

# THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTER.

Sub-Editor—J. M. WHEELER.

Vol. VI.—No. 19.]

MAY 9, 1886.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



DOCTOR JESUS.

*And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. . . . and he was restored and saw every man clearly.—MARK viii., 23, 25.*

## RUSKIN ON THE BIBLE.

MR. RUSKIN is perhaps our greatest living master of English, and the public who can gain access to them may well be grateful for the beautiful volumes which he conceals with so much pain and ingenuity. Yet the Master, as his disciples affect to call him, is more learned than logical, and his powers of expression are out of all proportion to his reasoning faculty. As he grows older his judgment gets weaker, and he is tempted, partly by his own egotism, and partly by the flattery of his injudicious worshippers, to discharge upon the public the most splenetic and far-fetched utterances on all conceivable topics. Dilute Carlyle's brandy with claret, and you have Mr. Ruskin. Dilute it with water, and you have Mr. Froude. Jeremiah is readable, but the imitation of his disciples is not edifying, nor even amusing. Mr. Froude is excellent, and Mr. Ruskin splendid, when they stick to their proper work. But when they write in Carlylese, Mr. Froude is maudlin and Mr. Ruskin grotesque.

Mr. Ruskin's latest sputter is on the Bible. Annoyed by all the "buzzing and fussing" about Rénan, Huxley, and other biblical critics, Mr. Ruskin undertakes to tell, "in the fewest possible words, what it is." The quiet

conceit of this sentence is simply delicious. Let the world be silent while its monitor speaks.

"I am Sir Oracle,  
And when I ope my lips let no dog bark."

Well, what *is* the Bible, according to Mr. Ruskin?—

"It is the grandest group of writings existent in the rational world, put into the grandest language of the rational world in the first strength of the Christian faith, by an entirely wise and kind saint, St. Jerome: translated afterwards with beauty and felicity into every language of the Christian world: and the guide, since so translated, of all the arts and acts of that world which have been noble, fortunate and happy. And by consultation of it honestly on any serious business, you may always learn—a long while before your Parliament finds out—what you should do in such business, and be directed perhaps besides to work more serious than you had thought of."

Let us first deal with Mr. Ruskin's "entirely wise and kind saint." This *kind* saint was a great hater of people who differed from him. "If," wrote Jortin, "we should say that Jerome was a persecutor, we should do him no wrong; we have it under his own hand." Following the detestable text in Luke (xiv., 26), this *kind* saint, in exhorting Heliodorus to desert his family and become a hermit, wrote thus: "If thy father lies down across thy threshold, if thy mother uncovers to thine eyes the bosom which

suckled thee, trample on thy father's lifeless body, trample on thy mother's bosom, and, with eyes unmoistened and dry, fly to the Lord, who calleth thee." So much for Jerome's *kindness*. As far his *wisdom*, let one illustration suffice. Writing to the mother of a nun, he reminds her that her daughter is the spouse of Christ, and that she has therefore the honor to be *God's mother-in-law*.\*

By the "grandest language of the rational world" Mr. Ruskin of course means Latin. But what is the grandest language of the irrational world? Judging from some of Mr. Ruskin's letters to the newspapers, we should say it is English.

When Mr. Ruskin calls the Bible the "grandest group of writings" in the world, he is of course expressing a personal opinion. Certainly it is difficult to make a comparison, for it is not easy to find another such "group" of writings to enter the lists. The Greeks, the Romans, and even the Hindus, had an exuberant literature; and the same may be said of modern nations. But the literature of the Jews was extremely meagre, and all couched in one vein. All they had to boast is contained in the Old Testament. Their whole national literature lies between the covers of a single volume. The "grandeur" of the New Testament is entirely in the translation. Mr. Swinburne well says that it is translated from canine Greek into divine English. Paul's Greek is bad enough, but that of Matthew, Mark and Luke is said to be about the worst ever written.

Whether the Bible has been the world's guide to happiness and nobility, is a question on which Mr. Ruskin and ourselves are likely to differ. But argument on the matter is a great deal better than dogmatism. Let Mr. Ruskin tell us what best parts of modern life have been inspired by the Bible, and we will answer him; it being clearly impossible to refute a vague generality. Meanwhile, we assert, on the other hand, that the Bible certainly *has* inspired a multitude of blunders and crimes. For proof of this assertion we refer to the *Crimes of Christianity*, where it will be seen that every enormity has been justified by Scripture.

Honest consultation of the Bible, says Mr. Ruskin, will always show us what we ought to do in any serious business. Well, it is a very serious business to have some wizened old woman in the neighborhood who afflicts one with her evil eye; and the Bible says "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." One's duty is therefore clear. That wicked hag must be settled. No doubt one would be hung for doing it, but what godly person fears the consequences when the Lord commands?

Mr. Ruskin inquired a few weeks ago, whether anybody could tell him what good there was in keeping his money? Why did he not consult his infallible guide? The injunction of Jesus is clear "Sell all thou hast and give unto the poor." Mr. Ruskin is a generous man, but, despite his recent eccentricities, he is not an imbecile, and we may rest assured he will not follow his Savior's advice. Genius as he is, he can be a little—shall we venture the word?—hypocritical. Indeed, it is the worst characteristic of an age of religious decay, that even the best men sometimes palter with themselves, and make moral grimaces to their fellow men.

Nearly twenty years ago, before the weaknesses of old age and flattered vanity defaced his writings, Mr. Ruskin held a different opinion of the Bible. He then thought that its contents "are no more trustworthy than as expressions of the enthusiastic visions or beliefs of earnest men opposed by the world's darkness; and have no more authoritative claim on our faith than the religious speculations and histories of the Egyptians, Greeks, Persians and Indians." We frankly confess that in this, as in many other matters, we prefer the Ruskin of twenty years ago.

G. W. FOOTE.

SAM JONES, the revivalist, says "the gambler is invariably the son of a Christian family. Why is this?" We should think it was because Christianity teaches a man to expect gain without deserving it, instead of teaching him that reward should strictly depend upon merit and upon honest industry. Christianity also fosters a vast amount of hypocrisy and selfishness, and produces a reaction against the close-laced pharisaical mode of life enforced by the saints on their children and dependents.

\* See *Crimes of Christianity*, pp. 7, 55, 61.

RICHARD BROTHERS.

Most people are more or less acquainted with the Anglo-Israel theory. A large number of pious but ignorant people in the face of the facts of history, ethnology and language, seriously believe that the dispersed and supposed lost tribes of Israel are to be found in these islands, and they usually think themselves of the chosen race. This opinion dates from the end of last century and originated with the subject of our article, Richard Brothers.

The case of Brothers though opening up none of those psychological problems which surround the names of such superior men as Jacob Böhme or Emanuel Swedenborg, is of some interest as showing the direct effect of Bible teaching upon a mind weak enough to receive it without dilution with secular principles.

Richard Brothers was born on Christmas Day, 1757, at Placentia, Newfoundland. He came to England while young, and was educated at Woolwich. At the age of fourteen he entered the navy as midshipman, and served till 1783, when having become a lieutenant he retired on half-pay. Here his difficulties began. In order to obtain his pay he had to take an oath every six months. This he felt was in contradiction to Christ's Command "Swear not at all." He made an application to the Admiralty to dispense with the oath but this was refused. In a publication which he issued he put the matter very plainly: "If I am out of my senses in the opinion of the Admiralty for refusing to take an idle oath, Christ the Savior of the world who prohibits by his gospel, in the strongest terms, all kinds of swearing, must, by the same rule, for giving such a command, be out of his."

Owing to this difficulty, poor Brothers fell into dire poverty, and, upon the application of his landlady, was taken into the workhouse, an arrangement being made by which his pay was received by the governors. He spent much time in studying the Bible, and at length the idea grew on him that he too, like the prophets of old, had a commission from God, who, he says, visited him in the night. That is to say, he dreamt God visited him, and why should not his dreams be inspired like those of Joseph, Daniel, or Mary? He believed his mission was to fulfil the many unfulfilled prophecies, especially the gathering together of the Jews from all nations and taking them to Palestine to rebuild Jerusalem. No doubt there were those then, as now, who deemed this, taken in its literal sense, was a consummation devoutly to be wished. But Brothers, as leader, felt he too must be of the house of Israel and of the tribe of David, and if he, why not others? On the 12th of May, 1792, he wrote to old King George III., almost as dotty as himself, and to the Ministry and to the Speaker, declaring that God commanded him to go to the House of Commons on the 17th, to inform the members that the time was come for the fulfilment of Daniel vii. Accordingly, on the day named, Brothers presented himself at the door of the House, and, by his own account, met with a very scurvy reception. As with Jesus, the rulers and the people derided him. He does not hesitate to draw the comparison:

"Christ having been abused at Jerusalem, reproached with having a devil, being mad, and out of his senses, makes it less astonishing for me, who am his servant, to be reviled in the same manner. For which the Lord God commands me to remind all men from the testimony of his blessed Gospel, that the sin is blasphemy against his Holy Spirit, and that the punishment is everlasting fire."

It is evident from this threat that Brothers had pretty well filled himself with the spirit of the blessed Gospel. Undeterred by this rebuff, Brothers wrote fresh letters to the King, Queen and Ministry, containing prophecies, with some hits and some misses. His best guess was the prediction of the violent death of Louis XVI.

In 1793 Brothers began to describe himself as the nephew of the Almighty. The relationship at first seems obscure. But Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, M.P. for Lymington, an Oriental traveller and scholar, who had been induced to believe in the prophet, explained it. Jesus having died unmarried, Brothers could not well claim descent from him, but he did from some of his brethren or sisters who are mentioned in Matt. xiii., 55, and Mark vi., 3. The perpetual virgin had a numerous family, and Hegippus records that the grandchildren of Judas, one of the Lord's brothers, were in existence at the time of Domitian. Who can suppose so wondrous a family would be

allowed to become extinct? Brothers, however, knew nothing of Hegesippus. His *Uncle* had enabled him to discern the members of the chosen race (Halhed was one, the Countess of Buckingham another), but had not puffed up his mind with vain learning. Several persons were found who, like Halhed, bore testimony to the truth of his prophecies,\* and, infatuated by his success, Brothers declared that on Nov. 19, 1795, he would be supernaturally revealed as ruler of the world, and that in 1798 the rebuilding of Jerusalem would begin. Crazy King George was alarmed, and on March 4, 1795, poor Brothers was arrested for treason and committed to Newgate as a criminal lunatic. Halhed stuck by him and moved his case in Parliament, succeeding only in obtaining his removal to a private asylum. Halhed eventually attached himself to another religious worthy, Joanna Southcott.

Apart from his leading craze there is not much of interest in the writings of Brothers. They are little better than a jumble of Biblical nonsense and personal vanity. One of the most curious and scarce is "A Letter to Miss Cott, the recorded daughter of King David, and future Queen of the Hebrews, with an Address to the Members of his Britannic Majesty's Council" (1798). Miss Cott, the daughter of an Essex clergyman, was for a short time placed in the same asylum with Brothers, who fell in love with her. (He had a wife, but had left her, or she him, soon after marriage.) A fortnight after Miss Cott's removal it was revealed to him that she was his destined queen. Alas for the prophet's passion. The recorded daughter of King David refused her title, and having recovered her reason, within a year married another. Brothers, however, went on with his project for rebuilding the New Jerusalem, and induced some subscribers to raise money for engraving the plans. When at the height of his fame before his incarceration, some had gone so far as to sell their goods in preparation for accompanying Prince Brothers to Palestine.

On the death of Pitt in 1806, Brothers was released, thanks to the zeal of a devoted disciple John Finlayson, with whom he resided until he ended his days in 1824. As late as 1849 Finlayson published a book called *The Last Trumpet*, the trumpet being if possible more cracked than Brothers himself. A few direct disciples still exist, and the central theory of the descendants of David being here awaiting restoration numbers a large following. After his death, Finlayson, who was a Scotch lawyer, pestered the Government with a claim for Brothers's maintenance, and we believe the case is unsettled, the claim having been run up by Finlayson's descendants to £80,000. Let this, however, be said for poor demented Brothers. He himself accumulated no emoluments by his prophecies. His successors in the business have, however, amply compensated for his simplicity in this respect. J. M. WHEELER.

## ACID DROPS.

THE Spanish clergy are putting forth some brilliant examples of the excellent effects of Christianity. Since the priest Galeote shot his bishop a week or two ago, another priest in Aragon has shot a schoolmaster. A bishop has had his life threatened by one of his canons. A priest has also been well horswhipped at Madrid by the brother of a girl whom he attempted to deceive and, when that failed, to terrorise by going to her house armed with a revolver.

ACCORDING to the Madrid correspondent of the *Times* the Spaniards are in a state of indignation against their priests. The immorality of these men of God has reached an intolerable pitch, and "a storm that will shake the Church to its foundation appears imminent."

Is the lad William Humphreys an imp employed by Satan, to throw discredit on a man of God, or is it the Rev. Charles Alfred Burleigh Harte, of Seaton Carew, Durham, who has fallen a victim to Satanic influence? Anyway it is curious that in the most abominable charges that come before our police courts there is so usually a minister of the gospel concerned, that they have come to be known as "clerical offences."

"A PENSIONED Policeman" writes to an East London paper denouncing the "Christian Policeman's Association" as the

\* William Sharp, the well-known engraver, was so persuaded of his claims that he engraved two portraits, each bearing the inscription, "Fully believing this to be the Man whom God has appointed, I engrave his likeness."

occasion of much tyranny. He declares that when a young man joins the force he is invited to become a member of the "C. P. A.," and join in their Bible-classes and prayer-meetings. Should he not feel disposed to do so his time in the force becomes very "rough" and limited, for the inspectors and sergeants who belong to the "C. P. A.," will keep on "working him up" and finding fault until he is dismissed or caused to resign. Surely here is another matter which it would be worth Sir Charles Warren's while to look into a little.

THE pious author of *Infidel Death-beds* is so inveterate a cadger that the Charity Organisation Society has to publish the following advertisement:

DEUBEN MAY, Great Arthur Street Mission.—Persons receiving Appeals from Reuben May are recommended, before responding to them, to communicate with the Charity Organization Society, 15 Buckingham Street, London, W.C.

Reuben and others who follow the same lucrative game, obtain lists of all the subscribers to various charities, and pester them with heart-stirring appeals to save the souls and supply the bodily wants of their poverty-stricken missions. Of course no account of how the money goes is ever published. Subscribers are satisfied with the assurance that they have made their own salvation sure.

QUACKS, whether doctors, fortune-tellers, parsons, pill merchants or peripatetic preachers, are all distinguished by the same feature—the selling of promised future advantage for present and positive pelf. Give them a comfortable living here and they will assure you eternal happiness hereafter. The parsons' promissory notes are all payable after death.

THE *Record* asks for prayers for the heathen visitors to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, lest, from the sight of the wickedness of London, they may learn to scoff at the Gospel and return to their native countries regarding Christianity as a farce.

THE creditors of an Anglo-Israel maniac in Sheffield were last week disconcerted to find that his funds had been sunk in a mission to discover monuments of the Lost Ten Tribes at the site of Tara's Halls, in Ireland. The amount of sense shown by these firm believers in the biblical promises that all Israel shall be restored was well illustrated by one of their men, who undertook to prove that William the Conqueror of England was descended from the patriarch Benjamin, which he did thus: "Was it not said that Benjamin should rage like a lion?" "Yes," replied his auditor. "Well, then," continued the man, "William the Conqueror raged like a lion"—so he was a lineal descendant of Benjamin!

SOME time ago we called attention to the Rev. S. G. Cotton, of Kildare, who was fined for flogging and chaining up a pupil in the Carogh Orphanage, of which he is the head. This worthy minister of God has since been following up his persecution of the girl by writing to her present employers, endeavoring to destroy her character.

THE Rev. George Tabberer was deprived last year of his living at St. Peter's, Coventry, on the ground of drunkenness. He has, however, many sympathisers among his congregation, for at the Easter vestry he was elected as churchwarden by an overwhelming majority.

THE Rev. William Hammond of Franklin Falls, New Haven, has fled to Montreal. His record promises a rich harvest of scandal. He leaves a large quantity of unpaid bills and several young women who want to know who is to pay for their baby's clothes. Hammond says the Lord will provide.

IN connection with the Church of SS. Peter and Paul (what a happy family!), at Godalming, there is a Girls' Friendly Society, one rule of which is that "No girl is allowed to remain in the ranks who has lost her virtue." The vicar's report adds: "We have very few members of the Girls' Friendly Society in Godalming." A hurried reader might take this as a severe reflection on the female population of Godalming, but it is only a reflection on the silly vicar and his purist friends, who doubtless feel very deeply the loss of Madame Mourez.

ANOTHER Salvationist, one George Cooke, of St. Helen's, has deserted his wife, eloping with one of the army lasses named Cooper. He left his spouse a pious note advising her to return to her parents.

A NICE little slip occurred in a recent number of the *Church Times*. A clergyman wrote of the harrowing influence of the cross. He now writes to say he meant "hallowing." The first term is, however, far more appropriate.

WE gather from a report in the *Burton and Derby Gazette* that the Rev. J. T. Parr has been lecturing on "The Testimony of Science to the Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures." The report must be very inaccurate or the lecturer very stupid. He is said to have declared that there was more proof of the existence of God than of the law of gravitation. "John Stuart Mill

said, if the universe *exists*, then its beginning was supernatural." This should of course be "if the universe *began*." The inspiration of the scriptures was shown because the word *Arets*, used for the earth, means "spinner." Now it means nothing of the kind, and only a fanciful etymology would connect it with the word *roetz*, to run. *Arets* means "that which is below," hence its constant use in contrast with *Shamayim*, or heavens, "that which is lofty." Another proof was that the word *day* means "period," even when defined as evening and morning, and moreover "the evolution theory of Darwin had utterly broke down," and "recent discoveries in the East proved the truth of the Bible." Has the pocket-book of Jonah been discovered at Nineveh?

A GREAT German historian has said that the phrase "Christian veracity" deserves to rank with the phrase "Punic faith." We are reminded of this by a paragraph in the *Christian*, which states that Mr. Foote and Mr. Ramsey were "punished for publishing blasphemous and *obscene* libels upon God." If it were any use to ask a Christian editor to act like a gentleman we should write a brief correction for the columns of our pious contemporary. But knowing the tribe as we do we save our paper and stamps as well as our time. Besides, Christian lies about Freethinkers are really too numerous for any one man to correct them all.

WE find that magic lantern services have been introduced for Easter. Capital idea. No doubt some artist will arrange slides representing the sudden rolling away of the stone, the popping out of Jesus, the appearance to the disciples and the levitation through the clouds to the right hand of the Father, while the holy pigeon can be introduced and made to flutter its wings. This will be bringing down the Gospel to the comprehension of the people.

THE lamentations of Lockerbie Free Presbytery outdo those of Jeremiah. Scotland, it seems, is falling into "a most appalling condition," and this because one member reported an increase in the milk traffic on Sunday. But worse was in store. Elder Smith had actually seen people amusing themselves by running and leaping on the Sabbath day, and he believed it was a regular thing for a set of people to go out to look for rabbits on that day. No wonder he declared that if the young followed the practices of their elders in Sabbath desecration they would fall into something like infidelity or sheer ungodliness. Bravo Elder Smith. Let us all be unhappy on Sunday!

THE *Christian Herald* shows what comes of Sabbath-breaking by the example of a religious young man named David, and his sister Maggie, who, after long continued pressure, went "just for once" on a Sunday's outing in a steamboat. The young man was speedily arrested on board as a pickpocket, and as the thieves had placed some of their plunder in his pocket, he was convicted and placed among convicts at Portland, where he died of grief and exposure to wet weather—all this, and his mother's death speedily following, being "the fearful cost of a broken Sabbath." As if false accusations resulted from Sabbath-breaking any more than from staying at home. The tale, too, is highly improbable, if not impossible. Pickpockets are not made convicts, and the supposed culprit besides was young, and it was his first offence.

THE sister, too, who, like her brother, appears to have no surname or address by means of which the truth of the story could be investigated, suffered the penalties of a broken Sabbath. She lost her place and character, for her bigotted employer locked the door against her that night on her return, and no explanation would be accepted next day—so "that broken Sabbath was her first step to ruin." It was not the cruel, but pious barbarity of shutting a young girl out in the streets all night that caused her ruin, of course. Pious people must do the Lord's work bravely and firmly, and the evil they cause must be attributed solely to the breach of superstitious regulations which they punish with such unfeeling severity. The Christian fiendishness which drives a girl on the road to ruin and then holds her up as a frightful example is evidently as blameless as a Sunday trip on the river with her brother is hideously sinful and degrading.

It has been computed, says *Words and Weapons*, that every eighth verse in the Bible is related to the Second Coming of Christ, and asks, if this be so, how is it that so little interest is given to this question. But the second coming of Christ ought to have taken place in the lifetime of his apostles, eighteen hundred years ago.

THE Rev. W. M. Kirk, who shot himself on Good Friday, was under the delusion that Moses talked to him.

THE *Wertheimer Zeitung*, of April 29th, reports that while the bells were ringing for Easter in Kaufbeuren, the church tower fell down and killed six persons besides severely wounding several others.

THE Rev. Dr. Booker declares that "if the great God of the universe chose to comprise three thousand persons in his glorious Godhead, it is not for finite mortals to pronounce it impossible." Just so. The missionary exhorts the Catholic worshipper of saints to use his reason, but should a Protestant desire to ques-

tion for himself how two and one make one, he is denounced for blasphemy and recommended to rely on the authority of his spiritual pastors and masters.

THE *Christian Commonwealth* has a leading article entitled "How Christ Rose." But as usual the expected explanation is not forthcoming. Gushing sentiment, and extravagant assertion supply its place. When Mary Magdalene came to the tomb "Jesus had risen," having bodily passed through the rocky walls of his sepulchre, since the stone had not been rolled away by the angel. "To that glorious Body stones were no obstacle, as he soon proved that doors locked were no impediment." The legendary "fact," however baseless and unproven it may be, is a "rock of confidence" and the "Gibraltar of the Gospel." From the hour of the Resurrection we are assured that "the reign of the flowers began." They must have been upas flowers and blossoms of the deadly nightshade, for it is a certain fact that the progress of Christianity resulted in, or was accompanied by, the Dark Ages. The *C. C.* owns that it is still only spring-time in history, and that the "sweet blossoms" are now coming up. Why this long delay, this chilling winter, this failure of the crops, till civilisation does the work which Christianity then claims as its own?

WE gather from the *Liberator* that friend Symes has been having a rough time of it in trying to evangelise the back parts of Australia. At a place called Woodend the ministers and Salvationists stirred up a riot in which his life were almost endangered. Not content with throwing eggs, so advanced in odor that Mr. Symes thinks they must have been laid by the holy pigeon, the Christian larrikins set on him when leaving the hall, and he had literally to run and fight for his life. A cut lip, some bruises, and a new phrenological bump at the back of his head are mementoes to Mr. Symes of the courtesy with which Christians receive opponents to their creed.

"RAMBLER" in the *Essex Weekly News* reports a visit on Good Friday to the Peculiar People at Witham. Several of the Peculiarists related their experience. One of their number had "happened of an hazard by a gun exploding, which shattered his arm." The doctors shook their heads and said it must be cut off; but the brethren met and prayed God to spare their brother's limb, and after being anointed with oil "the arm got better, and it is on now." "Bless the Lord," responded the audience, who of course attributed to God the natural cure. Such is the effect of Bible teaching. Does not James declare: "Is any man sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick."

THE *Liverpool Review*, which is supposed to be a liberal paper, accuses those "who are leading the attack upon old-fashioned ideas" of employing "the intellectual thumb-screw and the intellectual rack" on their orthodox opponents. What our contemporary means is the *logical* rack and thumb-screw. It complains of our compelling them to come in by irresistible arguments. We quite understand the mental qualms of a shaky Christian who sees his faith undermined, but we deny his right to ask Freethinkers to be fools or hypocrites merely out of consideration for his comfort.

BISHOP RYLE, seeking to support the Church by lay assistance, declares that "The clergy manage everything! The laity are practically allowed neither voice, nor place, nor opinion, nor power, and must accept whatever the clergy decide for them." There is one thing, however, the laity are allowed to do—contribute to the funds. This is the first and foremost if not the sole duty of the layman.

WHILE the dignitaries of the Church take princely fortunes for teaching the gospel of poverty this is how a curate describes the position of his poor brethren:—"If one has been in orders twenty years without obtaining preferment, he finds that every subsequent year his chance of getting a curacy grows less and less; and when he reaches say the age of fifty-five, he discovers that, unless he has private means, he may starve or go to the workhouse, for all the Church of England cares."

THE Rev. R. Sill, who has probably dropped the final "y," preached at St. Ambrose's, Liverpool, last Sunday on Samson's marriage, his object being "to warn the single members of his congregation against unsuitable unions." According to the Book of Judges it was not Samson's wife, but Samson who was the unsuitable partner. He was apparently a hot-tempered bully. Her only fault seems to have been that she coaxed and teased him into giving her the answer to a riddle. In consequence of this Samson left his wife and went home to his old people, while his wife's old people married her to another man. Not satisfied with the divorce, Samson went down to her residence and tried to "pal on" again, and on being refused he set fire to three hundred foxes and any quantity of corn and vineyards and olives. In the end the poor young woman and father were also burnt to death. Moral (but of course this is not Mr. Sill's)—Let every young woman fight shy of prophets.

## SPECIAL NOTICE.

## MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, May 9, Hall of Science, Rockingham Street, Sheffield; at 11, "An Hour in Heaven;" at 3, "Who wrote the Gospels?" at 7, "An Hour in Hell."

Monday, May 10, Workmen's Club, Church Street, Wellingborough at 8, "Will Christ Save Us?"

Thursday, May 13, Stratford.

MAY 16, Milton Hall; 23 and 30, Hall of Science, London.

JUNE 6, Oldham; 13, N. S. S. Conference; 20, Milton Hall; 27, Ball's Pond.

## CORRESPONDENTS

LITERARY communications to be addressed to the Editor, 14 Clerkenwell Green, London, E.C. All business communications to Mr. W. J. Ramsey, 28 Stonecutter Street, 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. 3d.; 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. M.

F. A. DAVIES.—We have dealt with the subject ourselves.

SYMPATHISER.—Professor Kenny's Bill stands for reading in July. All friends should see to the collection of signatures to petitions, and write to their local members of Parliament upon the subject.

J. E. S.—As a rule we do not notice unsigned letters, but we make an exception in this case. With respect to Mr. Foote's debate with Mr. Woffendale you say: "If the joint-committee agreed not to publish a joint report how came it to pass that the chief member of your own committee took a report on your behalf, and for your own party, and sent that report to your own paper—the *Secular Review*?"—Answer: Mr. Foote had no committee; he represented a London Secular Society, which appointed one half the joint-committee. The *Secular Review* was not Mr. Foote's paper. Mr. Watts would be responsible for any report in its pages. He had a perfect right to publish a summary report in a weekly newspaper. That is a very different thing from a pretended *verbatim* report in pamphlet form.

R. COX.—The received Canon of the New Testament writings was not established till the Third Council of Carthage in 397.

E. CLARKE.—Holy Scripture does not say how Noah preserved the whales. Aquatic animals do not appear to have entered the ark at all. In that case the flood would have killed them. The mixing of the waters would have made them too salt for the fresh-water fish and too fresh for the salt-water fish. But as the flood never happened at all it doesn't matter.

LOUIS COLEMAN is by birth a Jew, but he has become a Freethinker, chiefly through the agency of this journal. When he first saw the *Freethinker* he shuddered, but continuing to read it his mind was changed. He would like to have some back numbers of this journal for distribution among the agricultural laborers in his district. Those who have any to spare can address to 36 Carter Gate, Newark.

B. DAWSON.—Glad to hear you are so pleased with the debate, and that your lady friends are taking an interest in *Prisoner for Blasphemy*. Mr. Foote hopes to call at Spennymoor the next time he visits the North.

SIGNALMAN.—We will write you on the subject in a few days. It is monstrous that your officers should interfere with your reading what you please.

H. BARKLEY.—Thanks for cuttings. The new bishop of Manchester will be dealt with next week. The Perth joke shall appear.

C. BEARD.—We believe Mr. Evan Powell Meredith it still alive, but we have heard nothing of his long-promised work on the Gospels.

"INFIDEL" writes that the Rev. E. W. Bradby's "Lectures on the Bible" at Toynbee Hall must have been eye-openers to the orthodox who attended them. He wonders how the reverend gentleman can call himself a Christian at all.

R. BOAK hopes the Foote-McCann debate will be extensively read, as it shows that the reverend gentleman can only reply to his opponent by explaining away his own doctrines or evading the points at issue.

C. DOEG.—Thanks. Always pleased to hear from you.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Toby—Burton and Derby Gazette—Church Reformer—Burton Chronicle—Hull Critic—Dublin Evening Mail—Liberal—Women's Suffrage Journal—Liberator—St. Helen's Newspaper—Christian Leader—North Wilts Herald—Essex Weekly News—Reynolds's Newspaper—Echoes of the Exe—Boston Investigator—Manchester Guardian—Sunday Chronicle.

CORRESPONDENCE should reach us not later than Tuesday if a reply is desired in the current number. Otherwise the reply stands over till the following week.

A CATALOGUE of the Progressive Publishing Company's Works can be obtained at 28 Stonecutter Street, London, E.C.

## SUGAR PLUMS.

*Gladstone's Irish Stew* is the striking title of Mr. Foote's latest pamphlet. All who wish to get to the bottom of the Irish question would do well to read it. Mr. Foote has taken great pains to master the subject, and he has put its principal issues in a concise form, with a hope that his labors will be profitable to his fellow Freethinkers and Radicals. As a political pamphleteer Mr. Foote has been very successful. His *Shadow of the Sword*

has run out of print, and *Randolph Churchill: the Woodstock Bantam* went through three editions, the total sale amounting to nearly seven thousand.

WE are pleased to see that the services of Mr. A. B. Moss are in constant requisition by the Freethought party. Mr. Moss's recent visit to Swindon appears to have raised the bile of the godly, and the use of the Mechanics' Institute has been denied him. A proposal on committee that applications should be entertained irrespective of beliefs was unfortunately negated.

Mr. Moss points out that there are several Secular societies that have had no Freethought lectures this season. We are very sorry to hear this. Societies without lectures neglect the principal thing they are organised for. Perhaps the lecturers are too few. Mr. Moss is fully occupied himself and perhaps his colleagues are in the same position. We fear, however, that some societies are not steady enough in working for Freethought. There is always a danger of being caught in the political whirl of the hour, and of losing sight of the permanent purpose of Secular organisation.

WE hope the London Branches of the N. S. S. will push on vigorously this season with the open-air lectures. If possible some one should always be present to sell Freethought literature. The distribution of tracts should not be neglected. The Central London Branch have taken for distribution a large quantity of back numbers of the *Freethinker*. Some of the Committee provided themselves with bundles of these on Easter Monday and found that they were gladly accepted by the holiday-makers. Other Branches can if they desire also obtain back numbers of this journal. Our publishers supply the trade on sale or return and we always print in excess of our sale in order to extend the circulation.

SEVERAL open-air stations have been already opened. The Central London Branch provides lectures in Columbia Road and Mile End Road; the Finsbury Branch on Clerkenwell Green; the Peckham and Dulwich Branch on Peckham Rye; the Ball's Pond Branch on Kingsland Green; the Hyde Park Branch in Hyde Park; Battersea Branch at the Park Gates; and the Bethnal Green Branch in Cambridge Road. Mr. Trumper frequently discourses in Victoria Park, but we should like to see the outdoor propaganda more thoroughly organised there. There seems to be a deficiency at the Midland Arches. No doubt the whole matter will be considered at the next executive meeting of the N. S. S. In the meanwhile we understand that Mr. W. J. Ramsey is willing to lecture on Sunday mornings at any of the stations.

WE beg to remind the Manchester Freethinkers that the time is drawing near when they will have seized or lost the opportunity afforded them by Mr. Spencer's bequest of erecting a hall of their own. It is to be hoped that every Freethinker in that city will do his utmost in the way of taking shares in the building company. Intending investors should apply within the next two or three weeks to Mr. G. Payne, 26 Kennedy Street. Now is the time or never. A Secular hall in Manchester, belonging to the party, will be a rallying centre for the whole district; but if this opportunity slips, it will damp our cause there, and perhaps for years. We hope to hear a favorable report before the present month has closed.

*Is Secularism True?* will be ready next Thursday. It will contain a verbatim report, revised by both disputants, of the second two nights' debate between the Rev. Dr. James McCann and Mr. Foote. The last night's discussion turns chiefly on Free-will and Morality, and as that is a question which Mr. Foote has never written or lectured on, many of our readers will doubtless be anxious to learn his views. *Is Christianity True?* is being widely circulated.

LONDON Freethinkers usually find their Sundays well occupied. Those, however, who have leisure in the afternoons might do worse than go and hear Mr. Gerald Massey's lectures at St. George's Hall. They are full of research and thoroughly Freethought. Last week he dealt with the Hebrew account of Creation, exposing its origin in Egyptian and Persian myths. This Sunday he deals with "The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ," and on May 16 examines "The Sayings and Teachings assigned to Jesus."

ACCORDING to the London Correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, the prospects of the Wesleyan Conference are not encouraging. Several circuits are known to have sustained serious losses, and in many cases ministers are being asked to take an extended circuit.

Most people have seen the engraving of the picture entitled "The Secret of England's Greatness." It represents Queen Victoria presenting to a Hindu prince, not a model of an ironclad, but a book conspicuously labelled "Holy Bible." The portrait of the Hindu prince represents the Maharajah Dhuleep Singh, a convert to Christianity who was long a favorite at court. The Maharajah after a long stay in England has set out for his native country and published an address to the Sikhs, in which he re-

nounces Christianity and proclaims his adherence to the national faith. So much for the Secret of England's Greatness. The Maharajah is now regarded as a dangerous character, and will probably be sent back to England by the Indian Government.

The April number of the *Freethinker's Magazine*, edited by Mr. H. L. Green of Salamanca, New York, contains two capital sketches of Freethinkers, one of Thomas Paine by Thaddeus B. Wakeman, the other of Elizur Wright by L. K. Washburn. The editor also in his account of Atheism and Atheists, gives notices of various Atheists he has known who have been distinguished for clearness of intellect and goodness of heart.

#### DIVINE EXPECTORATION.

God could hardly have held our modern ideas on the unlady-like impropriety of spitting at people, else he would not have commanded disappointed widows to spit in the faces of brothers-in-law who were unwilling to add them to their perhaps already overcrowded harems (Deut. xxv., 9). He would have substituted some less offensive form of indicating contempt, unless indeed he approved of the somewhat too highly expressive piece of vulgarity. In Numbers xii., 14, we read that "the Lord said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?" God expressed no disapproval of the spitting, but only of the being spat upon. He evidently upheld the right of the angry and vulgar father and placed all the disgrace where of course all Christians will acknowledge it should be placed, upon the living spittoon, the offending daughter.

But it is not with spitting commanded by God that I am about to deal, but with spitting as practised by God himself. When he personally came on earth as Jesus Christ there are signs that he exhibited a ready proficiency in the art usually supposed to be practised only by vulgar children, angry llamas and habitual smokers. Inexcusably brief and defective as the biographical records of the gospel are, they yet narrate no less than three occasions of Christ's spitting. I must do him the justice to say that the object achieved, or rather nominally supposed to be achieved, by the ejection or application of the divine saliva was highly beneficial to the persons spat upon or "anointed" with it. Deity on earth did not expectorate like a Yankee for the mere pleasure of the thing, but for medical purposes. His saliva evidently possessed healing properties, especially when well directed fresh from the divine mouth upon diseased or defective organs of afflicted patients. This is clearly shown in the account given in Mark viii., 22-25 of the restoration of a blind man's sight by the use of spittle:

"And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly."

A similar case in which Christ's saliva was apparently the means of restoring speech and hearing to a deaf and dumb man is recorded in Mark vii., 32-35.

"And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech: and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain."

In this case the method of applying the divine saliva is not clearly stated. Christ could not have spat into the deaf man's ears because the divine forefingers were already inserted in the openings. Probably he spat a benevolent mouthful or a volley of jets direct upon the patient's tongue as the organ of speech, just as in the blind man's case he spat the healing fluid from the divine salivary glands direct upon the organs of vision. The cure evidently depended upon the spittle, for a mere accidental turning aside to spit or cough or sneeze would hardly have been recorded, and besides all Christ's acts were intentional, and the medicinal virtues of his saliva are well established by other cases. Perhaps in this instance he anointed the deaf man's ears and tongue with his spittle by help of his fingers, instead of spitting directly, in which case he might miss fire unless he had acquired by sufficient preliminary

practice some of that enviable facility which enables experienced smokers to hit distant spittoons with perfect safety. As the orifice of the ear is usually coated with a soft wax-like secretion which prevents small insects approaching the drum, it would seem somewhat unpleasant or even sickening to modern sensibilities that Jesus, after plugging the deaf man's ears with his forefingers, should have proceeded to touch his tongue without (so far as we can learn) first cleansing his fingers. But Jesus knows best and we must not criticise the good taste or cleanliness of the methods he employed. We must merely imitate them reverently, unhesitatingly, and in a spirit of truthful admiration. The grandeur and the excellence of such methods as he employed are for ever unimpeachable. The few particulars of his surprisingly short career which are divinely preserved for our special behoof cannot be studied too closely by the Christian, although incipient Atheism may tempt him to select particular specimens of Christ's teachings and conduct for study and imitation, and thus may insidiously lead him to ignore and practically reject other and perhaps even more important examples of the divine life exhibited once for all in its highest and noblest state of perfection. Christ could just as easily have adopted some more cleanly and less distasteful method of medical or symbolical treatment. That he did not, simply shows, that as he was infallibly right, our prejudices against spitting into people's faces or having our own eyes or ears or mouths spat into, do not deserve conciliation. Such prejudices or weaknesses must be mortified into due humiliation and subservience.

Another case where the great physician employs his spittle as a magical drug or ointment, just as foolish children and ignorant savages do, is recorded by John. Jesus saw a man who had been blind from his birth, and in answer to a question, he assured his disciples that this man was not blind as a punishment, since neither he nor his parents had sinned, but solely that "the works of God should be manifest in him," that is, that Jesus should have the credit of restoring his sight without any blame for first taking it away. Jesus then said he must do the works of him that sent him, that is of God the Father, and boasted that while he was in the world he was "the light of the world." The account proceeds thus:

"When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore and washed, and came seeing" (John ix., 6, 7).

The "light of the world" who restored three or four blind men's sight—Luke says "many," but he does not specify the cases—did not enlighten the world by initiating the scientific study which enables modern oculists to restore the blessing of sight to thousands of patients annually by suitable operations and skilful treatment and to most materially improve the defective sight of millions by suitable glasses. He enlightened the barbarism of his times by imitating its methods and by thus confirming men in ignorance and folly. He spat on the ground and, mixing up the spittle with the dirt, he made, or pretended to make, a medicinal mud, which he then rubbed over the eye-balls of the blind man. Why did he adopt so filthy and irrational a method? It is true that the intended effect was to be beneficial and that the blind man had not the same grounds for complaint that the suspected woman had who by God's command was made to swallow ink-washings and dirt from the floor, which would cause her flesh to rot if she were guilty (Numbers v., 14-27). But why should God, even for the purpose of effecting magic cures or carrying out magic curses, so lower the divine dignity and good sense as to resort to childish and beastly foolery? Dirt and saliva, either singly or mixed, have no beneficial effect on cataract or ophthalmia or any other serious affections of the eye. Why should God pretend otherwise, or go through useless and unpleasant forms in conformity with the degraded ideas of the times, when he knew all the while that these ideas were false and stupid?

If civilised men had not improved upon Christ's methods we should find the physicians in our hospitals spitting in patients' eyes or mouths and rubbing their faces with the contents of spittoons or with still more objectionable filth. The students following them around the wards would watch the precise manner in which these efficacious operations were carried out, so as to take degrees in spittle-

curing\* as well as in the kindred branches of faith-healing and surgery by prayers and incantations and holy water (John v.) and by the magic virtues going out of old clothes and sanctified handkerchiefs and aprons and the corpses of dead saints (Acts xix., 12; 2 Kings xiii., 21). The fact that in all practical matters men rely upon science or experience, and very little upon prayer and Christian empiricism, shows the tendency of the age. Christianity is passing through the sentimental stage on its road to death. Human Knowledge is being practically revered and trusted as the true Savior in time of trouble and affliction. For one man who goes to Lourdes a hundred go to the hospital; and for one who trusts to prayer a hundred prefer to rely upon the doctor.

W. P. BALL.

### THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

#### JESUS ON HIS MISSION.

I HAVE to thank your correspondent most sincerely for the trouble he has taken in connection with my mission and am sorry it has failed. I am now finding out the truth of what was told me, that the only welcome I should receive would be from the Secularists. As your correspondent has detailed, I tried the leading Christians of the day, and in every instance was treated with ignominy. So, sinking lower and lower, I tried as a last resource the gutter dregs—the Salvationists, and much as I detest this howling mob, attended at Clapton, but was met with such visages, such ranting samples of humanity in female garb, such noise and nonsense, such a kicking up behind and before—and then the posters about “blood-washed Sal” and “the converted mudlark”—that I mentally said, Christianity has indeed sunk to the lowest strata. But still, to make my mission known, I boldly told the captains, etc., who I was. “Ah!” said they, “we have a good many of your sort; but never mind, all are welcome, the blind, the halt, the insane, especially the insane, we welcome ‘hall.’ Have you any portable property? If so, unload for ‘Gord’ and be washed in the blood of the Lamb. The General minds the property for Gord.” And then to add to my disgust they wanted to harness me to a big drum. When I refused, they asked could I play sweet screels on the bagpipes. Still refusing, they pushed a tambourine into my hands and said admiration and attention could be won by bashing it on the head of a female “horficer” now and then. With utter disgust I fled. My mission is over. From henceforth I ask myself, Is life on this planet worth living? Christianity is played out; my occupation’s gone, and until another act of levitation, I shall only write “harum-scarum” notes for the *Freethinker*.

#### CHRIST ON CREATION.—(A REMINISCENCE.)

Reminiscences of my youth are particularly pleasing. My very juvenile days were getting dreadfully monotonous, and well do I remember the fearful *ennui* that was seizing the old man, gradually making him fat and lazy, when suddenly he thought of making a new world. The idea was no sooner in the old man’s noddle than he began to plan. We “sons of God” were at once set to work making navvy’s barrows, sharpening picks, looking up steam navvies and getting into all the mischief it was possible. The old ‘un was a sight in his water-tight boots, squinting through his theodolite, getting his levels, drinking fearful draughts of beer, smoking dreadful cutty pipes, levelling earth he had previously shot, making rockwork here and plateaux there. Ah! it was a splendid time for us boys. The old man was too busy to pay much attention to our escapades; and then the larks we had with the old ‘un’s failures. The earth would keep falling into the cuttings; fires would burst out. (One of the angels smoked, and no doubt had something to do with these fires. Didn’t he suffer when the old man found it out.)

After the first day’s work didn’t dad sleep, didn’t he snore; but he was awake early, and pulling us boys out of bed, set us to more serious occupation by asking if we’d try our hands at a few sample animals whilst he set some grass, trees, etc., and got the paradise palings up. We did make some animals and no mistake, the megatherium, ichthyosaurus, etc. Directly we let them loose, dad had a lively time of it. They chased the old man all round Paradise. He asked us in an out-of-breath whisper, what the Mephisto we meant by playing practical jokes on our respected progenitor. We went to bed that night feeling that life was scarcely as rosy pink as usual, and were more careful in the morning.

The old chap lighting up the sun with two or three heavenly *War Crys* and an immense bundle of wood was a treat worth seeing. We sons of God now tried our hands at smaller fry, and looked with feigned concern at the troubled appearance of dad as our fleas were no doubt making life a fearful reality. The wasps and hornets at this moment got loose and went straight for the old man. We ran for it, dad on our track. But he had to dive into the first deep pond; and every time his bald roof showed, those wasps and hornets attended to business with the alacrity of small tradesmen. He read us an enlightening lecture afterwards,

\* Christian Evidence lecturers will perhaps discover that this is the true derivation of hospital, formerly written *spital* or *spittle* (cf. *Spitalfields*, and see *Litham*); and they will thus happily prove that Christ founded hospitals in the true spiritual and germinative sense.

emphasised with stick solo, after which we got more serious and really assisted the old ‘un. His great object was to build a man in his own image. The mixture for the purpose we made all right; but Jehovah tried blowing life into him with a bellows and burst him. The second attempt was a failure in consequence of the material being made too wet, so that in drying it cracked. But the third was a success; and the old man wouldn’t use the bellows again, but blew up the fellow’s nostrils with his mouth, whereupon “he walked erect and assumed the God-like attitude of freedom and of man,” but wanted to fight us. We shoved him into the garden, shut the gate and engaged his attention by introducing a few cobras to keep him employed, whilst we commenced the general manufacture of some more animals, etc. “Oh! vat a larks,” what pleasant thoughts this episode calls up, the old ‘un too busy to give much serious attention to what we were up to, as he was engaged with the firmament, and seemed to have great trouble with the moon and smaller planets, at last out of patience launching them out with a “round arm slow.” The younger sons of God, my brothers, had to be stopped from making the neck of the giraffe any longer, as I put before them the appalling consequences of sore throats to those interesting animals. The kangaroos had a pouch given them as well as all the other marsupials, to put in all their belongings, the long journey they had to make necessitating this arrangement. That blessed “hare” we certainly thought was turned out as an animal that chewed the cud, but it must have given up that accomplishment out of “pure cussedness.” These rambling notes of my youth may seem trivial to your readers, but call up many pleasant memories to me, and besides, this creation business kept the old man busy and gave employment to us boys. It was a pity the old cockalorum got vicious towards the end, and tried his hand at such things as tapeworms, fever germs, animalculæ, etc. This last subject is rather painful for me to dwell on, as no doubt manufacture of parasites had better have been left alone. Now, for the present I will conclude my random notes, wishing some occupation could be found for dad, as he is certainly sinking to a “God out of work.”

### MEETING FOR THE REPEAL OF THE BLASPHEMY LAWS.

ON Wednesday, April 28th, there was a large gathering at South Place Chapel, Finsbury, for the purpose of supporting the Bill of Professor Courtney Kenny. Dr. Clair J. Grece presided. The Rev. W. Sharman read the following letters:—

C. Bradlaugh, M.P.: “I am sorry to say I shall be unable to be at the meeting on April 28, as I shall be in Scotland.”

Dr. Hunter, M.P.: “I shall not be in town during Easter week.”

Thomas Burt, M.P.: “I am sorry I cannot accept the invitation as I shall be at home at Newcastle at the date you mention.”

Joseph Arch, M.P.: “I cannot be at the meeting on April 28, owing to a prior engagement. As for the Blasphemy Laws, they ought to be repealed. If any one blasphemes the name of God, it appears to me absurd that another sinful mortal should set himself up—or anybody of human sinners should undertake to make laws—to punish a fellow sinner because he is a blasphemer. I hold that the only tribunal to judge a blasphemer is the Bar of God. I trust that such laws as presume to intercept the judgments of heaven, when the crime is purely between the conscience of the sinner and his God, may soon be erased from our Statute Book. If I steal, or commit any crime which a wholesome law punishes me for, such a law is necessary for public protection; but when I blaspheme against God then let me not be judged by a man who may perhaps be in heart as much a blasphemer as the man he tries to punish and condemn.”

Courtney Kenny, M.P.: “I thank you for the invitation to the meeting, but I shall be away in the North of England at Easter.”

Rev. Thomas Hancock: “I am heart and soul with you for the removal of the scandal.”

William Morris also expressed regret at inability to attend.

The Rev. Stewart D. Headlam moved the first resolution:—“This meeting, believing that prosecutions for the expression of opinion on matters of religion are an unwarrantable and mischievous exercise of public authority, welcomes the introduction into Parliament of the Bill for their abolition.” Speaking from the standpoint of a Christian minister, he felt that his hands were tied in dealing with sceptics while they could retort that they were liable to prosecution for expressing their disbelief.

The motion was seconded by Mr. George Jacob Holyoake, who advised the meeting not to credit the fair words of Christians who were not ready to petition for the removal of an injustice; and was supported by Mr. Foote, whose declaration that he was a walking argument against the Blasphemy Laws was received with much applause.

The Rev. Philip Wicksteed moved “that the thanks of this meeting be given to Professor C. Kenny, Mr. Bernard Coleridge, Mr. Crossley, and Mr. Illingworth for bringing forward the bill for the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, and this meeting promises them the utmost support.” The motion was seconded by Mrs. Annie Besant in an earnest and eloquent speech, and was supported by Mr. Herbert Burrows.

A vote of thanks to the chairman concluded the meeting, after which there was a considerable signing of petitions in an ante-room.

