof was taken off for the better performance of so memorable and magnificent a miracle, as was done at Capernaum for the working of a much less remarkable and original miracle; and he omits all details of the detonations and of personal variations of effect. In default of better evidence, we must fall back upon professional reminiscences to furnish us with a clue to a detailed description of the brilliant phenomena that so astonishingly grouped themselves around or "sat upon" each of the apostles, thus "burning head-foremost" in visible sign and proof of active and complete inspiration. If it be objected that we assign particular phenomena to the wrong apostles, we are quite willing to accept any scheme of redistribution that may be brought forward.

W. P. BALL.

(To be continued).

* God is as naturally and appropriately revealed in "cloven tongues" of incendiary nature as the devil by his cloven hoof. Whether these sportive and beautiful tongues of fire which decorated the heads of the Church subsequently entered into their mouths and affixed themselves there as the "other tongues" with which, under the immediate influence of "the spirit," they spoke so many languages in such a style that the people whom they addressed thought they were intoxicated we cannot undertake to say.

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES
(OF THE RAPID DECAY OF CHRISTIANITY.)

LAST week we attended a Conference on "Unbelief and How to Meet It," held under the auspices of the Christian Evidence Society at the Conference Hall, Mildmay Park, with Samuel Morley, Esq., M.P., in the chair.

Of course the speakers were not over complimentary in their references to opponents. A Secularist was usually spoken of as an "ignorant adherent of Bradlaugh," and the editor of the *Freethinker* was "this vile blasphemer Foote," "the wickedest man alive." The editor of what was called by one speaker the "National Republican" was referred to as "a poor shallow young man, whose empty hollow rubbish a child, by the grace of God, can easily refute," while the Secularists, as a body, are "poor deluded folk, steeped in the deepest ignorance."

The Chairman in his opening remarks said: "I am never very anxious to send our people to the places where these infidels meet, for our opponents are very clever in debate, keen and polished orators, and more clever than most Christians." This, however, was challenged by almost every speaker on behalf of the Christian Evidence Society.

The Rev. J. McCann, D.D., said: "I never fail after a lecture to ask for discussion and generally fail to get it—never from a Secularist." And he went on to give an experience at Norwood when the National Secular Society, according to his account, was challenged to debate and the challenge was never accepted. Christians appear to have very elastic consciences. It is but a short time since all discussion was stifled at Norwood, and a local Christian paper charged a large number of Freethinkers with wilfully disturbing the meeting, because they withdrew as a silent protest when Dr. McCann refused to allow any discussion or questions. The Rev. H. Sinclair Paterson also complained of an infidel editor who shirked argument. The Rev. T. T. Waterman, the secretary, said that the infidel disturbers of their meetings were always asked on to the platform, but never hardly came—even at the Hall of Science they got little discussion when they gave a course as they were in the habit of doing. This kind of talk really amounts to a suppression of the truth and a more than suggestion of the false. These people were doing their best to make the faithful believe that the Christian Evidence Society is absolutely hungering for debate, that they never shirk discussion, and only regret that they cannot get their fill. Every active Secularist knows how different the actual truth is.

But the Society is badly in want of money and it does its best to exploit the Christian public. The Rev. Dr. McCann, after saying that the best argument in favor of Christianity is Christianity, pointed out in one long wail that there are now three weekly papers and two monthly magazines devoted to Secularism, and that the general literature of the day, being largely tainted with the same principles, conveyed doubt into many families. He maintained that it was a grievous thing that there was no Christian paper to combat all this scepticism, and lamented that one after another such papers as the *Champion of Faith* had been allowed to die for want of Christian support. He was sorry that the Christian Evidence Society was losing ground and that its funds were failing, but he hoped the Society would soon have a paper of its own to oppose the awful spread of infidel literature. But he presently said, with an inconsistency which seems quite natural to Christians: "Really we need not trouble much about these people, for Secularism is decreasing." After this specimen of consistency we need not wonder at his saying that he liked to deal with the emotional rather than with the intellectual.

The Rev. H. Sinclair Paterson, M.D., a dogmatic, epigrammatic and very emphatic young man, pooh-poohed the importance given to unbelief. But he maintained that Atheism and anarchy were becoming more and more identified, and that these Atheists were pledged to destroy society, morals, love and everything. They have, he says, no standard of morality higher than themselves, and therefore are outside every reason for consideration by society! Would he revive the Inquisition, we wonder?

Mr. W. Barnard continued the wail for money. He urged that "there never was a time when Christians were so earnest as to-day"—that Christians "say that a soul is of more worth than all the world; that is our faith"—and that "Atheists expect us to live up to our faith; do we do it? I say we do not." He proved this by the want of support accorded to the only society which deals with Atheism, "a want of support," he said, "which is a reproach to the Christian Church, which has allowed the papers to die and is allowing the Society to die for want of money." Finally he tried to frighten these earnest Christians out of their coin by dragging in the usual old bogey of Anarchy again. "You should support us," he said, "from a simple business point of view; Nihilism and Anarchy are threatening us."

Such a pitiful exhibition of intellectual failure as these addresses afforded we have seldom listened to. Contradiction followed contradiction. Secularists are clever and polished, but they are steeped in ignorance. Christianity is earnest to save souls, but not on Sunday. It values money at nothing, yet fails to part with it. The Christian Evidence Society lecturers will work, cash or no cash, yet are obliged to give up for want of support. Infidelity has an increasing command of the press, yet is decreasing in power. A child can easily refute our shallow rubbish, yet all Christendom cannot send people to debate. The only point of agreement in

the whole proceedings—and here the unanimity was wonderful—was in the continual cry, Give us money, Give us money, Give us money. T. S.

"SORROWING, YET ALWAYS REJOICING."

SONS of earth, awake! Behold
The immortal morn is breaking;
Thunder-clouds are turned to gold;
See! the people are not quaking,
Though the purple lightning flies
Like a winged serpent, wild,
Over the re-echoing skies,
O'er the mountains, earthquake-piled.
Faith has vanished, Shame and Dread—
God is dying, Christ is dead.

Soon the reptiles, mitred, crowned,
Robed and throned, shall, lean and naked,
Lie on the polluted ground,
Curs'd for their accursed sake.
Shake the hills with welcoming,
Raise unto the stars your song—
"Glory to the new-born King!"
Peace to our triumphant throng!
Freedom blest! we crown thy head;
God is dying, Christ is dead.

Over lake and plain and sea
They shall pour in surging masses
To the fane of Liberty.
This the woe of ages passes
In its plenteousness of joy,
In its fulness of delight,
In that all that would destroy
Hath gone out into the night,
Hath into the darkness fled;
God is dying, Christ is dead.

We but know the bigots' smile
Of ineffable deceit;
We but know the prelate's guile,
His caressing of the feet;
We have only heard the whining
Of the pittance-craving priest,
His preposterous divining
As his silly flock he fleeced.
Bruis'd is the serpent's head—
God is dying, Christ is dead.

But forget not there were ages,
All of direful, doleful years,
Whose dread records in the pages
Of true hearts are burnt by tears
Tortured from Humanity
By a nerve-torn brother's groan,
By a sister's agony;
So, though thine own breast were stone,
Thou must triumph when 'tis said
"God is dying, Christ is dead."

JOHN M. HARVEY.

FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

MARK TWAIN ON JESUS.—It seems curious enough to us to be standing on ground that was once actually pressed by the feet of the Savior. The situation is suggestive of a reality and a tangibility that seems at variance with the vagueness and mystery and ghostliness that one naturally attaches to the character of a god. I cannot comprehend yet that I am sitting where a god has stood, and looking upon the brook and the mountains which that god looked upon, and am surrounded by dusky men and women whose ancestors saw him, and even talked with him face to face and carelessly, just as they would have done with any other stranger. I cannot comprehend this. The gods of my understanding have been always hidden in clouds and very far away.

GREAT CHRIST IS DEAD.—When the spirit of a faith has departed, that faith is dead; and its burial is only a question of time. When the noblest hearts worship not at its altars, when the most vigorous intellects abandon its creeds, the knell of its doom has rung. At the risk of being thought bigoted or prejudiced, I must avow that to my mind the decomposition of Christianity is so offensively manifest and advanced, that, with the exception of a very few persons whose transcendent genius could throw a glamor of glory over any creed however crude and mean, and whom I recognise as far above my judgment, I can no longer give my esteem to any educated man who has investigated and still professes this religion, without grave deduction at the expense of his heart, his intellect, or his conscience—if not of all three. Miraculous voices are not heard in these days; but everywhere myriads of natural voices are continually announcing to us, and enjoining us to announce to others, Great Christ is dead!—James Thomson (B.V.), "Satires and Profanities," p. 109; 1884.

PROFANE JOKES.

A LITTLE girl, who, with her parents had succeeded in reaching home before the rain came down said: "Well, we beat the Lord this time, didn't we, ma?"

At a catechetical examination in Scotland a little girl was asked: "Why did the Israelites make a golden calf?" She answered: "They hadna as muckle siller as wad make a coo."

"WHAT chapel do you attend Mrs. Partington?" "Oh, any paradox church where the gospel is dispensed with."

A LADY who has millinery for her profession and millenarianism for her persuasion laments that she will not live to see the last day if J. C. is not pretty quick about it.

"Do you remember what you paid the minister when we were married?" asked a wife. "I didn't pay anything. You know I was very poor at the time, and he told me I could let the matter stand." "Well, you expect to pay him sometime, don't you?" "Oh, yes," he replied with a sigh, "I suppose I'll have to, but it's like paying for a suit of clothes after it is worn out."

A LUCKLESS undergraduate of Cambridge being examined for his degree, and failing in every subject upon which he was tried, complained that he had not been questioned upon the things which he knew. Upon which the examiner tore off about a square inch of paper and pushing it towards him, desired him to write upon it all which he did know. He is now a sky-pilot.

A CERTAIN impecunious clergyman is a very small man indeed. but he said he never minded it at all until his three boys grew up to be tall, strapping young fellows, and his wife began to cut down their old clothes and cut them over to fit him. And then he said he did mind.

A NORTH-WESTERN clergyman is reported as having said to a newspaper reporter: "You newspaper men must have queer views of things. You are always looking on and never taking part. I suppose, now, your idea of the day of judgment is, that you will have a table off at one side and report the proceedings for the morning paper!"

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