

# THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

Sub-Editor—J. M. WHEELER.

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COMIC BIBLE SKETCH.—No. 120.



SAMSON'S TIPPLE.

"But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again and he revived."—JUDGES xv., 19.

## VICTOR HUGO.

Two years and a half ago France was mourning the death of Gambetta. Every hostile voice was hushed, and the whole nation bent tearfully over the bier, where a once mighty heart and fervent brain lay cold and still in death. Never, perhaps, since Mirabeau burned out the last of his great life had Paris been so profoundly moved. Gambetta was carried to his grave by a million of men, and in all that tremendous procession no priest figured, nor in all the funeral ceremony was there a word of God. For the first time in history a nation buried her hero without a shred of religious rites or a whisper of any other immortality than the immortality of fame.

France now mourns the death of Victor Hugo, the great poet of the Republic, as Gambetta was its great orator and statesman. These two, in their several ways, did the most to demolish the empire. Gambetta organised and led the Republican opposition, and when the *déchéance* came, he played deep for the Republic in the game of life and death, making the restoration of the empire an impossibility. But long before the young orator challenged the empire, it was arraigned before the bar of liberty and humanity by the great poet. From his lonely channel rock, in the bitter grandeur of exile, Victor Hugo hurled the lightnings and thunders of his denunciation at the political burglar of France and his parasitical minions. Practical people laughed at him, not knowing that he was

more practical than they. They saw nothing but the petty present, and judged everything by its immediate success. He was nourished by sovereign principles, rooted in the depths of the human heart and blossoming in its loftiest aspirations. He was a prophet who chanted his own inspiration to the world, knowing that few would listen at first, but assured that the message would kindle some hearts, and that the living flame would leap from breast to breast till all were wrapt in its divine blaze. He scorned the base successful lie and revered the noble outcast truth, and he had unflinching faith in the response which mankind would ultimately make to the voice of their rightful lord. Great he was as a poet, a romancer and a dramatist, but he was greatest as a prophet. He lived to see his message justified and his principles triumphant, and died at the ripe old age of eighty-three, amid the love and reverence of the civilised world. We are not blind to his failings; he had, as the French say, the defects of his qualities. But they do not obscure his glory. His failings were those of other men; his greatness was his own.

Victor Hugo, like Gambetta, was a Freethinker. We know he professed a belief in God, but he had no theology. His God was Nature, suffused with passion and ideality; and his conviction of "Some far-off divine event, To which the whole creation moves," was only his faith in progress, extended into the remotest future. He was a true Freethinker in his grand assertion of the majesty of reason and conscience. He appealed to the native dignity of the individual and hated priestcraft with a perfect hatred. Lacking humor himself, and brilliant without wit, he could recognise these qualities in others, and he thought them as valid as his own weapons against the dogmas of superstition. How fine was his great word about Voltaire—"Irony incarnate for the salvation of mankind." Like Gambetta, Victor Hugo is to be buried without religious rites, according to his will. No priest is to profane the sanctity of death by mumbling idle words over his grave concerning what he is as ignorant of as the corpse at his feet. In death, as in life, the Freethinker would confront the universe alone from the impregnable rock of his manhood, convinced that

"There is no danger to a man, that knows  
What life and death is: there's not any law  
Exceeds his knowledge: neither is it lawful  
That he should stoop to any other law."

Not only did Victor Hugo will that no priest should officiate at his burial, he ordered that none should approach his bed. But the carrion crows of the death-chamber were not to be deterred by his well-known wishes. The Archbishop of Paris offered to visit the dying heretic and administer to him the supreme unction on behalf of the Church. M. Lockroy, the poet's son-in-law, politely declined the offer. Our newspapers, especially the orthodox ones, regard the Archbishop's message as a compliment. In our opinion it was a brazen insult. Suppose Mr. Bradlaugh wrote to say that he would gladly attend the sickbed of Canon Wilberforce for the purpose of receiving his confession of Atheism; would the orthodox regard it as a compliment or an insult? We fail to see any difference in the two cases, and we know not why impertinence in an Atheist becomes civility in a Christian. Fortunately Victor Hugo's death-chamber was not intruded upon by impudent priests. His relatives respected his convictions the more as they were Freethinkers themselves. No priest will consecrate his grave, but it will be hallowed by his greatness; and what pilgrim, as he bends over the master's tomb, will hear in the breeze, or see in the grass and flowers, any sign that a priest's benison is waiting to his repose? G. W. FOOTE.

## THE NEW OLD TESTAMENT.—II.

THE language in which an inscrutable deity first condescended to reveal his opinions on cosmogony, ancient history, sanitation and other matters, was most admirably adapted to exercise ingenuity in interpretation. Not only are the original characters of Hebrew entirely lost, and some of their modern equivalents, for instance ו and ׀, easily mistaken in manuscripts often written in far from indelible ink; but even in the time of the Talmudists and Jerome, four hundred years after Christ, there were no vowel-points to determine the pronunciation, so that the right reading of a word, whether bill, ball, bull or bell, was determined by oral tradition, which, in the words of Prof. Robertson Smith, "ascribes everything to Ezra which it has not the assurance to refer to Moses."\* Further, as that clerical authority assures us, the text was handed down by interested scribes, who "did not hesitate to make small changes, in order to remove expressions which they thought unedifying."† Thus they altered "Jahveh stood before Abraham" into "Abraham stood before Jahveh." The advice of Job's wife, "Curse God and die," was improved into "Bless God and die." This directly opposite reading is that adopted in all Roman Catholic versions, following the Vulgate, "Benedic Deo et morere." The Revised Version gives neither "bless" nor "curse," but "renounce."

In Judges xviii., 30, the name of Manasseh was substituted for that of Moses, to conceal the fact that the priests of the silver image at Dan traced their descent to the great lawgiver. The Revisers have had the honesty to restore the true reading. The slight omission of the letter ׀ is here, of much historical significance, for it shows that from the time of the grandson of Moses until the captivity, there was a priestly party in Israel who believed image-worship formed part of the Mosaic system. Readers of the Authorised Version have no hint of the light on the early religion of Israel in this passage.

Another difficulty in Hebrew is the confusion between the negative particle and a form of the personal pronoun. Thus we find Psalm c., 3, now translated and "It is he that hath made us, and we are his," instead of "and not we ourselves." Isaiah ix., 3, "Thou hast multiplied the nation and not increased the joy," is altered into its opposite "Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased their joy." Is xlix., 5, "Though Israel be not gathered," is now changed to "That Israel be gathered unto him." Another instance occurs in Job xiii., 15, where the alteration is only presented in the margin, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," being given as "yet will I wait for him," with the alternative "I will not wait." The insertion or omission of the word *not* is evidently a ticklish business in the word of God, and it may be doubted if the revisers are justified in keeping the *not* in italics in Prov xxv., 27. No doubt the version which printed the commandment "Thou shalt commit adultery" was the one followed by David and many of the saints, but the weight of authority is here on the side of inserting the negative.

The most important errors in translating the Old Testament have arisen from an endeavor to make it conform to Christian and modern views. In the New Testament itself are a number of misquotations and false renderings. Thus Matthew quotes as from the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene," a passage not to be found in the prophets, but garbled from Judges xiii., 5; and ascribes to Jeremy a passage found in Zechariah. Mark gives a quotation from Malachi as from Esaias. Paul misquotes Ps. lxxviii., 18, in Eph. iv., 8, and gives in 1 Cor. ii., 9, a misrendering of Isaiah xlv., 4. In the Authorised Version, Ps. civ., 4, is translated as in Heb. i., 7, "Who maketh his angels spirits." The Revised Version gives the very different rendering, "Who maketh winds his messengers." If angels were always transformed into messengers and spirits into winds, the supernaturalism of the Bible would be considerably modified. The Jews render Gen. i., 2, "a mighty wind," instead of the "Spirit of God," and this rendering is endorsed by the Revised Version translating "a mighty prince" in Gen. xxiii., 6, putting "a prince of God" in the margin, "mighty wrestlings," Gen. xxx., 8, instead of "wrestlings of God," "great terror" for "terror of

God" in Gen. xxxi., 8, "mighty thunderings" for "voices of God," Exod. ix., 28, etc. It is needless to mention that the Jews knew nothing of the third and most mysterious person of the ever-blessed Trinity. Ps. viii., 5, no longer follows Hebrews ii., 7, but instead of making man "a little lower than the angels," makes him "but little lower than God." The word "God," however, is still applied to the angel that visits Manoah and his wife (Jud. xiii., 22). The passage where the witch of Endor applies the term *Elohim* to the ghost of Samuel, has that plural word (which is a plain remnant of Jewish polytheism) translated in the plural in the Authorised Version, but "I saw gods ascending" is altered in the Revised Version into "I see a god coming" (1 Sam. xxviii., 14). The passage is interesting, as it confirms Herbert Spencer's theory of the original identity of "God" and "ghost."

We may here complain that the revisers have not pointed out when in the name of the Jew-God the usual *Elohim* is found in the modified *El* and the singular *Eloah*. It would have been better also if, instead of using the *Lord*, which is no translation, they had kept the proper name *Jehovah*, or better still, *Jahveh* or *Yahveh*. In giving the proper name *Asherah*, with the plurals *Asherim* and *Asheroth*, instead of the misleading "groves,"\* they are to be commended, but the curious reader has yet to be informed that the symbols of the goddess *Asheroth* represented the organs of generation, and then, if he will consult the passages where the words occur, and compare 2 Kings xxiii., 7, with Ezekiel xvi., 16, he will have more light on a most ancient religion than he will ever get explained in church. Many of the coarse expressions which have made the public reading of the word of God so painful to delicate minds are now subtly veiled in euphemisms. The American revisers suggest a good deal more toning down in this direction. The essential indecencies of the Bible, however, could not be removed without the entire omission of many of its narratives, and for this reason the Revised Version can no more be recommended for use in Sunday-schools than the Authorised translation.

It has long been known that the Old Testament "hell" had no connexion with the theological place of torment. Where the revisers retain it, they always supply the margin *Sheol*. It would have been better if they had kept this term or "grave" throughout. As it is, ministers are earnestly exhorted to henceforth speak of *Sheol* and *Abaddon* instead of "hell and destruction."

Into the question of the Messianic prophecies, where occur the main differences of rendering between Jews and Christians, I propose to enter next week.

J. M. WHEELER.

"GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES;"  
OR, EVERY MAN HIS OWN GOD.

God helps, 'tis said, the man who helps himself;  
If this be true—and Christians say it is—  
All those who steal, and help themselves to pelf,  
As protégés of heav'n, do godly "biz."  
That this is so, I'll prove from holy writ,  
Which tells us how Jehovah helped the bad  
To help themselves, and cheat the good—to wit  
The trick that Jacob played upon his dad.  
That God-protected, Heav'n-helped, lying sneak,  
Through Jahveh's aid, succeeded all too well:  
The moral is: If honest help you seek  
Don't go to Jacob's god—for, who can tell?  
His evil aid might land you 'fore the "Beak"—  
But go to man; for Heav'n's as bad as Hell.

G. L. MACKENZIE.

## REVIEW.

*Our Corner.* June. Freethought Publishing Co.—Mrs. Besant concludes her very interesting Autobiographical Sketches; A. Gigadibs continues his able "Upshot of Hamlet;" and there is a translation of a brief appreciative notice of Mr. Bradlaugh by S. van Houten, a member of the Dutch Parliament.

A DR. WARREN has published a work announcing the discovery of Paradise. It appears that Eden between the four rivers was really at the North Pole, and mankind has migrated southwards. This accounts for the Lord making coats of skin for Adam and Eve.

\* "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church," p. 81.

† *Ibid.*, p. 78.

\* In 1 Kings xiv., 23, in the Authorised Version, we have the stupidity of "groves . . . under every green tree."

## ACID DROPS.

WE are informed that the Vicar of Rushton, near Desborough, refused to hold forth the other Sunday morning because only thirteen of his parishioners turned up at divine service. This reverend gentleman is more fastidious than his maker. Jesus Christ promised that he would join two or three met together in his name, but the Vicar of Rushton draws the line at thirteen.

EVER since Constantine the Church has been anxious to secure the support of the throne, and a curious illustration of this desire has been furnished recently. The Archbishop of Canterbury, on behalf of Convocation, sent the Queen and the Prince of Wales an early copy of the Revised Bible. These were not common editions, of course, but gorgeously printed and bound, as God's Word should be for persons of such distinction. Her Majesty and his Royal Highness have both acknowledged the gift, and in doing so they send the Archbishop a first-class testimonial. The Queen congratulates the Revisers on performing their "difficult work so successfully," and the Prince refers to its "clearness and accuracy." As the old lady and her eldest son were both suckled by a Jewish wet-nurse, and as each was taught Hebrew so thoroughly by a learned Rabbi that their skill in the language is a matter of common notoriety among scholars, the Revisers will be justly proud of this eminent tribute of praise. Her Majesty and his Royal Highness, however, are probably no more skilful in Greek than they appear to be in English; and we venture to ask whether the Revisers attach equal importance to their praise of the second half of Holy Writ.

"BROTHER SMITH," who is "No. 53" in "541 corps" of the Salvation Army, and whose real name appears to be William Cheney, deserted his two children some years ago, but has at last been caught by the police as he was leaving a Salvation meeting at Thrapston, in Northamptonshire. He was clad in a "blood and fire uniform." The bench sentenced him to three months' imprisonment with hard labor. He will regard himself, we suppose, as another persecuted martyr, suffering all things for Christ's sake. Did not Jesus promise heavenly rewards as well as earthly to all who left wife and children for his sake? (Luke xviii., 29; Mark x., 29; Matt. xix., 29).

ANOTHER Christian martyr, Annie Bell, a "lieutenant" in the Salvation Army has been fined 20s. and costs for singing in the Market place at York, late on Sunday night, after being warned by the chief constable and requested to go away by Thomas Squire whose wife was ill. Of course the Lord's work must be done whatever sick people think of it.

DR. PYWELL recently gave evidence that a girl who had been attending Salvation Army meetings was suffering from religious melancholia. He considered that this form of lunacy was likely to result from attendance at such meetings if indulged in to excess. The magistrate said he thought the public should know that. But the sensible portion of the public know it already, and look upon Salvationism and lunacy as practically identical.

How much lower down, asks a cynic, will the Salvation Barnum play religion? The other day a big cart drove about an English town with a band in it and a banner, and bills were flung about announcing a salvation tea of "ham, jam and glory—9d. a head." Outside the place where the ham and hallelujah went on, there was a bill exhibited—"Come and see the man who was snatched from the jaws of hell in his nightcap!"

THE Rev. C. J. Byng is authority for the statement that people will know each other in heaven just as they do on earth. If a man has ten wives below, he will have ten in heaven, only "spiritualised." If this news gets abroad, we know of some men who would rather risk the kindness of the flames below than venture on a celestial existence. And then, too, think of the poor devil who dies in debt—what amusement it will be for him to be chased all over the highlands of eternity by half-a-dozen tailors and a landlady or two, each with an "itemised" statement of the amount due! No, Mr. Byng, you must give us a more comforting doctrine than that, if you want us to knock for admittance at the pearly gates.—*Sydney Bulletin*.

THE Rev. G. Fleming Williams considers Atheism to be "the result of contracted manhood." Surely this is a misprint? Contracted is the right word?

PROFESSOR CARPENTER is reported by the *Christian Life* as saying that "the present century will go down to posterity as the age which discovered Christianity." What an insult to the Lord! It implies that he sent a religion, which all men are to be saved or damned by, eighteen centuries ago, and has kept it dark ever since, to the perdition of thousands of millions of souls, in order that Professor Carpenter and other Christians of this age might enjoy the luxury of discovering it.

"BIOLOGICAL RELIGION" is the title of a new volume by the Rev. T. C. Finlayson. The reverend gentleman says nothing about the animals of the Bible. Eve's serpent, Balaam's ass,

Samson's ditto, and Jonah's whale, have not even the honor of a mention. How the sky-pilots do neglect the blessed book, though they are always writing about it—we mean round about it!

A COLOGNE Court has just fined a witness fifty marks for refusing to take the oath on the ground that he did not believe in God.

A CHAPLAIN at the seat of war writes home that the first thing he did was to "build an altar to the living God" at the base of operations. But he could not complete his altar with its "retable" and cross to his satisfaction without flowers, which were not easily procurable in the midst of the desert; so he says, "The only thing was to rob Osman Digna, who has a garden close by, near some wells." This was accordingly done, and the altar of the God of the pious invaders was appropriately decorated with the stolen bouquets. We wish that none of the robberies perpetrated by the Church were more serious than this.

THERE is some talk of the Mahomedans in London having a mosque of their own erected here. It is suggested that it might as well be erected near the Greek Church of St. Sophia, Bayswater, Islam and the Greek Church being already close neighbors in the East. Why don't the Buddhists also start a temple in London? The more the merrier, and the more instructive.

THE *Methodist Recorder* declares that "the press with all its advantages is far from being an unmixed blessing." As we have occasion to glance over the columns of the *M. R.*, we feel cordially in accord with its opinion.

SPURGEON'S Tabernacle only flourishes when its pastor is present. In this month's *Sword and Trowel*, Spurgeon complains that, although £400 per week is needed, "no contributions for the work have come for the last three weeks." The Tabernacleites are apparently like John-a-Duck's donkey, that would not go unless personally conducted and stimulated by John-a-Duck himself.

IT must have been in an inspired moment that Doctor Joseph Parker hit on the brilliant idea of issuing his old sermons under the title of "The People's Bible." This is the sort of thing which some people call "a smart stroke of business" and other persons call by a plainer name.

JOSEPH PARKER'S organ the *Christian Chronicle* now advertises a reproduction of Joseph's Bust at 18s. 6d. The ladies of the City Temple congregation will be in danger of breaking the first commandment and falling down and worshipping the graven image when it is set up in their drawing rooms.

MOSES SHRIMPTON who knocked out a policeman's brains near Alvechurch has been writing a pious letter to a friend from Worcester prison. He says, "I poot myself down at the feet of my savour and i think he will hear my prayer and my trust is intirely in im and i am proud to say i feel quite reckensild to im. Please to tell your sister arriott to make herself conted and i hope that we all shall meet in heven." He omits to state whether he is quite reckensild to the police constable, but probably he does not expect to meet him in heaven.

REUBEN SMITH a Salvationist who carries the flag at the Army gatherings at Loftus has been committed for trial at the Gainsborough Police Court for attempting to commit an unnatural offence. Let us hope no more Salvationists will poach on clerical preserves.

THE *Church Times* is very angry with the Old Testament revisers for keeping Deut. xxiii., 23, "Cursed be he that lieth with his mother-in-law." It would prefer the reading "deceased wife's sister."

BISHOP FRASER has been preaching against "Speculative Ceremonialized Gnosticism." He explains that "the Speculative Gnosis of to-day busies itself largely with an objectively localised Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar." We don't pretend to any more acquaintance with the Gnosis than with the Paraclete, but we are quite prepared to admit it might busy itself about something more important.

BLASPHEMY in the *Times* is rather a novelty but the letter from "A British Matron" condemning the nude pictures at the Academy provoked the following reply which was duly inserted.

"TO THE EDITOR OF THE 'TIMES.'

"Sir,—I quite agree with your correspondent, 'A British Matron,' that the human form is a disgrace to decency, and that it ought never to be seen in its natural state.

"But 'A British Matron' does not go far enough, in my humble judgment. She censures the painters, who merely copy Nature. It is God Almighty who is to blame in this matter for having created such an indelicate object.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

"JEROME K. JEROME."

A CORRESPONDENT signing himself "Clericus" supports "A British Matron" and says he cannot venture to look at decent pictures for his eye may meet nudities near them. It is to be hoped "Clericus" will not be sent as a missionary to the South Sea Islands or he will be afraid to look at the landscape lest his eye may meet an unclothed savage.

UNDER the title of "Trust Deeds and State Control" the *Church Quarterly Review* endeavors to show that the Dissenting chapels are as much under the control of the State as the Established Church, and, doubtless, there is some truth in the allegation, since Mr. Stannard, a Congregational minister, was turned out of his chapel at Huddersfield against the wish of the majority of his congregation because he preached doctrines inconsistent with those declared in the trust deeds of the chapel. No doubt in many of these trust deeds rigid Calvinism is enforced, and were the same publicity given in all dissenting chapels to the trust deeds under which they are held as is given to the creeds of the Church of England, persons would notice the vast discrepancy between the doctrines now taught and those to teach which the chapels were originally endowed.

THE *Church Times*, while declaring that disendowment of the Church of England would be robbery, declares "There is, however, one class of endowments which the State might seize with a good conscience, and that is the chapels and endowments of Protestant dissenting bodies which have ceased to exist. There are hundreds of properties given for the purpose of preaching Calvinism by persons, who, as one of the characters of Mrs. Beecher Stowe says, liked to have their 'hell hot,' and this school has happily all but disappeared." It represents Mr. Spurgeon as almost the sole surviving Calvinist, and declares that "the State is the natural heir of the founders of Calvinistic chapels and ought to have them." When Episcopalian and Dissenting rogues so fall out honest Secularists should have a chance of getting their own.

ONE Ecclesia Chudleigh has devoted his time and talents to writing a book with the title "Was Abraham a Christian?" Who could doubt it when they consider his readiness to sacrifice his son Isaac, and kick out the mother of his son Ishmael? Mr. Chudleigh concludes that Abraham was about as good a Christian as they made them "in those days."

THE Rev. Sandy McWrath, of Kiljoy, N.B., is delighted to find that the Revised Version has changed "organs" into "pipes." (Gen. iv., 21; Ps. cl, 4). The Jews knew nothing of the "kist o' whistles." Their instrumentation was admirably illustrated in the *Freethinker* for September 7, 1884.

THE Rev. Ambrose Cave, clergyman of the Church of England, has been repeating his drunken exploits, this time in the streets of London. Mr. Hannay fined him 5s.

THE clergy of Portland, U. S., have requested the press of that city to suppress all details of criminal reports. The press might very fairly retort by requesting the clergy to suppress the indecent and ruffianly details of the biblical reports of sanctified vice and crime.

THE *War Cry* is so successful that General Booth wants a new machine to print it. Instead of purchasing one with the profits, he issues an appeal for funds "to all interested in the spread of Salvation" in which he says, on the authority of "experienced printers" of the old machine, that "if it had been used for any other purpose than that of salvation it would have come to grief long since." The machine has only been kept from breakdown by the exclusive use of holy oil prepared according to the recipe given by Jahveh unto Moses.

ACCORDING to the New York *Truthseeker*, a Methodist clergyman recently in England visited Westminster Abbey, and has given an account of what he saw in the columns of the *Methodist Independent*. This worthy says that the tomb which attracts most attention is inscribed "Sacred to the memory of Thomas Sayers, England's famous prize-fighter." Few of our American cousins will guess that the redoubtable Tom was buried at Highgate Cemetery, or believe that at his grave Bendigo, the converted pugilist preached from the text "Hit his eye, Peter, be not afraid."

THE *English Churchman* has the good taste to speak of Mr. Gladstone as "Lord kill-Gordon, the G. O. M."

DURING a religious meeting, one of the persons who occupied the platform was an enthusiastic deacon, who frequently interrupted the speakers by yelling, "Thank Heaven for that!" One clergyman was called on, who arose and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I am heart and soul in this cause, and I feel that it will be a great benefit to the people of this place." "Thank Heaven for that!" yelled the deacon. "But, ladies and gentlemen," he continued, "I am sorry to say it will be impossible for me to address you this evening—" "Thank Heaven for that!" shouted the absent-minded deacon, and the chairman took him out of doors and had two men sit on him!

## FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

THE DEATHS OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA (Acts v., 1-11).—There were no coroner's inquests in those days; but if a full and searching inquiry had been made into these mysterious deaths by some Roman official, how could Peter have explained the startling tragedy.—"The Evolution of Christianity," p. 287; 1883.

JAHVEH AND CIRCUMCISION.—The mark of the covenant observe is to be borne not only by Abraham and those of his blood, but also by those whom he has bought. The mark is a strange one, and the extension of it is strange, if we assume it to be imposed by the Creator of the Universe, as a mark on a favored man and his descendants; and on this assumption it is no less strange that one transgression for which every "soul shall be cut off" is not any crime, but the neglect of this rite. But such a ceremony insisted upon by a living potentate under penalty of death is not strange; for, as we shall hereafter see, circumcision is one of various mutilations imposed as marks on subject persons by terrestrial superiors.—*Herbert Spencer*, "Principles of Sociology," vol. i, p. 436; 1876.

THE DISCIPLES.—But what are we to think of the conduct of these disciples? "They all forsook him and fled." They ran off and left their divine master in the hands of the multitude. Besides the manifestation of love for their master, it was very like the conduct of men impregnated with divinity. Very like the conduct of men possessing power to move mountains. Very like the conduct of men able to raise the dead. As to their own powers, they knew they possessed none (excepting Peter, who thought of doing something with the sword); they felt themselves powerless, but they still had faith in the power of Jesus; they expected, I dare say, that every moment he would rise up into the air like a balloon, and carry the whole of them after him; but finding, at last, that his divinity, like their own, was all a farce, they forsook him and fled.—*C. J. Haslam*, "Letter XXI. to the Clergy of all Denominations."

A CHRISTIAN PARABLE.—In the Parable of the Vineyard (Matt. xx., 1-16) a very suggestive piece of moral argument is to be met with, apparently advanced as sound and conclusive: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" This is well worth noting as an instance of how a thing may seem natural and self-evident to minds in one age, and the very reverse to others, when some centuries have elapsed; for modern morality—in her hatred of anything like selfish despotism—would unhesitatingly reply to such a question, "Certainly not, unless what you do is thoughtful and just." Nor does arbitrary conduct, such as that of the owner of the vineyard, admit of an easy vindication. What should we say of an English farmer, who paid his laborers after this fashion, and then answered a reasonable remonstrance with, "I choose to do this, you can go."—*J. F. Yorke*; "Notes on Evolution," p. 191; 1882.

### THE ATONEMENT.

A third part of Jehovah died  
To stop the other two  
From having man for ever fried,  
And roasted through and through.

From this, it seems to me quite plain,  
These three did not agree,  
Else, wherefore should the angry twain  
Be stopped by number three?

Now, if this Triad disagreed,  
How could the three be one?  
They must have been three gods, indeed,  
This Father, Ghost and Son.

As 'twas the Son alone who died,  
I'll swear "till all is blue,"  
That he ne'er meant us to be fried:  
'Twas but the other two.

For if the three meant us to fry,  
Each had to be appeased;  
So each in turn would have to die,  
And each in turn be pleased.

Whichever way this god did die—  
In part or in the "lump"—  
If we the bloody fact deny  
In hell we're sure to jump!

Now God! look here! I've read your book,  
And, if I'm not a fool,  
It clearly shows your anger took  
Four thousand years to cool!

For, if you'd wished to purify,  
And save men's souls from hell,  
Why was it that you didn't die  
The day that Adam fell?

G. L. MACKENZIE.

## SPECIAL NOTICE.

## MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, May 31, Milton Hall, Hawley Crescent, Kentish Town, at 7.30, on "The New Bible: or God's Word brought up to Date."

JUNE 7, Liverpool; 14, Plymouth; 21, Manchester; 28, Bristol.

JULY 5, Hall of Science, London; 12, Camberwell; 19, Milton Hall; 26, Claremont Hall.

## 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.—R. E.
- R. CHEREL writes that Mr. J. Christ, the Kentish Town baker, whom T. Evan Jacob inquires about, dispenses loaves without fishes at 37 Wellesley Road, Queen's Crescent. We dare say his bread of life is quite as good as his ancient namesake's.
- R. W.—The fourth General Council of Lateran (1215) decreed full remission of all sins to those who set themselves to extirpate heretics. Pope Innocent III. declared that heretics should be caught with guile, and that no oaths in their favor were binding against the Church. Pope Martin V. wrote to the Duke of Lithuania: "Be assured thou sinnest mortally in keeping faith with heretics," and Pope Gregory IX.: "Be it known to all under the jurisdiction of those who have openly fallen into heresy, that they are free from the obligation of fidelity, dominion and every kind of obedience." In the case of John Huss, who was promised a safe conduct by the Emperor Sigismund if he would appear before the Council of Constance, that council decreed that no safe conduct to heretics could over-ride ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and he was committed to the flames. In the appendix to Pascal's Provincial Letters you will find even worse instances of Catholic casuistry.
- W. F. C.—Many thanks. We have A. Lamson's "Church of the First Three Centuries," which is a very good work from the Unitarian standpoint. The extracts show how uncertain was the Hebrew text in the time of Origen.
- R. BARNES.—The oldest MSS. of the Old Testament belong to the 10th and 11th centuries of our era. There is virtually only one Hebrew text, instead of the variety of readings found in different copies of the Greek Testament. But we know from the early Greek and Syriac translations, and from the citations in the Fathers and the Talmud, that the earlier texts were often very different from that now received. Scholars agree that the Jews fixed on one as the standard and destroyed all other copies.
- "ONE WHO BELIEVES WHAT HE SEES."—We were very interested in your "yarn," and are rejoiced to know that Freethought is progressing in the Navy. We send Tracts under cover.
- J. B. S.—The Fathers of the Church actually discussed the question whether Adam had a navel.
- F. CLAYDON.—Thanks for bill and suggestions.
- J. GENTIFEE.—We should be glad to receive the authority for the statement about Talleyrand.
- D.—Very good; we hope to use it.
- J. E. ROOSE.—Thanks for the reference, although it was known to us. No doubt it will serve our turn by-and-bye.
- IGNORAMUS.—Mr. Bradlaugh was put in the Clock Tower for insisting on taking his seat in face of the bigoted majority. Your friend must have invented the story of Mr. Bradlaugh being fined for a libel. The libels are all the other side so far as we know. Glad to hear that you so heartily enjoy the *Freethinker* and *Progress*.
- SHAYTON.—Drawing is necessary in pictures. Ideas are of no use without it.
- VOLTAIRE.—Mr. Foote has forwarded the subjects. We decline to discuss the other matter. You say you have read all that has been written on both sides; if so, you have as good means of forming an opinion as we have.
- S. BROWN.—Thanks. See our article on Hugo.
- W. V.—Thanks for the cutting and joke. Part II. of Comic Bible Sketches will be published before long. The churchy smell you detect in Part I. must come from the ink or the Devil. Perhaps Mr. Ramsey will be able to supply you with a copy of "Hell Open to Christians."
- G. GREIG.—The idiotic passage is worthy of the *Anti-Infidels*. We are glad to read your letter, but our illustrations scarcely need any defence now. They have justified themselves.
- A. H. HUNTER.—We are sorry you find Freethought so inactive in Nottingham after London. The Liberation Society, Sergeant's Inn Court, Fleet Street, will supply you with good literature on the Church and State question. Thanks for your sympathy and good wishes, and your opinion after turning again to our first number issued four years ago, that we have kept our word.
- G. WHEELER asks us to announce that a meeting of Coventry Freethinkers will be held on Sunday, May 31, at the City Coffee Tavern, Fleet Street, for the purpose of forming a Secular Society.
- W. G. CHAMBERS.—Received with thanks. Pleased to hear you find "Job's Excursion" "is rich and would make even John Calvin smile."
- E. J. WATSON.—Thanks for the cuttings. If you wish to join the N. S. S. why not do so through the Birmingham Branch? The subscription for members who join through the General Secretary (Mr. R. Forder, 6 Cambridge Terrace, Islington, London, N.) is four

shillings a year. Glad to hear that the *Freethinker* (supplemented with *Progress*) is your Sunday paper, and that you think the *Shadow of the Sword* one of the best pamphlets you ever read.

H. P. BOWDEN.—It would be impossible to prosecute the Bible for obscenity. No magistrate would grant a summons. Thanks for the cutting.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Freethinkers' Magazine—Liberal—Derby Daily Telegraph—Horsham Times—Oldham Evening Express—Leicester Daily Mercury—War Cry—Liverpool Post.

## "FREETHINKER" PRIZES.

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 suitable for reproduction; the competition to close on June 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.

At the annual meeting in Exeter Hall of the Blue Ribbon Gospel Temperance movement, the Rev. Dr. Clifford said that "when the reformation was born, organised Christianity looked upon it with suspicion, and thirty years ago teetotalers were a terror in an ecclesiastical assembly, and were looked upon as revolutionary Radicals." What is this but admitting that temperance, like every other reform, began outside the Church and progressed in spite of it?

MORE wailings over the people who won't come to church! At the recent Congregational Conference in London, the Rev. W. Hewgill deplored the fact that "attendance at public worship was sadly decreasing," and cited the Mayor of Salford, who recently stated that there was not accommodation for one-fourth of the population of that town, yet it was more than enough, for not one in eight attended public worship. At this rate Freethinkers need not be in too great a hurry about building new halls. They will soon be able to buy a few played-out churches and chapels.

The religionists are always complaining of want of funds but now it seems not without cause. The religious papers report that the May meetings have been more thinly attended than formerly. There have been not only more empty seats but sparser collections. All this is cheering. It is especially gratifying to learn that the London Missionary Society is twelve thousand pounds in debt and sees little prospect of making up the deficiency. Freethought operations are extending as religious ones diminish. With a tithe of their funds we would guarantee to put their results into insignificance.

The *Freethinker's Magazine* edited by H. L. Green of Salamanca, New York, is a capital publication. The March number amid a variety of interesting matter contains a spirited defence of the demands of American Freethinkers entitled "Secularization." It is from the pen of Frederick May Holland, author of "The Rise of Intellectual Liberty from Thales to Copernicus."

WE are pleased to notice from the *Freethinker's Magazine* that a committee has been found for the purpose of establishing a Freethought college in America.

MR. FOOTE will take the chair at Mr. W. W. Collins's lecture in the Camberwell Secular Hall, New Church Road, next Wednesday evening. It will be Mr. Collins's first lecture in that part of London, and we hope he will meet with the hearty welcome he deserves.

## A PROPHECY OF DANIEL'S.

A REVEREND gentleman recently, challenged for a single proof of the genuineness of revelation, gave the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy of the "seventy weeks" as a conclusive evidence of the supernatural inspiration of the Bible. He said that seventy weeks of years had elapsed between the issuing of Cyrus's decree for the restoration of Jerusalem and the appearance of Christ, exactly as foretold by Daniel. So conclusive was the proof, that he said he had put the case to a Jew, who was forced to acknowledge that the expected Messiah must have appeared either about the time of Jesus or previously. Whether this Jew was one of the costly but worthless renegades secured by the lavish expenditure of the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, or whether he was only ignorant and incompetent, was a question which the reverend gentleman of course did not touch upon. If the proofs from Old Testament prophecy are so clear and certain as this clergyman

maintains, it is strange indeed that educated Jews look upon the Christian allegations with such profound contempt—a contempt, I may add, almost invariably merited by reason of their preposterous nature, their stupid and dishonest distortions of the original, their wild assumptions, their childish and far-fetched analogies, and their general weakness and absurdity.

Daniel's prophecy (ix., 24—27) commences thus :

“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.”

Jesus did not make an end of sins, and has not to this day, as we can all see for ourselves, though he (or, more probably, his followers in after years) introduced the fiction of everlasting righteousness by faith in his blood. Neither did he “seal up” the vision and prophecy (the Revised Version has “seal up vision and prophecy”), for the Holy Spirit inspired the visions and prophecies of Revelation long after Christ's death. The “most Holy” may mean either person or place (see marg. ref., Revised Old Testament). Supposing, however, that these difficulties are got over by various pretexts or methods of interpretation, and that the preaching peasant of the gospels is identified with the anointed prince of the prophecy, the question of time, the main point in the matter, remains. Seventy prophetic weeks of *years*—not, of course, of centuries, or months, or æons, or ordinary weeks, for these would not fit the facts—would be 490 years. Turning to Pinnock's Analysis, a condensed text-book from which, when a Christian student, I “crammed” my Scripture history, I find that the great decree of Cyrus (Ezra i., 1; Is. xliv., 28) was put forth in 536 B.C.;\* so that 536 years elapsed between the decree and the birth of Christ, or 569 between the decree and the atoning crucifixion, and not 490 only, as required by the prophecy. To obviate this objection Christians have to fall back on one of the various subsequent confirming edicts issued by succeeding monarchs. As 490 years before the crucifixion would be 457 years before Christ's birth, it is evident, to Prideaux and other Christians, that the decree of Artaxerxes (Ezra vii., 27; 11—27) to “beautify” the already restored temple, must necessarily be the one referred to by Daniel; for this decree is said to have been issued in 459 B.C., a date which very nearly satisfies orthodox requirements, being only two years out. Some Christians, however, prefer to start from the decree given to Nehemiah (Neh. ii., 1—7) in the year 446 B.C., which Dr. Pinnock (par. 561) treats as the same decree which Prideaux dates 459 B.C. A prophecy which requires so much manipulation of somewhat obscure and disputable dates, and the substitution of an obviously different event from that really referred to, is of no value except as proving the unreliability of inspiration or the absurdity of Christian interpretations thereof.

The 25th verse somewhat complicates the matter by making the period 69 weeks of years in all, and not 70; but we need not be particular to a week or two. The “Messiah the Prince” should be merely the anointed prince, and is rendered in the Revised Version as “the anointed one, the prince.” If this anointed prince should be called the Messiah, so also should Cyrus, who is described as the Lord's anointed in Isaiah xlv., 1.

It seems to me that the “seventy weeks” of the alleged prophecy are simply the seventy years of captivity which had already elapsed, and had been followed by the return and the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Jer. xxv., 11—12; xxix., 10). The decree was issued in the “first year of Cyrus” (Ezra i., 1) and the verse immediately following the pseudo-prophecy shows that Daniel (supposing him for the moment to be the author of the book) wrote at least as late as the “third year of Cyrus” (Dan. x., 1), so that he was not prophesying in advance in this particular at least.

The Revised Version alters the punctuation of verso 25, and the period intervening between the decree and Christ's appearance thus becomes *seven weeks only* instead of sixty-nine or seventy! The position of the colon being changed,

\* Or in 559 B.C. (compare paragraphs 547 and 556 and Ezra i., 1), which makes the discrepancy still greater.

the time is cut into two unequal halves, and the “three score and two weeks” are thus made to apply separately to the rebuilding “with street and moat.” What do our prophecy-mongers say to this serious alteration of the old Word of God? Will they accept it, and own that they been proving inspiration by the alleged fulfilment of a falsified prophecy?

W. P. BALL.

(To be concluded).

## THE BIRMINGHAM CONFERENCE.

THE Conferences of the National Secular Society get better every year. Last Sunday's gathering at Birmingham was the greatest success we have yet scored. The local Branch carried out all the preliminary arrangements in the most admirable manner, and deserves especial praise for inducing the authorities to grant the use of the splendid Town Hall for the evening meeting.

Alexandra Hall, where the Conference was held, is not naturally a handsome edifice, particularly in its interior; but the Birmingham friends had done their utmost to make it look pleasant. All the windows were draped with snowy lace curtains, and darker drapery relieved the monotony of the bare walls. A huge banner, inscribed with “Welcome,” was hung across the hall below the ceiling. The platform, though small, was commodiously arranged, and plenty of fine flowers gave it a gay and genial appearance.

Delegates were present from all the following branches:—Bury, Barrow in Furness, Ball's Pond, Blackburn, Brighton, Bedlington, Battersea, Birmingham, Bermondsey, Chatham, Cramlington, Central London, Camberwell, Crewe, Cardiff, Dewsbury, Deptford, Darwen, Derby, East London, Grimsby, Houghton-le-Spring, Hackney, Huddersfield, Halifax, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Mossley, Nottingham, Newcastle, Norwich, North London, North-West London, Oldham, Paddington, Portsmouth, Plymouth, South Shields, Staleybridge, South London, Swindon, Southampton, Stourbridge, Sheffield, Wednesbury, Woolwich, Westminster, West Ham, West Central London.

Mr. Bradlaugh took the chair punctually at half-past ten; perhaps a minute earlier, for punctuality is one of his strong points, and he seems to carry a watch a minute or two ahead of most people's. On the platform were Mrs. Besant, the Misses Bradlaugh, Mr. G. W. Foote, Mr. John Robertson, Mr. R. Forder, Mr. G. Standring, Mr. R. O. Smith, Mr. Le Lubez, and Mr. R. O. Cooper. The hall was full of delegates and friends; so much so, indeed, that some disturbance was caused by the difficulty in finding seats for late comers, delayed by the railway companies not going by Mr. Bradlaugh's watch.

The President informed the meeting he was a little hoarse through cold and overwork. The fact was evident, but it soon disappeared. He also asked the delegates to cut their speeches short, unless they wished to resume the Conference on the morrow.

Then came the President's report; an interesting document, which we regret we cannot print in full. The balance in hand was £248 2s. 9½d., despite the previous bad year. As for the year's work, it will be pretty well known already to readers of the *Freethinker*. We may remark that the reference to Mr. Symes's work out in Australia was heartily cheered. Mr. Sharman's name, in connexion with the Society for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, was received with enthusiasm.

Then came the election of President for the ensuing year. Mr. Bradlaugh was nominated, and immediately vacated the chair, which was taken by Mr. Foote. The nomination was seconded by a lady. Messrs. Hart and Chambers having delivered eulogiums on Mr. Bradlaugh, and other speakers being obviously ready to follow suit, Mr. Foote implored them to do nothing of the kind. There was plenty of business to do, and they ought to have some consideration for Mr. Bradlaugh's feelings. He had been proposed and seconded by a representative of each sex, and might therefore be regarded as representing the right and left wings of the party, everybody being free to decide which was which. There was some laughter, and the vote being promptly taken, Mr. Bradlaugh was unanimously elected President, resuming the chair amidst vociferous applause.

Mr. Le Lubez was re-elected Treasurer, with Mr. W. H. Reynolds as Assistant-Treasurer; and Mr. Robert Forder as Secretary, all agreeing that he was the right man for the post.

Mr. Bradlaugh then made a communication from the Anticlerical League, of France, inviting the N. S. S. to send delegates to the International Congress at Rome. Mr. Bradlaugh and Mr. Foote were both unable to go, and as the time was so short (only a week) it was decided to do nothing at present, but to send two delegates to the unveiling of Giordano Bruno's statue at Rome next February. Mr. Foote then proposed the following resolution, which was carried unanimously:—“That this Conference thanks the Roman Committee for undertaking the necessary arrangements for erecting a monument to Giordano Bruno, and pledges itself to render them every assistance in their effort to leave posterity a visible memorial of one of the noblest martyrs of Freethought.”

On behalf of the Executive, Mr. Foote then proposed that "The Conference take steps, by appointing a committee or otherwise, to revise the Prospectus of the Society."—Carried: The Executive being left to appoint the committee. Another proposal from the same was also carried: "That once a year each Branch shall make a collection for the Special Lecturing Fund."

Then came the great bone of contention. Mr. Foote proposed, and Mr. Rogers seconded, "That special grants from the fund be discontinued or reduced to a minimum, and that the diploma issued to special lecturers carry with it a guarantee of £26 per year for three years." The object was to substitute some kind of certainty for the existing chaos. When a young lecturer had undergone a severe examination and taken the Society's diploma, he should be entitled to some assistance in introducing himself completely to Societies throughout the country. The sum proposed was only a small one, but it was as much as the Society could afford, and it would be better than casual sums begged for the lecturer as he went along. The guarantee would only hold for three years, at the end of which time the lecturer would stand or fall on his merit. The N. S. S. ought not to remain indifferent to the success of the lecturers it ostensibly encouraged with diplomas. If it did, it would see its most promising advocates drafted off one by one to the colonies, where they would be treated, not so much in a more generous as in a more just manner. Lecturers like Mr. Bradlaugh, Mrs. Besant and Mr. Foote, who had won renown by long years of struggle and sacrifice, could take care of themselves; but similar hardships ought not to be imposed on every fresh candidate for platform honors, now that the Secular party was powerful enough to help them through their first difficulties.

This proposal excited a great deal of opposition, as well as some support. Among its defenders was Mr. Arthur Moss, who does not hold a diploma, and has never made an application for assistance from the Fund. It was his first speech at an N. S. S. Conference, but we hope not his last. Among the opponents was Mrs. Besant, from whom unfavorable criticism was not expected. She thought the diploma should be regarded as an honor, and any emolument attached to it was derogatory to the lecturer's dignity. She would like to see the distinction between special and other lecturers abolished, but did not explain how this was consistent with the issue of diplomas. Other speakers, too numerous to name, shared in the discussion. One called the meagre £26 a salary; another thought its colossal proportions would tempt adventurers; another thought it would set up a sort of priesthood; and another thought a lecturer provided with the magnificent sum of £26 a year might enjoy his salary without working at all. Mr. Brumage, representing the Portsmouth Branch, moved the direct negative, which the President could not consider an amendment. Then Mr. Payne, of Manchester, moved that the administration of the Fund should remain as at present, but the Committee should be recommended to be more liberal, and, if possible, secure each lecturer the sum of £26 a year. This amendment was finally carried by a small majority, the votes having to be counted. The question is, therefore, shelved for another year; it cannot be shelved for ever.

This discussion had to be adjourned at the close of the morning session, and it occupied some time in the afternoon. The remainder of the second session was chiefly spent in a series of strategic withdrawals. All the motions on the Agenda were sacrificed by their movers, with the consent of the Conference, except that of the Brighton Branch as to the travelling expenses of a provincial auditor, and Mr. Pomeroy's (Neath) proposal that the "Executive should be requested to take steps to procure the compilation of a Secular Hymn Book for the public and private use of Secularists." Mr. Pomeroy justified his proposal in a very neat little speech. The Newcastle delegate warmly supported it, and several others spoke approvingly. Mr. Bradlaugh drew attention to the probable expense, but Mr. Smith, of Plymouth, said that difficulty could be met, and as a practical man, he had no hesitation in promising that somebody should print a few thousand copies that could be sold at a low price. A delegate pointed out that more than one useful book already existed, notably Mrs. Besant's. This reference brought the lady to her feet, and she was loudly cheered. She explained that her Hymn Book had been out of print for some years, and it did not contain any music; but she should be happy to hand over for the new Hymn Book some copyrights she had in connexion with her own, and to render any other assistance in her power. The motion was carried unanimously. Rightly, too, but it will involve a very tough bit of work for somebody.

When the business of the N. S. S. was over there was an open Conference for all Freethinkers. Nothing took place but a little genial and general conversation; there was indeed no time for anything else. Mr. Foote proposed a vote of thanks to the Birmingham Branch, which was acknowledged by Mr. W. W. Collins, who made a graceful little speech and met with a flattering reception. Mr. Bradlaugh then closed the Conference with a few earnest words of congratulation on the past and exhortation for the future.

Between the two sessions a capital dinner was provided for the delegates at the Market Hotel. The meal was seasoned with good conversation, and any Socialist dropping in from abroad might have fancied, from the "happy family" style of things, that in England at least the millennium had actually begun.

The public meeting in the Town Hall, at 7 o'clock, was a

grand success. The splendid building was crammed from the organ to the front doors. Several local notabilities were seated on the platform, and many more were ensconced in obscurer parts of the hall, where they could escape attention. It requires some nerve to sit on the platform at a diabolical Freethought meeting, and be talked about all over the town.

Mr. Bradlaugh occupied the chair. He was loudly cheered on rising. Thanking the authorities for granting the use of the Town Hall for such a meeting, and explaining its purpose, he introduced Mr. W. W. Collins, whose reception showed that he is certainly not without honor in his own town. Mr. Collins's speech was brief, too brief, but vigorous and pointed, and ended in a storm of applause. His definition of Freethought as the assertion of a man's right "to think as he can" was particularly appreciated, and the manner in which it was illustrated elicited the warmest approval.

Mr. Thomas Slater, late of Bury, but now of Leicester, followed with a speech of characteristic earnestness, full of the good sentiment and practical wisdom which have gained him so much sympathy and respect in co-operative circles, where he has labored for many years.

Mr. Foote, as the *Birmingham Post* says, "was enthusiastically received." It was some time before he could begin to speak. The warmth of his reception was so marked that it must be apparent to all that his thorough-going policy has far from alienated the sympathies of Radical Birmingham. Birmingham, he said, had all this century been associated with freedom. What progress since Priestley's house was wrecked by a bigoted mob urged on by the Tories and the clergy! He thanked the authorities for having the courage, as well as the enlightenment, to grant the use of that noble hall for a Freethinkers' meeting. He was not sure that any other city or town would repeat the experiment to-morrow, but now Birmingham had taken the lead they would all have to follow, however long they might be in imitating the example. There was a more certain connexion than Lord Salisbury's critics knew of between Radicalism and Freethought, mental liberty and political freedom. The practical Liberals of to-day were only carrying out the principles of the philosophical Radicals of forty, fifty and sixty years ago, such as Bentham, Grote, and James and John Mill, who were all pronounced Freethinkers. Wherever Radical battles were fought, Freethinkers were found in the van. Freethought was in the air now; people breathed it unconsciously as they did the atmosphere. What progress the cause had made since Bruno was burned to ashes. Victor Hugo was to be buried without a priest in a country where a century ago men could be butchered and tortured by priests, but where now almost every eminent man is a Freethinker. Yes, the great wheel of Progress turned slowly. Watched, it seemed almost still; but look at it at long intervals and what a sweep it had made!

Mrs. Besant came next, and was of course cheered to the echo. She seemed physically a little tired, but the spirit burned clear. Her speech was listened to with profound attention. She dwelt chiefly on education, without which Freethought is impossible or ineffectual. Admirable were her remarks on the wider life opened up to the people by the spread of knowledge and the exercise of intelligence. The cause was growing day by day, and every fresh Conference served to mark new steps in advance. Ages ago the soldiers of liberty were few. They flung themselves against the walls of superstition and were sacrificed. But their flag was never quite trampled under foot, and now there was gathering behind its bearers a great army, full of determination and confident of victory. The hour of victory was not yet decided but it would come, and its quickness depended on Freethinkers being brave in speech, open in the avowal of their principles, and ready to face the world in their defence. They might hasten the triumph by remembering the gallant heroes who made the struggle easier by their sufferings, and catching inspiration from their glorious example.

Mr. Bradlaugh spoke last. He was received as he always is by a crowded audience. After thanking the Mayor and Corporation of Birmingham for their liberality, he said that the victory of Freethought would not be won without trial and suffering; it would have to be striven for as Mr. Foote had striven for it through imprisonment, and as Mrs. Besant had striven for it through a mother's agony. All he claimed was fair play. Toleration he despised; no one had any right to tolerate him. He demanded equality. The English Government ruled three hundred and fifty millions of people of all religions. Some of these could not be right, and all might be wrong. It was the duty of the State to hold the scale level for all. Freethought was growing, despite all obstacles. Priestley's library was scattered by a pious mob a hundred years ago; now his memory was honored, and they were there in the Birmingham Town Hall scattering his thoughts in speech. An eloquent tribute to Victor Hugo closed Mr. Bradlaugh's speech, and he sat down amid real Birmingham cheering.

The great meeting then dispersed. Everybody seemed delighted with the day's success, and many delegates fervently hoped that next year's Conference would assemble under equally happy auspices.

OBITUARY.—On May 16, at 1 Raven Row, Spitalfields, William Frederick Sefton, aged 41 years. During the whole of his short life he was a steady, silent worker in the cause we all hold dear; and in that cause he died, firm and faithful to the truth that made him free.—J. LUBBOCK.

PROFANE JOKES.

DURING a sermon part of the congregation fell asleep, but some youngsters at the back were making a great noise. The parson stopped in his sermon and said in a stago whisper to the youngsters: "Don't make such a row or you'll wake up the old people in front."

I SAT at the back of the chapel And listened with drowsy ear To the sky-pilot's solemn preaching, As his voice rose high and clear. And I knew that I was called on To repent my sins and weep, But really felt too lazy, And so I fell asleep.

"ANANIAS lived a long while ago, didn't he?" questioned a Sunday-school lad as he trotted along by the side of his teacher. "A very long while ago," was the answer. "Then I guess Chicago must be an ancient City." "What makes you think so?" "I heard father say that Ananias was a reporter for a Chicago newspaper."

NORTH COUNTRY WIT.—"If I go to heaven shall I be as finely donned (dressed) as you?" asked a little ragged Sunday-scholar of her teacher. "Much more beautifully." "Shall I be donned like you were that day when I saw you going to a party?" She was told that no earthly clothing could be compared with the white robes of heaven. "Shan't we swagger?" said the child, with an air of intense satisfaction.

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