

THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

Sub-Editor—J. M. WHEELER.

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COMIC BIBLE SKETCH.—No. 110.



EVE AND THE APPLE.

"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field."—
GEN. iii., 1.

OATHS AND BLASPHEMY.

MR. HOPWOOD'S Affirmation Bill is now printed. It has the merit of clearness and brevity. Common-sense is invading the law as well as other mysteries, and our Acts of Parliament are yearly becoming shorter and more lucid, so as to be understood by laymen rather than to give endless employment to lawyers. Some day or other, perhaps, Sir James Stephen's dream will be realised. Our laws will be codified, a holocaust will be made of ancient legal rubbish, and we shall have the Laws of England published in a portable form like the French Code de Napoléon.

As our readers do not, it may be supposed, generally purchase Acts of Parliament, we venture to print the full text of Mr. Hopwood's Bill.

"A BILL to amend the law as to oaths: Be it enacted by the Queen's most excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows: (1) Every person shall be permitted to make his solemn affirmation instead of taking an oath in all places and for all purposes where an oath is or shall be required by law, which affirmation shall be of the same force and effect as if he had taken the oath, and if any person making such affirmation shall wilfully, falsely, and corruptly affirm any matter or thing which, if deposed on oath, would have amounted to wilful and corrupt perjury, he shall be liable to prosecution, indictment, sentence, and punishment in all respects as if he had committed wilful and corrupt perjury. (2) Every such affirmation shall be as follows: 'I, A. B., do solemnly, sincerely, and truly declare and affirm,' and then proceed with the words prescribed by law, omitting any words of imprecation or calling to witness. (3) This Act may be cited as the Affirmation Act, 1885."

No. 187.]

The Bill is backed by Mr. Hopwood, Mr. Stansfield, Mr. Percy Wyndham, Mr. Charles Russell, Mr. Noel, Mr. Pennington, and Mr. Arthur Elliot. This is a strong and representative sponsorship, and but for a misunderstanding as to a date, it would have been still further strengthened by the honored name of John Bright.

Mr. Hopwood has wisely carried a great principle beyond the limits of party strife. He has dealt with the oath question in a broad, statesmanlike spirit. By treating its various parts with one comprehensive method, he has largely disarmed faction, and made it impossible for unscrupulous politicians to oppose his measure as a Bradlaugh Relief Bill.

We dare not hope, however, that the Affirmation Bill will enjoy a holiday passage through Parliament. It has been read once without any disturbance, but its troubles will begin at the second reading. The Tory bigots, and perhaps a few Liberal canters like Mr. Samuel Morley, will probably oppose it tooth and nail. Lord Randolph Churchill is at present an uncertain quantity in the problem. The family pension being commuted, his interest in religion has diminished by four thousand a year; and his trip to India may have given him time to reflect whether the Tory democracy he aspires to lead has anything further to gain by withstanding the progress of a measure which is unquestionably favored by a majority of our working population. As for the Government, it would be idle to speculate on their course. They have a most extraordinary way of interpreting Liberal principles, and as they have assisted religious liberty so oddly in the past, it would be rash to count on any rational assistance from them in the future.

The duty of Freethinkers in this struggle is clear. Let them petition in favor of the Affirmation Bill, and forward their petitions to members who will publicly present them, instead of privately dropping them in the official bag. Letters in the local newspapers are also very useful. Still more so is the "heckling" of members of Parliament when they address their constituents, and the questioning of fresh candidates, who are usually in a more plastic condition. A little judicious pressure works wonders in these cases.

The Affirmation Bill and the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws should be introduced together. Neither should be neglected, or omitted as "inopportune." Freethinkers who consider any moment "inopportune" for demanding equal rights of citizenship with their Christian neighbors are absolutely unworthy of the name. Considerable success has already rewarded the efforts of our friends. Very few Liberal candidates have refused to vote for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. Of these Mr. Goschen is a fair type, and his fate at Edinburgh may also be typical of theirs in other constituencies. Some have promised to "consider the matter more fully," and a still larger number have definitely pledged themselves in favor of absolute repeal. Unless Mr. Gladstone suddenly resigns, and Lord Salisbury plays a paltry trick with the electorate, the next Parliament will be far more Radical than any England has seen since 1640. Sir James Stephen's Bill for making a clean sweep of the Blasphemy Laws, which is as brief and lucid as Mr. Hopwood's Affirmation Bill, will be introduced and discussed. It may be defeated at first; such measures generally are. But its mere appearance in Parliament will mark the beginning of the end. When monstrous laws are once brought under the light of public opinion their doom is sealed. It is probable that no further prosecution for Blasphemy will ever be attempted. Our sentence was the severest for 120 years, but it is likely to be the last—Prosecution's final spring in the agony of dissolution.

G. W. FOOTE.

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

DURING the season of Lent, Christians are supposed to fast in commemoration of the forty days during which, according to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, Jesus fasted and was tempted by the Devil. Matthew represents the fast of forty days as preceding the temptation, for Diabolus is only introduced as making his first suggestion when Jesus felt the hunger which, strange to say, only made its appearance *after* the forty days when "he did eat nothing." The author of John evidently knew nothing of the story. He not only does not notice it—he leaves no room for it, since he distinctly connects in the order of time the baptism of Jesus with the marriage in Cana. It can hardly have been for want of gullibility that the writer omitted all mention of the contest between the Son of God and his great opponent. The event seems also to have escaped the vigilant notice of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, whose inspired eye was enabled to detect Levi as existing while potentially in the loins of his forefather Abraham (vii., 9, 10), for he declares that Jesus "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (iv., 15). He can hardly have said this and have believed the gospel at the same time, unless he thought the Devil was in the habit of coming up to all and sundry and asking them absurd questions in Greek, and forthwith carrying them away through the air and placing them on mountains to show them all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. James, too, the brother of the Lord, must surely have forgotten it, as well as the story of Abraham, when he so emphatically declared that "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (i., 13).

Some dear Christian friend who only knows as much of his Bible as his accepted sky-pilots have chosen to tell him, may ask, "Who says anything about Jesus being carried through the air by the Devil?" Pray tell me then, my friend, how otherwise did the Devil "take him up" from the wilderness and set him upon a pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem? Let us suppose, if you will, that they walked arm in arm, or otherwise, all the way to the holy city. We know from Josephus that access to the temple was most difficult. Even if Jesus and the Devil had managed to pass themselves off as priests, how did they get up to the roof and sit on a pinnacle? Josephus informs us that the roof was covered with spikes, to prevent birds from lodging upon and defiling it. What a pity they did not spike the Devil when he set Jesus down there! Again: How did he take him to the exceeding high mountain, where he showed him all the kingdoms of the earth in a moment of time? Did they toil laboriously up to the summit; and where is it situated? Commentators are not agreed about the locality of this mountain, nor as to how the feat was performed. With a desire to elucidate the sacred scriptures, we last week, in our Bible Sketch No. 100, illustrated how Satan may have managed the business, but our suggestion, like those of more renowned interpreters, is attended with a little difficulty—viz., that if the Devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world on a globe or map, he might as well have done it in the wilderness as on the summit of "an exceeding high mountain." From the Peak of Teneriffe itself Jesus could no more see all the kingdoms of the world than an insect on one side of an orange can see the opposite side. The writer clearly labored under the common error of his age that the world was flat, so that from an elevation the ends of the earth could be seen—an error which is committed by all the inspired writers in every expression indicating their notion of the shape of the earth.

The idea of spirits flying is common to Oriental literature. Readers of the "Arabian Nights" will not forget the incidents of the genii carrying away persons and setting them in various curious situations. The Jews believed that spirits filled the aerial regions. Paul calls Satan "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. ii., 2); and even the apostle Philip is represented in the Acts of the Apostles (viii., 37) as having vanished, being caught away by the spirit of the Lord. In the "Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul"—a very early Christian document printed in volume 16 of the Ante-Nicene Christian Library—Simon Magus, by the help of the Devil, flies through the air and is brought down by St. Peter invoking the more powerful name of Jesus. In the "Sepher Toldoth Jeshu" Jesus has an aerial combat with his opponent Judas.

What was the purpose of the story, unless to show that the Devil is an ass, it is not easy to determine. The first temptation was the suggestion that if Jesus was the son of God, he should command that stones be made bread. Had he done so, who could suppose that such an act of supernatural power would have been sinful? The second temptation, according to Matthew (Luke transposes the order), was that Jesus should cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. As the only inducement offered was a quotation from an old Hebrew psalm to the effect that Jahveh gave his angels charge to bear the righteous up in their hands, to a sane mind this could not have been a strong motive for suicide. The reply of Jesus to the Devil is to the full as unreasonable. He caps him another verse of Scripture: "It is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." But the evangelist tells us he had been "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil," and why, in the name of Beelzebub, had he accompanied him all the way from the wilderness to Jerusalem, unless for the very purpose of being tempted? The third and last trial is to the full as ridiculous. The Devil is represented as offering to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if he would fall down and worship him. What a temptation this must have been to the very god of very god, who had himself created the worlds! Even the poorest Jew in Jerusalem would not so risk old Jahveh's displeasure by worshipping the arch-fiend, yet Jesus, who knew the kingdoms were not Satan's to give, is supposed to have been tempted by an offer in itself as ridiculous as if a beggar were to promise Windsor Castle to the Queen, on condition of her kissing his toes. The ingenuity of the arch-fiend is supposed to have been exhausted by this farcical proposition, and upon Jesus saying "Get thee behind me Satan," he promptly retires, never to return.

The story of the fasting for forty days bears on its face its imitation of the legends of Moses and Elijah having fasted for that period. Of course, the Christian writers could not allow that their Messiah had been outdone by any of the heroes of antiquity. Most of the ancient religious teachers were supposed to go through a preparatory discipline or initiation before entering on their mission. At the present day, the Mahdi fasted and lived as an hermit for years before raising the standard of revolt. The tale of the temptation of Jesus is considerably like the earlier story of the temptation of Gautama by Mara, only the Indian tempter in the wilderness also endeavors to fascinate the candidate for Buddhahood with his beautiful daughters, and when Gautama resists all temptations, hurls rocks at him, which change into flowers. But the Buddhist legend is on the face of it a poetical allegory of internal conflict. Not so with the Christian legend. The story of the temptation is related with the same literalness as that of the crucifixion. If there was no Devil or God in the case, but Jesus was only a man who went into the desert to meditate a proposed work of reform, and, while there, fell into a state of doubt whether he should abandon pleasure, profit and power for others' good, our only objection is that such is not the picture of the narrative. If Jesus was God, as Christians suppose, the story of his temptation by the Devil is an absurdity not easily paralleled even in that choice collection of oriental fables and fictions which passes among the ignorant by the name of the Word of God.

J. M. WHEELER.

A YOUNG lady to an orthodox old lady: "I declare you are a dreadful fanatic, Mrs. McCizzon. I do believe you think that nobody will be saved but you and your minister!" Old lady: "Aweel, my dear, I whiles hae my doots about the meenister."

"Now then," said a Sunday-school teacher, who was trying to explain a miracle to her class, "how do you account for Peter's being able to walk on the surface of the water?" "I know!" said a little bright-eyed boy, whose father lost a limb at the siege of Vicksburg. "Well, how do you account for Peter's walking on the water?" "He had cork legs and they wouldn't let him sink!" said the little fellow triumphantly.

A FRIAR'S PUNCH-BOWL.—A first-rate portrait painter in London recently exhibited a picture representing a friar habited in his canonicals. Viewing the painting at a distance, one would think the friar to be in a praying attitude: his hands are clasped together and held horizontally to his breast, his eyes meekly cast down like those of the publican in the gospel, and the good man appears to be quite absorbed in humble adoration and devout recollection. But on taking a nearer survey, the deception entirely vanishes; the book which seemed to lie before him is discovered to be a punch-bowl, into which the friar is all the while in reality only squeezing a lemon.

TWO PRISON SCENES.

This morning upon the gallows a murderer meets his doom,
And signs of the coming horror are heard thro' the prison gloom.
The convict awaits the summons—he can hear the tolling bell—
When the chaplain pale and anxious comes to see him in his cell.

The parson has seen him daily, though the man has turn'd away,
And told him he'd have no Bible nor anyone there to pray.
But now on the fatal morning comes the parson once again
To repeat the same old story how the Lamb for sins was slain.

The man was as firm as ever. "Enough of that stuff," he said;
"Don't think I shall turn 'believer' because I shall soon be dead.
How is it believing murderers have stood here many a time;
What use is it believing after if useless before a crime?

"You tell me there's no repentance if your words I will not heed;
But that is no true repentance—belief in a selfish creed.
My sorrow is real and earnest—not something to cant about—
For neither belief nor sorrow will e'er wipe a murder out.

"Our employer stole our wages—left us starving for our toil;
He struck me and insulted me—my blood began to boil.
My workman's tools were in my hands—he called me thief and
hound—
And in my sudden temper I felled him to the ground.

"I've shown that I'm not a coward although you have vainly tried
To get an excuse for saying I altered before I died.
For Christians to widely publish all the highly-colored 'facts'
Of 'an Atheist's Conversation' in their papers and their tracts.

"No! I've killed a fellow-creature and the law says I must die;
I require no threats of torture nor expect 'a home on high,'
Though hypocrites may eagerly adopt your Christian plan,
My death is an expiation, and I'll meet it like a man!"

* * * * *

Soon the awful work was over and the prison chaplain sighed
When the papers all recorded how an "Infidel" had died.

Now then, ye story-mongers, here's an answer to your lies.
Are "Infidels" more cowardly than when a Christian dies?
This story is no fiction like the tales you freely tell.
Where are now your death-bed horrors and your talked of fear
of hell?

Read the story with attention—let it put you all to shame
When you think of those concoctions that have slander'd many
a name.

Though the truth may be distasteful, p'raps a lesson you will glean,
So continue your attention while we show another scene.

'Tis about a twelve-month later and within a prison cell
Sits a man engaged in writing. Read the tale he has to tell.
It's so full of choice expressions, 'twould appear both good and
wise;

But the tale contains a crime for which to-morrow morn he dies!

'Twas the murder of his sweetheart that had brought him to that
place,
But he says he "feels quite happy" and has found the means of
grace.

Yes! he's found a blessed Savior whom before he didn't know,
And he's cleansed him from the murder, and has made him
white as snow.

He would like this letter published as advice to one and all,
And he hopes that ev'rybody on the Lord at once will call;
For although he didn't find Him till he'd done the dreadful crime,
He has found Him since it happened, and has had a right good
time!

He feels comfortable—very! and has felt so all the while,
For his sins are all forgiven though he once had been so vile.
Soon he hopes to be in heaven, free from pain and all the rest,
Singing Glory Hallelujah in the mansions of the "blest."

* * * * *

Is there aught by way of comment to be added to this tale?
Is it hard to find the moral (!) in this story from the jail?
If nearly every murder goes to Heaven straight away
It requires consideration *whether murder doesn't pay*;

Salvation's cheap and easy, and it takes but little time,
Mere belief will make one happy and efface a dreadful crime;
What sublime and moral teaching! What a thought on which to
dwell—

That the murder goes to Heaven while his victim goes to Hell!

But the chaplain's paid to preach it, and he carries on his trade,
Till beneath his careful training canting hypocrites are made,
Who will prate about a Savior, and the joy that he bestows,
And as "paragons of virtue" in their letters try to pose.

Oh! how nice must be this Heaven if the Christians are correct!
What a very pleasant company, so moral and select!
But tastes have never differed more than in the present case,
For all good folks will be obliged to *choose the other place.*

ACID DROPS.

THE Rev. Joseph Cook wants the State to assist in suppressing Atheism, etc., as a means of preventing dynamite plots. The reckless malignity of the clericals towards foes is well illustrated by such baseless charges and such arrogant demands. The reverend slanderer, however, shows that he thinks that Christianity, and not Atheism, has been at the bottom of "gunpowder plots" and dynamite outrages, for he proceeds to tell the Roman Catholics that if they do not frown on such deeds there will be "danger for Catholic cathedrals and the Vatican, as well as for London Towers."

THE Rev. Joseph also says: "The Christian consciousness is a mischievously misleading guide, unless it is exactly harmonious with Christ's consciousness." There is no need for the addition of the latter clause, which only detracts from the truth of the statement. Joseph says he wants "no Christian consciousness as a guide, unless it be Christ's consciousness." How does he decide whether his consciousness is Christ's consciousness or not?

WHEN a man is killed by a stroke of lightning and an inquest is held upon the body, the jury always find that he met his death by "a visitation from God." If such is the result of a momentary visit from God, we should like to know what the effect would be like if he came to spend his summer holidays with anyone?

THE *South Wales Echo* says that a clergyman in a large northern seaport, driving to his church rather late one wet Sunday on account of the difficulty of procuring a cab, found no congregation there. Waiting a little while, however, a very wet individual entered and took up a back seat, whereupon the clergyman conscientiously went through the service. At the end of the liturgy he explained to his congregation of one that he would forego the sermon he had prepared and would content himself with a few remarks. The hearer, however, expressed a desire to hear the sermon, and the minister, pleased with this evidence of intelligence among the lower orders, complied. After it was over, he descended from the pulpit and shook hands with his listener, thanking him warmly for his attention. Being short-sighted he did not discover until they both reached the church-door that the patient listener was his cabman, the sum total of whose "half-a-crown an hour for waiting" had been materially augmented by the length of the discourse.

MR. STUDD has gone to China as a missionary because a certain verse of scripture kept running through his mind—"I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance," etc. He says: "I knew it was the voice of God speaking to me." When he asked God for "definite guidance" God "gave it" in the words of another text which came into his mind. Any strong impression is regarded by religious fanatics as directly inspired by the deity, and floating words are snatched at as precious instruction from heaven. Modern examples like that of Mr. Studd enable us to understand the facility with which the heroes of the Bible have assumed divine inspiration for their own ideas.

A BELIEVER who has taken to faith-healing says: "I gave my epileptic fits to the Lord." We hope the Lord enjoyed the fits which were thus appropriately enough returned to the original giver. This believer has a little boy who similarly disposes of his stomach ache. What a predicament Jesus must be in if he thus has to take the infirmities and bear the sicknesses of his followers (Matt. viii, 17)! The apothecary's boy who had to test all medicines by taking some of each would be quite happy in comparison with a deity who has to suffer every disease under the sun.

A VICAR long ill, who treasured up wealth,
Told his curate each Sunday to pray for his health;
Which oft having done, a parishioner said
That the curate ought rather to wish he were dead.
"By my troth," says the curate, "let credit be given;
I ne'er prayed for his death, but I have for his living."

—*Cotton Factory Times.*

THE *Church Review* complains that fasting in Lent "as an act of bodily mortification has become a farce." No doubt many a poor fellow would be glad of the copious and dainty fish dinners, washed down with generous wine, with which the pious mortify the flesh at this season, but would the *C. R.* have Christians follow the example of Jesus Christ and Dr. Tanner and eat nothing for forty days and nights? If so surely the bishops and clergy should show the way.

THE Rev. W. Findlay minister of Carsphairn, Galloway, has been charged by his servant with being the father of her illegitimate child. Of such is the kingdom of heaven.

A TEXAS man is said to have become hopelessly insane from a persistent reading of Talmage's sermons. That could not have been. No man, not already hopelessly insane, would ever have attempted a persistent reading of Talmage's sermons.

THE Rev. T. A. Ottley, vicar of Portland St. John's, near Weymouth, is being tried in the ecclesiastical "Court of Arches" for causing public scandal by open violence towards his wife, disgraceful conduct in his relations with Miss Raper, and intoxication while conducting divine service. The Commissioners had decided that a *prima facie* case had been made out against him.

A CORRESPONDENT in the *Rock* considers that our troubles in Egypt and the Soudan are a punishment sent by God for various sins, of which the attempt to introduce an avowed Atheist into the House of Commons is one. Secularly viewed they seem more like a punishment for Mr. Bradlaugh's exclusion, for he certainly would have done his very best to keep us out of the unjustifiable wars and greivous entanglements in which a Christian Government, egged on by a still more Christian opposition, have engaged us.

SPEAKING at the close of a lecture on "Prophecy," by the Rev. Canon Taylor, at Hope Hall, Liverpool, the Rev. Canon Lefroy referred to the death of Gordon and his comrades, and pointed out that they had the consolation of the Bible, which they would not have had had they been infidels and followers of that "foul fool Charles Bradlaugh." This characteristic remark was, according to the report, received with applause.

THE same Canon Lefroy is announced to deliver a lecture on "Why Infidelity prevents me being an Infidel." We know—because it would not pay. Canon Lefroy does well to praise the bridge which carried him so safely over. Had he been an infidel he would probably not have advanced far beyond the very modest position on an Irish daily paper from which Dame Fortune so kindly rescued him. By the way, this little episode in his career was carefully suppressed in a biography lately published in a religious weekly.

AT Warrington Police-court, on Monday, William Egerton, a member of the Salvation Army, was ordered to reimburse the union for the maintenance of his wife and family. Prisoner had eloped to Halifax with a girl, and when the latter, at the end of some weeks, left him, he decided that "his best course was to come home."

THE revised and highly-improved version of God's Holy Word in the Old Testament is to be published shortly after Easter, at prices ranging from six pounds to three shillings and sixpence. The fixing of the latter as the minimum sum may be commended if it indicates that the work-people employed are not put on starvation wages like those of the British and Foreign Bible Society; but we venture to predict that working men will pause awhile before shelling out three shillings and sixpence for the renovated Jew book.

OF course our old friend shall have our best attention when it appears with a new face. We shall look carefully to see whether Jahveh made the world in six days or six periods, whether he tempted Abraham or only tried him, whether Joshua stayed the sun or only the moon, and if Balaam's donkey spoke good Hebrew or only brayed.

DR. ADOLPHE NEUBAUER recently read a paper before the Anthropological Society on "The Racial Purity of the Jews," which he does not think is so intact as is generally supposed. He pointed out that Moses married a Midianitess, Zipporah, that Boaz married Ruth a Moabitess, and that David took the wife of Uriah, the Hittite, who was probably of the same race. This, says the *Jewish World*, was long ago, and does not prove much as to the "purity" of the race. But it does prove one thing, viz., that in early times they were unacquainted with or inattentive to the absolute prohibition of such marriages in Deut. vii., 3, and elsewhere. The fact is one of many which show that the legislation ascribed to Moses was the product of a date long subsequent to his era.

"GENERAL" BOOTH has been asked for a declaration upon the subject of the faith-healing "miracles," but that wary warrior diplomatically declines to commit himself. The line he has taken before the public is that on the face of it the idea is absurd, but that the evidence in favor of it is too strong to be withstood. This is artful. Any amount of evidence for miracles can always be gathered from those who believe in them. What is absurd is to suppose that the cures testified to are really supernatural any more than the insanity so frequently induced by red-hot religion.

THERE is no question as to the marvellous effect which excited feeling will produce in some cases. Some sixty years ago a gentleman in Somers Town, who was suffering from gout, suddenly dropped his crutches, vaulted over a fence and ran over a meadow, to escape from an ox—the result being a complete and permanent cure. Numerous and more startling cases can be found in Dr. Tuke's "Illustrations of the Influence of the Mind on the Body." In the case of "Major" Pearson's cures it

should be noted that he succeeds only in a comparatively few cases, and only with those who already have faith. He himself says he cannot work cures in the presence of unbelievers, and cites the example of Jesus, who could do no mighty work in his own country because of their unbelief (Matt. xiii., 58; Mark vi., 5). "Major" Pearson is especially unsuccessful with children, the juvenile mind not easily being brought under the stimulus of religious fervor; moreover, the patient often relapses, and each cure is utilised for the purpose of a "collection."

ACCORDING to a paragraph going the round of the papers, a Russian priest in whose parish some bones were exhumed, undertook an examination. He entered an account of them in the parish register of deaths, and in the space allotted to the statement of the name, business and religion of the deceased, he stated, "Name and occupations unknown, but according to all appearances of the orthodox religion of Russia." This expert should be of service to the heresy hunters, and his talents might come in usefully at the day of resurrection.

ACCORDING to Mahomet, man's body is entirely consumed in the earth, with the exception of the bone Ajb, the os coccygis, and that will remain uncorrupted till the last day, when it will serve as a seed whence the whole body is to be renewed either for hell or paradise. Our Russian priest, who can judge the religion by the bones, may be employed in determining the future of the bone Ajb.

ONE of Mr. Spurgeon's admirers has recently presented him with a handsome brougham with exquisite fittings. There are shelves for books and parcels, trays for cigars, and a handsome looking-glass in the centre. Spurgeon, being gouty through much indulgence in the blood of the Lamb, will henceforward follow Jesus in a brougham. We wonder if the meek and lowly Nazarene, who had not where to lay his head, met Spurgeon at Mentone, whether the popular preacher would offer the peripathetic enthusiast a cigar.

SPURGEON found prayer no good against the gout, but he finds that "the sunshine and warmth" of Mentone "work wonders." By faith ye are healed.

"AN Anglican Clergyman" shamelessly avows in the Catholic organ, the *Tablet*, that he and many of his fellow-Ritualists use books and ritual "in order that they may familiarise their people with things Roman and pave the way for their full acceptance." Strong language would be found for a soldier who, while taking the pay of one nation, was employed in betraying her to her enemies; but perjury in a priest is too common to attract much attention.

POPE PIUS THE NINTH has been dead seven years, yet he is still in Purgatory. At least, we judge so from the Catholic churches offering on the anniversary of his death Solemn Requiem Masses for the repose of his soul. If it takes over seven years to pray a Pope's soul out of Purgatory, how long does an ordinary sinner stay there?

A CONFERENCE of ministers was held at the Cannon Street Hotel last week, to consider the attitude Christian ministers should take in regard to the Soudan war. Such a diversity of views was expressed that the only resolution to which these exponents of the religion of peace could agree was that the passing of any resolution would be premature. When the sky-pilots attempt to meddle with earthly politics it is always the same; Liberal Christians defend the Liberal Government, Tory Christians defend Tory opposition, and whining cant and religious humbug alone prevail.

WHAT is the difference between Cain and Noah? The one slew his brother and the other got slewed himself!

THE "arms of Jesus."—Swords, daggers, stake, pistol, gun, knife, rack, axe, and of such is the kingdom of heaven. Amen!

AGREEABLE ALL ROUND.—"I purpose introducing some new features into the service," said Rev. Mr. Textual. "All right," remarked Fogg. "New features in that pulpit are just what I have been longing for for the last year or two."

A BARBER, recently converted, asked his minister how he could do some religious work. "Try and awaken your customers to a sense of their danger." Accordingly, the next day, when he had carefully wrapped the towel round the neck of a fat old gentleman whom he was going to shave, and profusely lathered the chin, he pinched the old gentleman's nose, and, being ready to commence operations, held up the razor to the throat and said, in earnest tones, "My good sir, are you prepared to die?"

A BATCH of West Riding trippers were congregated near the old sulphur well at Harrogate. Two of them had squabbled a bit, and their language had got "a bit warmish loike, tha knaws." To them came a parson. Said he, "My good friends, do you not know that when you use this awful kind of language the evil one is very near you?" Said one of the noisy ones, getting a whiff of the medicinal spring, "By gow, lad, thart reight, he's been abaat here lately and no mistak."

SPECIAL NOTICE.

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, March 8, Milton Hall, Hawley Crescent, Kentish Town, at 7.30, " Buddha before Christ."

MARCH 15, Northampton; 17, Walworth; 22, Grimsby; 29, Glasgow.
 APRIL 5, Bolton; 12, Milton Hall; 14, Walworth; 19, Hall of Science; 26, Hall of Science.
 MAY 3, Hall of Science; 6, Camberwell; 10, Milton Hall; 17, Hall of Science; 24, N. S. S. Conference; 31, Manchester.
 JUNE 7, Liverpool; 14, Plymouth.

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, 14 Clerkenwell Green, London, E.C.

The *Freethinker* will be forwarded, direct 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.—E. Drain, E. Sims, Edwin T. Watson, G. H. THE Editor or publisher of the *Agnostic* sends us the March number for review. We notice among the "Opinions of the Press" that a contemptible, and we fear characteristic, trick has been played in the extract from the *Freethinker*; and we therefore decline to notice the magazine again, unless we receive an apology from its responsible conductor.

J. W. GRANTHAM.—Thanks for your sympathy and good wishes. We can say without boasting that we have "put in" a good deal of work since that morning, twelve months ago, when you saw us emerge from Holloway Gaol.

W. STANLEY.—We are not "hard up for matter." All the same your idea is a good one, and we may be able to adopt it.

E. DOUTZ.—Hardly up to the mark.

INQUIRER.—You will find our views on the subject in "Secularism the True Philosophy of Life."

W. WISE writes that himself and a friend at Bishop Stortford have been thrown out of employment through the Christian bigotry rampant in that place.

C. BROWN.—The third canon of the 4th Council of Lateran ordered that all heretics shall be put to death, and the proposition has been defended in numerous theological works.

J. H. WHITHAM.—We see no way out of the difficulty except educating the boy at home. If he is sent to a Church school he must take what they give him, unless they are willing to exempt him from religious drill. If however the school receives a Government grant he may take advantage of the conscience clause.

H. WOOTTON writes that pious ladies have been calling round Battersea for subscriptions to purchase flowers for the burial of sky-pilot Hall who has just left an enormous income in this life for something very problematical in the next. Perhaps the ladies are thinking of "the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire."

W. F. C.—We cannot insert a long list of the back numbers you wish to dispose of. Mr. Ramsey may be able to find customers for some if you communicate with him or send him the parcel.

G. BRISCOE.—*Progress* sent. We regret we cannot use the MS. We have no space for long articles, and so much has been written on the first chapter of "Genesis."

J. C. DRENON.—Address "the Venerable Archdeacon Farrar." We cannot answer your second question. Our Jewish life of Christ is in the press, and we can almost venture to promise it in a week or ten days.

E. J. WATSON.—We are pleased with your letter. Thanks for the cuttings.

A. FIRTH.—You Christians never lacked impudence. Asking us to join you in "stemming the tide of infidelity" shows you to be graduating for the asylum; and if there is no such institution near Barnsley, you had better remove to some locality that boasts one. We are glad to hear that the *Freethinker* is working great mischief (to Christianity) among young men and women in your neighborhood; and that it is passed from hand to hand even at the Salvation barracks. You are very good to tell us that if we "turn" the Christians will make it worth our while. We can only smile at your ignorance of our character. The ministers of the gospel of Freethought must preach to live, but they look to something higher than £ s. d. as their final reward. However, you can go on praying for us; it amuses you perhaps, and it does us no harm.

H. C. T.—Many thanks, but by the time we have room for insertion the public interest in the matter will have flagged.

W. M. BORLEY.—It is gratifying to learn that Edinburgh Liberals have, as we expected, repelled Mr. Goschen's advances so decisively.

W. C. SAVILLE.—We are obliged for the cuttings. The MS. shall be read and considered. Glad you find "Jonah's Excursion" a "splendid pamphlet." It cost us a great deal of time.

T. GILLMAN.—An account of Richard Carlile appeared in the number of *Progress* for last December.

J. KELSO.—The text, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness," occurs 2 Thessalonians ii., 11-12.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—South Wales Echo—Evening News—Liberal—Comet—British Workmen—Brighton Gazette—Boston Investigator—Oldham Chronicle—Herts and Essex Observer—Truthseeker—Bridport News—Sydney Bulletin—Philosophic Inquirer—Anti-Christian—Winnowing Breeze.

"FREETHINKER" PRIZES.

THE Guinea Prize for the best Comic Bible Sketch has been awarded to "Mephisto." His drawing will appear next week. It treats the subject of Balaam and the Donkey.

Some of the sketches of the following competitors will be used, a remittance being sent according to value.

Highly Commended.—William Carter, G. Collins, G. E. Warnes, Spiro, C. Bentley, G. F. Ashley (who has unfortunately drawn on colored card), J. D. Tate (too crowded with close lines). C. Prescott (faces and figures good, rest confused), H. Wootton, B. Jeffery, Pharaoh.

Commended.—Salvation Searcher, Veritas (idea good), R. F. G., Eumathian, Holy Ghost, J. Gorrill, W. Yeomans (too coarsely drawn).

The Competitors for the Religious Topical Sketch have been very few, and as none of their drawings are quite fit for reproduction, we are unable to award the Guinea Prize. Spiro, J. M. Hoyle and W. Yeomans are commended.

We offer another *PRIZE OF ONE GUINEA* for the best Comic Bible Sketch, and a *PRIZE OF ONE GUINEA* for the best Religious Topical Sketch; the competition to close on April 1.

The drawing must be done on white cardboard or thick white paper in pure black ink. The lines should be bold and well distinct. Washes or colors must not be used. The size should be about one-third broader than our ordinary single or double column size.

SUGAR PLUMS.

LARGE and enthusiastic audiences greeted Mr. Foote at Manchester, the hall being crowded to the street door in the evening. Mr. G. Payne, who occupied the chair, announced amid loud cheers the establishment of the Manchester Secular Hall Company, in whose behalf the sum of £500 has been left by the late Mr. Spencer. Mrs. Spencer, who was present on Sunday, has the scheme at heart as deeply as her husband had, and she hopes the Manchester Freethinkers will do their utmost to avail themselves of the legacy, which is open to them for the space of three years. We heartily trust that they will see it is "now or never," and give a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether.

THE Rev. W. Sharman, whose letter appears in another column, requests us to print the following list of subscriptions which he has received towards the funds of the Society for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws:—Mr. Tapp, 2s.; G. Warren, 1s.; Rev. C. J. Street, 2s. 6d.; Rev. John Wright, £1 1s.; Dr. Hardwicke, 5s.; Mrs. Fischer, 1s.; W. H. Harrup, 1s.; Rev. F. Haydn Williams, 5s.; Mr. Jackman, 1s.; Mr. Lockwood, 1s.; R. Dingle, 5s.; W. Stanley, 1s.; Rev. R. A. Armstrong, 5s.; Mr. Underdown, 1s.; Professor Frankland, F.R.S., £1 1s.; Augustus Mordan, £1 1s.; Dr. Roth, £1 1s.; Octavius V. Morgan, £1. We have received the following further subscriptions:—H. Whitham, 2s. 6d.; L. L., 2s. We hope our readers will favor us with a longer list to publish next week.

COL. INGERSOLL has decided to accept the office of President of the National Liberal League, which contemplates changing its name to that of the American Secular Union. We are glad to note that the Canadian Secular Societies are affiliating with those in the United States.

THE *Boston Journal* again repeats the report that Col. Ingersoll is "going to Europe for a year or two." If this is true we hope the gallant Colonel will not give up his lecturing. He will find as appreciative audiences in England as across the herring pond.

We always thought Malone was joking when he declared that Aberdeen was "a city much given to hilarity," and the recent attempts of the Presbytery to put down dancing, Sunday bathing and church bazaars had not undeceived us. We find, however, from some numbers of the *Comet* or letters to Bon-Accordians, which have been sent to us, that there is a larger share of humor in the granite city than we had given it credit for. A letter on Freemasonry by Bearing-rein is especially humorous and well worth reading.

THE Positivist Society are preparing a work in a volume of about 600 hundred pages, giving short biographies of all the great men whose names are found in the Positivist Calendar. The list includes Paul, but not Jesus, Comte apparently being in doubt as to the historical existence of the latter. There will be a number of contributors to the volume, Mr. Frederick Harrison acting as editor.

THE English Jews, it is well known, are not nearly so orthodox as their continental fellow-religionists. In America they are even more inclined to rationalism. Dr. Felix Adler is head of a Society of Ethical Culture, which discards all supernaturalism. Dr. Rabbi Isaac M. Wise is chief of a college at Cincinnati, intended to supply pulpits with rabbis brought up in the tenets of Rational Judaism, which discards the divine authority of the Levitical system. Political freedom brings religious Freethought in its train.

ELMINA SLENKER, of Snowville, Pulaski county, Virginia, a Quaker lady who has found her way to Freethought, and who, by her

"Stories for Children," "Lessons for Little Folks," and "Secular Romances," has endeared herself to the hearts of American Freethought readers, being familiarly known by her signature of Aunt Elmina, sends us a very cordial letter, and desires us to speedily issue the Comic Bible Sketches, which she declares will "sell like hot cakes." We intend shortly to put them in hand, and shall take care our American friends get a supply.

THE Calcutta *Anti-Christian* continues to bravely uphold the standard of Freethought in Bengal. Our Hindu friends know that the effective way to meet Christian cant is by using plain language and common-sense illustrations. We are glad to see that the January number is enlarged. Some selections from the *Freethinker* are given, which will, no doubt, be as much appreciated in India as at home. The *Anti-Christian* will prove a lion in the path of the missionaries.

THE *Pall Mall Gazette* has taken to "regarding the Home Secretary as a distinctly evil element in English public life." A great many people have known this a long while. A person who can deliberately lie away men's characters behind the shelter of a privileged post is hardly fit for decent society. A prominent Lancashire Radical, soon after Sir William Harcourt slandered us, called him "a political ruffian." The description is admirable.

MR. HOWARD EVANS, writing in the *Weekly Echo* an account of his recent visit as a workmen's delegate to Paris, says: "I spent Sunday morning in visiting Notre Dame, and two or three of the largest churches in the city. At Notre Dame and St. Eustache there were considerable congregations. The women largely predominated, of course, but there were a considerable number of men. I could scarcely discover among the latter a single one who appeared to belong to the industrial class. They say that the Church is satisfied so long as it has the women; it is shut up to this painful necessity, seeing that it has alienated the men altogether."

SOME of the Church members of the Manchester School Board have resigned, upon the ground that their influence in the operations of the Board is virtually *nil*, because of the manner in which their representations and desires are overborne by the dominant "unsectarian" majority.

THREE bishops—St. Albans, Bangor and Liverpool—voted in favor of Lord Salisbury's war policy. The rest were too craven to vote at all. We are delighted at these signs. The more the bishops play the rogue, the coward, or the fool, the better we are pleased. It brings them nearer their end.

MR. W. S. CAINE, M.P., has promised to vote for the Affirmation Bill and the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. Every Parliamentary candidate should be pressed on these two questions.

JOHN LEE'S RELIGION.

LAST week we dealt with the religion of a "Christian hero" who spent his life in the dubious but not yet entirely superseded and unnecessary work of organising slaughter, but who displayed many personal virtues of the highest order. As this hero is now widely admired for his virtues (which were his own) and almost worshipped for his faults (which are the faults of the age and of our nation), pious people are fond of boasting of him as a specimen of the real Christian. But when another real Christian in the shape of the Babbicombe murderer comes before the public the followers of Jesus make no boasts and draw no lessons. They drop the subject. They cannot make capital out of such an example of the sustaining power of religion. Yet John Lee, like many other vulgar murderers on a small scale and many grand murderers on a large scale, had a genuine belief in God and drew much comfort and support in trouble from that "ennobling belief." Surely Christians who wish to exhibit religion in all its aspects should put forward the case of John Lee, who is rightly detested for murdering his mistress and setting fire to the house, as well as of General Gordon, who is wrongly adored for slaying Soudanese patriots and destroying their homes in accordance with current Christian morality. When meek and mild believers in Christian Jingoism absurdly claim, as is done in a paragraph in the *Rock*, that Gordon's life "is merely the example of Christ copied, so far as a finite creature can succeed in copying such a standard," they should remember the blood he has shed, and when they speak of Lee as "the vilest of malefactors" they should not—as in the paragraph in the *Rock* immediately succeeding the above—ignore that he too was strengthened and upheld by the glorious power of religion. They should say of both men, and not of one only: "In this age of atheistical

opinions the example of such a man carries with it a great moral." It seems to us, too, that the "thrill of horror" they feel at the bungling attempt to execute a murderer should be felt far more deeply at our own successful execution by bullet and bayonet of thousands of Arabs whose only crime is that of patriotism. This is to us the really "horrible and heart-rending scene." The Christian "piety" and "fair-play" and strong "sense of justice" and the forgiveness bestowed so readily on a cold-blooded villain should be extended to those whom we wrong as well as to those who wrong us. Is it a fellow-feeling, arising from a faint and perverted consciousness of our own misdeeds in the Soudan, that makes us more merciful to a pious criminal at home than to dark-skinned heroes abroad?

The religious impressions which filled the mind of this treacherous and brutal wretch have been set forth in a letter which has been published. Writing to his sister on the day after the failure to execute him, he piously says:

"It was the Lord's will that I should not die yesterday at that time appointed by man . . . It was the Lord's hand that would not let the law be carried out. Dear Sister, I did not fear to walk into death with a firm foot, because I knew the Lord was with me, and that if I had passed through the shadow of death I knew I should have went to the home which the blessed Lord has promised all who believe in Him. I have had kind attention shown me, and, dear sister, I was at the brink of death three times. It was my will to die, and I hope to do so yet. I hope the next time I go to the scaffold that I shall pass from this life to the home above. It is my wish to die. I am tired of this world, and I am waiting for the time to come, and I hope it will not be long before the time does come. I have been dead to this world three times, and I give myself up to the Lord, and whatsoever the will is, 'His will be done.' I leave it all in the Lord's hands. I believe what has occurred was a miracle worked by the Lord. . . . I fear nothing while the Lord is with me. My dear sister, we must not forget to pray to the Lord, and give thanks to Him for his mercy."

Lee had a dream on the Sunday night previous that the scaffold was not ready, and he regards this as having been an intimation from God, who intended to prevent the execution by sending wet weather to swell the wood and so cause the trap-door not to act. The pluck and self-possession displayed by the culprit were associated with religious intuitions, as in Gordon's case. Like most Christian criminals, he displays no consideration whatever for his victim. He prays to the Lord for himself, but not for his murdered mistress—perhaps having strong Protestant scruples against the heresy of praying for the souls of the dead. He trusts all to the Lord, and even, in the fervor of his piety, wishes to die, so that he may pass at once to his "home above." No wonder the Lord worked "a miracle" on his behalf. Such faith deserved reward and received it from a God who pities and helps and loves his criminal children much more than their honest victims to whom he allows no opportunity for repentance and conversion when their lives are suddenly cut short. According to Christian theory murderers like Lee are undoubtedly redeemed; for his faith is genuine, and God, who cannot lie, promises heaven to all who believe. The moral sense of the community, however, is beginning to revolt against the sickening spectacle of murderer after murderer edifying the public with religious cant and departing in the full assurance of eternal bliss. We hear of even reputed Christians exclaiming against the admission of such wretches into heaven, and protesting that they and their wives and daughters will scarcely venture to enter such a place if they are expected to associate with company of this description. We trust that the moral revolt against the eternal salvation of scoundrels and the eternal perdition of innocent sufferers and of honest heretics will continue to grow until the great Christian dogma of salvation by faith is universally despised and rejected as it deserves to be from its innate moral deformity and hideousness.

W. P. BALL.

THE GOSPELS.—Apart from continual minor contradictions throughout the first three Gospels, it is impossible to reconcile the representations of the Synoptics with those of the fourth Gospel. They mutually destroy each other as evidence. They must be pronounced mere narratives, compiled long after the events recorded, by unknown persons who were neither eyewitnesses of the alleged miraculous occurrences, nor hearers of the statements they profess to report. They cannot be accepted as adequate testimony for miracles, and the reality of Divine Revelation.—"Supernatural Religion," vol. iii., page 576; 1879.

REVIEWS.

The Commonweal. March.—Mr. William Morris's poem "The Message of the March Wind" is the most attractive feature of this number. The committee of the Socialist League are supposed to edit the *Commonweal*, but the style of the "Editorial" on the first page is easily recognisable. E. Belfort Bax writes vigorously, if a little wildly, on "Gordon and the Soudan." Stepniak contributes a sadly interesting article on "The Actual Position of Russia." F. Engels writes a long suggestive paper on "England in 1845 and in 1885." There are characteristic articles by Paul Lafargue and F. Kitz. Dr. Aveling signs some paragraphs, a form of composition in which he is not quite at home. G. B. Shaw has a brisk sparkling report of the Industrial Remuneration Conference. Eleanor Aveling's column this month is filled with letters of sympathy from some of the leading continental Socialists.

Moods and Memories. By WILLIAM MACCALL. W. Stewart and Co., Holborn Viaduct Steps. Price 2s.—To say that this little volume is far above the ordinary productions of minor poets is faint praise. It is characterised by simplicity and sincerity, qualities too generally deficient in writers who aim at effect. The title is appropriate. The drift of many of the short pieces is mainly autobiographical. All represent either the moods of a cultured and passionate mind or the memories of a long life full of sadness and unrest. Mr. Maccall's inveterate faults of temper and personal injustice to ourselves do not blind us to his native talent and his long and little-rewarded career of literary industry. For any save fashionable poetry there is but a poor market, yet we trust Mr. Maccall has sufficient admirers to make this publication a profitable one. The volume is tastefully got up, and reflects credit on the publishers.

BOARD SCHOOL ESSAYS.
No. 1.—NOAH.

NOER woz a man after God's own 'art, an' 'ad to suns named Jacup and Seesaw. Jacup wanted to get sun porridge from Seesaw as 'is birthrite so God sed e'd drowned the whirled an' all that belonged thereunto, as the peepul were gettin' so wicked. He therefor told Noer to bild a hark an' to go in it an' take to kinds of evry anerual burds beasts and fishes with 'im, and God said he wood make it rain till everythink witch moveth upon the water was drowned even unto the forth generashun. (P.S.—The last five words is a exact quotashun). Noer did as the lord bid him, but 'is wife who lookt back to see the promised land woz turned into a pillow o' salt—a salt woman—but Noer was turned into a *salin'* man. After *salin'* about for sun yers without food or cloze the hark struck on a rock call'd mount arrowroot witch is in the red sea, an' they woz all throne out xcept Noer, who swallerd a wale to keep hisself a flote, and after livin' on locusts for forty daze and nites he was washed up on the river Jawden were the king of the egyptshuns who 'ad erd all about him made 'im prime minister becoz he saw seven noxen eat up seven ears o' weat, witch woz considered a mirrykle in them daze. Noer lived to a ripe old age but 'is daze woz cut short in the pride of his youth. He woz killed by God for strikin' a rock with a snake made from a stick, witch caused the peepul who woz leading 'im threw the dessert to washup a golden carf insted of Crist our lord and savyer. A lass! a lass! so ends the life of one of the greatest 'eroes of modern times.

Not ded but gone before,
Safe in the arms of Jesus.

BILLY BROWN.

A PAIR GUIDE.

THE sky-pilot of Abircairney was at one time visiting some of the outlying members of his flock. Night coming on, found him snugly installed at the farmhouse of Whinnyknowes, about a mile from his residence.

He prepared to start for home. In the meantime, however, a dense darkness had set in, and, to prevent accident, it was deemed advisable to call into requisition the services of the halfin, or herd laddie, who, with the stable-bowet or lantern, preceded, to light the minister on his way. When the two had got some distance upon their journey, the following colloquy is said to have ensued:

Minister: Well, my lad, and what do you generally do about the farm? What is your usual employment?

Boy: Weel, sir, I rin the errands, herd the kye, an' help wi' ony odd job that's gaun. An' what div ye dae, gin I may speir? (evidently not aware of the ghostly character of the interlocutor).

Minister (thinking, no doubt to improve the occasion): My business, my lad, is not altogether unlike what you are at present engaged in—my business is to guide men from earth to heaven.

Boy (after a pause): Eh, man, man, ye'll mak a pair guide, I doot, when ye canna e'en guide yer ainsel 'tween the ferm toon o' Whinny knowes an' the clachan o' Abircairney.

"THERE now," said a little girl, after looking through some drawers, "poor grandma's gone to heaven and left her spectacles behind her."

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE REPEAL OF THE BLASPHEMY LAWS.
TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

DEAR MR. FOOTE,—The readers of the *Freethinker* ought to fully understand that if the attempt which will be made next year to repeal the Blasphemy Laws is to succeed, much earnest work must be done this year. New members must join us, and old members must help with new subscriptions. I shall have pleasure in sending copies of our report to all applicants, and will give any further assistance in my power to any voter who wishes to bring the question before the constituency in which he resides.—Truly yours,
W. SHARMAN.
29 Frenchwood Street, Preston.

FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

"THOU SHALT NOT SUFFER A WITCH TO LIVE" (EX. XXII., 18).—So little light did the Bible afford regarding the atrocity of the proceedings against witches, that the Secession Church of Scotland, comprising many intelligent clergymen and a large number of the most serious and religious of the people, complained, in their annual Confession of personal and national sins (printed in an Act of their Associate Presbytery at Edinburgh in 1743), of "the penal statutes against witches having been repealed by Parliament, contrary to the express law of God."—George Combe, "Constitution of Man," chap. ix.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL COURTS.—Howard, in the course of his visits to the English gaols, mentions that in Rothwell Gaol, in Yorkshire, he found a weaver named William Carr, who, "having given a bad name to a woman who was said not to deserve a very good one," was cited before the Ecclesiastical Court and imprisoned "until he shall have made satisfaction to the Holy Church as well for the contempt as for the injury by him done unto it." He lay in prison from May, 1774, to July, 1776, when he was released by an Insolvent Act which forgave that class of debtors their fees. In 1797 two women were committed to Northampton Gaol by virtue of the writ "De excommunicato capiendo," "because they had wickedly contemned the power of the keys."—W. E. H. Lecky, "England in the Eighteenth Century," chap. xiii., vol. iii., p. 495.

A WORD ON BLASPHEMY.—Whose religious feelings, then, are likely to be wounded by "atrocious blasphemies," by "blasphemous indecencies?" . . . The feelings of tract distributors, scripture-readers, polemical parsons, all those in general who violate every courtesy of life to thrust their narrow-minded dogmas upon others, and who preach everlasting damnation against people too sensible to care for their ranting! They outrage our reason, they vilify our human nature, they blaspheme our world, they pollute our flesh, and they wind up by dooming us to eternal torture because we differ from them: these trifles are, of course, not supposed to hurt our feelings. We endeavor to enthrone human reason, to ennoble human nature, to restore the human body to its pure dignity, to develop the beauty and glory of the world; and we wind up, not by retorting upon them their fiendish curses, not even by laughing at the idea of an almighty and all-good God, but by laughing at their notions of an almighty and all-good God who has ja Hell ready for the vast majority of us: this horrible laugh lacerates their pious sensibilities, and we hear the venomous whine of "atrocious blasphemy." After condemning us to death they commit us for contempt of court, which surely is an anomalous procedure!—James Thomson (B. V.), "Satires and Profanities," p. 67-68; 1884.

IN A HOPELESS MINORITY.

MIKE MCGLOIN found himself delayed one Sunday in a country town where a big revival was in progress. Mike had a supply of fluid rations and was quite liberal in his state of feelings. On hearing the shouting and singing in the church, Mike went in to observe the proceedings. He was forced to find a seat near the front row, usually reserved for "the mourners." The meeting was growing interesting, and the preacher grew fervent. Soon he called out—

"All of you who want to go to heaven, please stand up!"

Every one in the church stood up except Mike, who didn't comprehend that he was a part of the "everybody" addressed.

The preacher and the congregation stared at Mike very hard, and the former saw a chance to administer a rebuke, and when the people were again seated, he called—

"Now, all of you who want to go to hell, stand up!"

He stared hard at Mike, and Mike dimly catching on to the formalities of the affair, stood up in view of the whole crowd. Seeing no one standing but himself and the preacher, Mike solemnly waved his hand at the latter and said:

"Well, (hic), parson, it 'pears that you'n me iz (hic) in er hopeless minority; don't it?"

The meeting was adjourned by the horrified preacher, amid the suppressed laughter of the crowd, and Mike was helped to lodgings by the constable.

PROFANE JOKES.

"WHAT is an epistle?" asked a Sunday-school teacher of her class.—"The wife of an apostle," replied a young hopeful.

A WISCONSIN paper, after describing a farm which the advertiser wants to sell, adds—"The surrounding country is the most beautiful the God of Nature ever made. The scenery is celestial—divine; also two waggons to sell, and a yoke of steers."

LITTLE MAUD: "Mamma, where do people go when they die?" Mamma: "Oh, you must not ask such questions, dear; you will understand all about it when you are a little older." Little Maud (after some reflection): "Mamma, do you know all about it?"

An undertaker in Australia exhibits a coffin in the window of his shop, on the sides of which, in gold letters, is the inscription, "Let Me Hide Myself in Thee." Many mistook this for a trade-mark until they discovered that it was the second line of a verse, the first of which, "Rock of Ages Cleft for Me," was on the other side of the coffin.

A YOUNG lady says: "When I go to a theatre I am very careless of my dress, as the audience are too attentive to the play to observe my wardrobe; but when I go to church I am very particular in my outward appearance, as most people go there to see how their neighbors dress and deport themselves."

A LITTLE boy was talking very loud to one of his companions in the Sunday School. Teacher: "What are you growling about there?" Boy: "He won't give me my knife." Teacher: "Well, let him keep it. God pays all debts." Boy: "Well, I wish he would come and pay my father's debts, because we expect the brokers in on Monday."

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