

THE FREETHINKER

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.
Sub-Editor—J. M. WHEELER.

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COMIC BIBLE SKETCH.—No. 232.



A BIBLE HERO.

Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad.—JUDGES III., 31.

CHRISTIANITY AND PAGANISM.¹—II.

MR. MITCHELL'S remarks on the Babylonian and Assyrian systems are somewhat curious. Quoting from Professor Sayce—by the way, he always relies on orthodox authorities—he says that life in Babylon must have been "almost intolerable" because of the abounding superstition and magic. No doubt such a life would be intolerable to Mr. Mitchell, but it was not so to the Babylonians, and the proof is that they went on living. Nor do we quite understand Mr. Mitchell's contemptuous reference to the soothsayers and astrologers at the court of Nebuchadnezzar, seeing that Daniel was amongst them, and became the chief subject in the empire through his special skill in interpreting dreams. Surely what is sauce for the Babylonian gander is sauce for the Jewish goose.

The Babylonian Istar (Ashtaroth or Astarte) was the goddess of a sensual worship, and Mr. Mitchell observes that "certain parts of Babylonian worship were excessively impure." In support of this he refers to the sacred prosti-

tuition, recorded by Herodotus, in the temple of Istar. No doubt this practice was "in the highest degree abominable," although its strictly religious character indicates that it was a survival from ruder times, besides proving the truth of Mr. Mitchell's own admission that "it is in connection with religion more than any other subject that we have to deal with the morbid anatomy of human nature." But does Mr. Mitchell mean to assert, or wish to imply, that Jehovah's chosen people were strikingly superior to the Babylonians in this respect? Does not the Old Testament contain frequent references, through many centuries, to Jewish phallic worship? And what is the meaning of the text (Deut. xxiii., 18) that "the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog," shall not be brought into the house of the Lord? Does not Mr. Mitchell know that the Hebrew word translated *dog* means *sodomite*? And can he deny that this law involves the practice of the offence which it condemns? Further, is he not aware that the Hebrew term for prostitute also signifies a sacred person? And does not this indicate that religious prostitution at one time existed among the Jews precisely as it did among the Babylonians? Mr. Mitchell does not allude to these things, yet his silence is not the result of ignorance, but of design.

¹ *Christianity and Ancient Paganism.* By J. Murray Mitchell, M.A., LL.D. "Present Day Tracts," No. 51. Religious Tract Society.

Dealing with the Phœnician system, Mr. Mitchell dwells on the sacrifice of the first-born to Moloch. Does he not know that more than one passage in the Old Testament proves this practice to have obtained amongst the Jews? Mr. Mitchell dilates also on the general impurity of the Shemitic worship "Israel alone excepted." How then does he account for the extremely plain-spoken Hebrew laws against bestiality, and the untranslatable denunciations of Jewish libidinousness by such late writers as Ezekiel?

Mr. Mitchell's remarks on the Grecian system are conveniently brief. Where comparison would be fruitful he has little to say. Quoting from Mr. Gladstone (again an orthodox authority) he observes that in the theology of Homer "elements of a profound corruption abound." He does not, however, notice the more abundant noble parts of Homer, which anticipate most of the best things in the New Testament. Nor is he just in dwelling on the degradation of Greece after the loss of its independence. Honesty would have suggested a fuller examination of Aristotle and Plato, to whom Mr. Mitchell devotes the magnificent space of four lines. Mr. Mitchell should also remember that, although Greece was laid low by the heavy hand of Rome, her spirit was not utterly extinguished. Her art and literature animated the great men of the Renaissance, and Sir Henry Maine well says that wherever we dig down from our modern civilisation we come eventually to Greece.

Mr. Mitchell says nothing of the religion of Rome before the decline of the Republic. "During the two centuries that preceded the birth of Christ," he informs us, "unbelief spread like a pestilence and immorality kept pace with it." But students of history will smile at this sweeping statement, which contains a few grains of truth in a bushel of falsehood. They will also smile at "the utter moral degradation" of Julius Cæsar. Not even Dr. Arnold's authority can make this anything but ludicrous. Mr. Froude has effectually disposed of the libellous rubbish that accumulated around the memory of "the foremost man in all this world." Mr. Mitchell goes on to tell us that darkness and despair settled down on mankind. Has he read the history of Augustus? Does he remember Gibbon's unchallengeable statement that the historian would fix upon the period between the death of Domitian (A.D. 96) to the accession of Commodus (A.D. 180) as the most happy and prosperous in the history of the human race?

The Stoical philosophy, which challenges a comparison with Christianity, should have been dealt with more fully. Will it be believed that Mr. Mitchell devotes just two lines to Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius? It is difficult to speak civilly of such a gross evasion of duty. Mr. Mitchell pretends to write a comparative study, yet he devotes nearly all his space, without the least historical perspective, to denouncing the corruptions of Paganism, and passes in almost total silence the highest manifestations of its nobler spirit. May we assume that Mr. Mitchell thought silence discretion while confronting the manly philosophy of Epictetus and the beautiful wisdom of Marcus Aurelius? Did instinct assure him that Christianity might suffer in a comparison with these?

"We have thus," Mr. Mitchell says, "failed to trace in the great Pagan systems of antiquity any grand conceptions which Christianity did or could incorporate with itself." Yes, Mr. Mitchell has failed, signally failed, where he might have succeeded had his quest been honest. Doubtless he feels comfortable in relying upon Archdeacon Farrar's declaration that Paganism was "a vast failure," and that "the light of any other religion compared with Christianity is but as a star to the sun." But that is merely a Christian certificate of Christian superiority. Christianity appears a sun because it is nearer; indeed to the ordinary Christian there is no other luminary; but those Pagan stars were also suns to their worshippers, and their glory is now diminished because of their immense distance. Mr. Mitchell rejoices that "a Christian church stands on the spot where once arose the majestic temple of Jupiter." Does he also rejoice that a Turkish mosque is built over the ruins of Zion? He also states that he has "visited the Serapeum" at Alexandria, but he omits to inform us whether he discovered in any subterranean nook a catalogue of the vast and priceless library which fell a sacrifice to the illiterate bigotry of the early Christians.

G. W. FOOTE.

SOME MODERN PROPHETS.

(Concluded from p. 11.)

THE Methodist revival produced many inspired persons. In their train came Ann Lee the founder of the Shakers who emigrated to America with a few followers in 1774. Next came Mrs. Buchan of Glasgow who, excited by religious mania, announced herself in 1783 as a mother and leader of the elect. She also proclaimed herself as the woman spoken of in Revelation; she announced that the end of the world was near, and that all should follow her ministrations. For some time she wandered from place to place attended by hundreds of half-crazy dupes. Mrs. Buchan appears to have simply been a lunatic who ought to have been under restraint and medical supervision. She announced that she was immortal, and said, like Jesus, that those who believed in her should never die. But like all other mortals she departed, and this event staggered the faith of her followers.

The French Revolution saw the advent of several prophets, and in this country Richard Brothers, a paid-off naval lieutenant, made crazy by Bible reading, announced that London would be destroyed in 1791. The prediction caused great uneasiness to the credulous in the metropolis. Although, like the second coming of Jesus, it did not happen as predicted, that only gave the prophet reasons for self-laudation. London was merely saved by his interposition. He found believers among persons of distinction like Mr. Halhed, M.P., W. Sharp, the engraver, and the Countess of Buckingham. Brothers was the founder of the Anglo-Israel mania. He announced himself as the "nephew of the Almighty" [descended from the brothers of Jesus] "and prince of the Hebrews appointed to lead them to the land of Canaan." He wrote several works replete with Bible nonsense and personal vanity. A letter to King George III. and a visit to the House of Commons ensured his committal to Bedlam in 1795, where he remained eleven years, despite Mr. Halhed's invocation to Parliament to examine the Bible as to his credentials. Many of his followers transferred their allegiance to the next fanatic impostor, William Huntingdon (S.S.) and Joanna Southcott. Of these the former, like most modern prophets who were not insane, was a good deal more knave than fool, advancing by his religious arts from being a coal-heaver to riding in his coach and marrying the titled widow of a Lord Mayor.

Joanna Southcott was silly enough to be sincere in her own prophecies and mission. Among other rhapsodies couched in language violating alike common sense and common syntax, she uttered dreadful denunciations upon her opposers and the unbelieving nations, and predicted the speedy approach of the millenium. She, too, was the woman in Revelation clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet. A herd was ready to devour her Bible garbage as the word of life, and she numbered among her believers three clergymen, as well as persons of fortune and fashion. Over eight thousand persons purchased her seal, sealing them Heirs of God and Joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. Eventually, when in her sixtieth year, she gave out that like Mary she was with child of the Holy Ghost. There was an external appearance that the prophecy of a birth might be fulfilled, and the most elaborate and sumptuous preparations were made for the coming Shiloh—who turned out to be the dropsy. The death of Joanna did not entirely undeceive her followers—and I have myself met one of the sealed preaching the Southcott gospel and giving away tracts headed "Behold the Bridegroom cometh."

A more dangerous, because more respectable, prophecy-monger was the late Dr. John Cumming, a shrewd Aberdonian, who became minister of the Scotch Church in Crown Court, Covent Garden, London. By his startling expositions of Scripture he attracted large audiences, numbering the Duchess of Sutherland and other fashionable ladies among his congregation. He published a great number of trashy religious works bearing on the fulfilment of the prophecies and was extremely successful in raking in the shekels. The overthrow of Antichrist the Pope and the end of the dispensation was fixed for 1866, but the shrewd prophet bought the lease of a house which expired some twenty years after the day of judgment. 1866 came and the grand collapse was adjourned till "later on" and the fame of the prophet began to wane, despite his endeavor to galvanise himself into notoriety by writing to the Pope demanding admission to the Ecumenical Council of 1869.

But Cumming had feathered his nest as snugly as any bishop.

The mantle of Cumming has fallen on the shoulders of an equally long-headed exponent of prophecy, the Rev. M. Baxter. The career of this worthy will one day be cited as a curious commentary on the enlightenment of the latter half of the nineteenth century. He has repeatedly altered his interpretations of prophecy, yet apparently finds as many believers as ever, for his journal, the *Christian Herald and Signs of the Times*, boasts an immense circulation. Some twenty years ago he published a book entitled *Louis Napoleon the Destined Monarch of the World*. After the Downfall of Napoleon the Little, the claim to universal monarchy was transferred to his son, upon whose death in Zululand he shifted it to Prince Jerom Napoleon. In all these names he discovers the "number of the Beast." His latest feat is to find this number in the Greek characters for E. Boulanger.

Baxter has recently put forward a little book entitled *The Great Crisis from 1888-9 to 1901*, which includes a "Prophetic Calendar." From this instructive document we learn that on March 5, 1896, "about 3 p.m.," 141,000 watchful Christians will ascend into heaven. "At that moment railway trains may be swiftly speeding upon their accustomed course at the rate of forty miles an hour, and instantaneously all their passengers who are truly ready for Christ's advent will be supernaturally caught up to the skies to meet their coming Lord." Another passage tells us these 144,000 watchful Christians "may then return to assist in the preaching." Then will follow "the Great Tribulation and Anti-Christ's Massacre of Christians, Aug. 14-15, 1897, to Jan. 26, 1901." All Christians will, however, ascend to heaven on April 6, 1901 [blessed date]. Christ will descend at Armageddon April 11, 1901, and all the Christians being in heaven, the Millennium on earth will commence. Our belief in human credulity is very considerable, but we have too much respect for Mr. Baxter's longheadedness to suppose that he more than half believes in this nonsense. He is said to have made very good property investments and to have set up a son on a large farm in America. The *Great Crisis*, of course, winds up with an appeal for contributions to carry on the missions of the Gospel Union.

J. M. WHEELER.

ACID DROPS.

THE other evening a man about sixty, dressed as a workman, knocked sharply at the door of the Paris *Figaro* office. Being asked his business by the attendants, he shouted "I am the Son of God, the man of Bethlehem! Down with the *Figaro*, and make way for the Son of God!" Two guardians of the peace were sent for, and the Son of God was removed to the police office, protesting his divine origin along the road.

AN American missionary describes the disaster occasioned by the overflowing of the Yellow River in China as one of the most appalling occurrences in loss of life and property recorded in recent years. Over 30,000 people, he says, were drowned, and close on a million persons were left homeless and starving. Other accounts say there are two millions of people left in a starving condition. The weather is bitterly cold, and men, women and children sit on the river bank, stunned by their misfortune, hungry and dejected, and without a rag to wear or a morsel of food to eat. What does God think of his handiwork? Has he no pity for all the misery he causes? Is it his benevolence that is lacking, or his omnipotence?

A TORCHLIGHT procession of several thousand Lowestoft men escorted an effigy of the Rev. Lewis Price to his residence, a distance of two miles. They then took the effigy from the trolley on which it had been carried, and burnt it, giving vent to their feelings in an abundance of groans and hisses. The reverend gentlemen had been denouncing the wickedness of the "cursed ball" proposed by the Mayor. Dancing, unless in the fashion of David before the ark, is a dreadful offence against God in the eyes of bigots like the rector of Pakefield; but people at large do not share these absurd views.

A PROTESTANT orphanage and school for Italian children at Tarfa, near Rome, is boycotted by the Catholic inhabitants of the district. Threats of excommunication are launched against laborers who might be tempted to work for the heretics. The priest publicly burnt portions of the Protestant Bible in front of the village church, and the local authorities have ordered the closing of all the institutions by the end of the year. How these Christians love each other.

ACCORDING to *Truth* the Pope has received 14,000 pairs of slippers from female devotees in all parts of the world. Fancy one man with so many ladies thinking of his poor feet! What a pity they cannot snivel over his pedal extremities, wipe them with their locks (some short-haired ones would have to rub hard), and anoint them with Macassar, like the lady in the New Testament.

THE value of the presents sent to the Pope in commemoration of his Jubilee is estimated at over five hundred thousand pounds. One of the most curious is the reliquary designed to receive the head of John the Baptist, which it would appear is in the Pope's possession. The head must be pretty shrivelled and dry by this time. By the way, it seems a pity that while Jesus was working so many miracles he did not re-fix his cousin's head on his shoulders, instead of letting him go to heaven without that useful appendage.

THE Church of Ascension, Battersea, has been repeating a pantomimic Miracle Play under the direction of the Rev. C. S. Wallace. Among the *tableaux vivants* was one of the expulsion from Eden, Adam and Eve being clothed in skins. Probably the sacred drama was not taken at the fig-leaf or primitive-innocence stage for fear of the police. Centuries ago Adam and Eve used to come on the stage as God made them.

THE Rev. Mark Guy Pearse, speaking at Steinway Hall during the "week of prayer," said it was "a great pity that children were often considered too simple to be taught religion." We sympathise with Mr. Pearse. Children too simple to be taught religion must be too simple for anything.

IN another address the same speaker declared that "If England was a fair example of the benefits of Christianity was it worth while to train men and send them to the ends of the earth to convert other nations? He had been told by foreigners of all nations that there was not a scene so appalling in its hideous debauchery as that they witnessed after leaving St. James's Hall last Saturday night in Piccadilly and Regent Street. Besides, there was caste as rigid, as haughty, and as exclusive as anything in India. Yet they called themselves by the name of the meek and lowly Jesus. In fact, Christianity had become a poor, shrivelled, miserable, should he say selfishness? Every man was seeking the salvation of his own little soul, and only sighing over the world."

IN spite of this tremendous failure the Christian orator is certain that Christianity is God's power for regenerating the world. It is "un-Christlike Christians" who are responsible for the evils. But when and where are the real Christlike Christians to come? Is failure in the past and present a guarantee of success in the future?

AT the same meeting the Rev. B. C. Symes warned Christians against taking their children to pantomimes, which might give them a taste for theatre-going in after life; and against Christmas dancing-parties, which might induce a taste for the ball-room. Like most Christians in this Puritanic country, Mr. Symes looks upon all carnal enjoyments as insults to God and stepping-stones to Hell. The God of these people loves his children so that his brows go down as stiff as the top bar of a turnpike gate whenever he sees them frisky.

THE Rev. G. S. Reaney is leaving London for Manchester, and being interviewed by an evening paper he gives his opinion on the state of the East-end. Among other things he says that the people there do not go much to church or chapel, but they are not atheistical; no, they "have a deep and silent belief in God." Well, it may be deep, but it certainly is silent.

THE vicar of the Martyrs' Memorial Church in Clerkenwell has found out a capital way of assisting the unemployed, and the papers are duly trumpeting his philanthropy. The public are to subscribe funds for paying workmen, and he, the benevolent vicar, will kindly permit them to clean and decorate his church so far as the money will allow. If they were to build him a handsome vicarage he would probably accept it, just of course as a thoughtful means of tiding over the distress in the labor market. Who wouldn't turn philanthropist on terms of this kind?

AMY CAROLINE ELAND, daughter of Mr. R. F. Eland, J.P., and banker, of Thrapston, has committed suicide while suffering from religious mania. The poor girl had of late been very much depressed through reading religious books, and she told her doctor that she had never before realised how great a sinner she was. She shut herself up in a room, and with a razor first severed the arteries in each wrist, and then made a terrible gash in the throat, the latter alone, according to the medical testimony, being sufficient to cause almost instant death. At the inquest the jury returned a verdict of "Suicide while temporarily insane."

THOSE whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. He has made himself very busy of late in bestowing gratifying evidences upon his children of his peculiar mode of showing his love. A clergyman in Kansas, who was engaged to debate with Mr. J. E. Rensburg, was visited by his gracious Father, who left him a

souvenir of his visit in the form of a stroke of paralysis. This presentation was made a few days prior to the date fixed for the debate. Another opponent of the same lecturer, a Nebraska clergyman, had also a proof of divine favor. This gentleman attempted to answer the lecturer's arguments, but after he had uttered a few words, he fell back in a fainting fit.

THE Bishop of Rochester, in his New Year's pastoral letter, warns the younger clergy of his diocese against being led astray by Socialism. No doubt the warning is well meant, and perhaps it is necessary, but it comes with an ill grace from a Father of the religion which began in the crudest form of Socialism, and whose founder plainly taught the worst form of Communism.

AMONG those who signed the petition for our release when we were a prisoner for "blasphemy" was the Rev. Dr. Abbott, head master of the City of London School. His action in that instance was highly courageous, for the School is under the very City Corporation which prosecuted us. We naturally, therefore, regret to hear that a set is being made against Dr. Abbott on account of the "broad views" expressed in his last book, *The Kernel and the Husk*. It is reported that his most active opponent is pious Alderman Fowler, who shouted "Kick him out" when Mr. Bradlaugh was assaulted by fourteen hirelings in the House of Commons.

MR. JOHN HAMPDEN, whose distinguishing characteristic is his belief that the earth is flat, edits a monthly journal called *The Earth and its Evidences, Scripturally, Rationally and Practically Described*. Mr. Hampden runs a tilt at Sir Isaac Newton, Prof. Huxley and Fashionable Scepticism, and says of popular lecturers on astronomy "They never utter one word of truth." Probably this single taste of Mr. Hampden's sweet reasonableness is enough for our readers.

MR. W. S. LILLY holds forth on "Right and Wrong" in the *Fortnightly Review*. After trying to floor Huxley, Herbert Spencer, and other scientific thinkers by quotations from Aristotle and the New Testament, he apparently feels that he has made very little real headway, for in concluding he breaks into superior Billingsgate against the great author of Synthetic Philosophy. Herbert Spencer, he cries, "is essentially a grocer's intellect. He is most industrious, most precise, most conscientious, most clear when he chooses, within certain limits. But they are narrow limits, like the four walls of a shop. Of the vast horizons beyond he has no knowledge. . . His popularity is an emphatic testimony to the singular unidealism—I had almost written the congenital imbecility—of the English mind in respect of eternal and divine things." No doubt the English people will appreciate the compliment; though they may feel inclined to retort that when their congenital imbecility becomes more pronounced they will perhaps sit at Mr. Lilly's feet and drink in the wisdom of his lips.

THE Rev. George Bishop has been lecturing at Nottingham on the causes of Infidelity. One of his causes is this—Freethinkers are generally too young to know their own minds. In reply he was furnished with the names of four Nottingham Freethinkers whose total ages amounted to three hundred and thirty-five years, each of them being over eighty. An ordinary lecturer would have subsided, but G. B. has a large share of that quality which is known in some circles as courage and in others as "cheek."

THE cheaper food becomes by importations from abroad, the more dolorous are the parsons at the fall in the tithe rent-charge estimated on the value of corn. Last year the value of £100 was only £87 8s. 10d., and it will now be only £84 2s. 8½d. There has been a decrease of £18 13s. 5½d in every £100 of tithe since 1882, and there is every likelihood of the process continuing. As the community benefits by the cheapness of bread, nobody but the parsons, who are interested in its dearness, need grumble.

AN iron pillar of a church in New York fell as the congregation were leaving. Two people were badly hurt. Many other "pillars of the Church" fall at times, but such scandals are always hushed up as far as possible.

THE Church Missionary Society has been having a "Whole Day" jollification at Exeter on Jan. 11. They began at 11 with the contrite confession of "Our Spiritual Shortcomings." After a short adjournment for lunch, in which perhaps they made up for their spiritual shortcomings, they commenced again at three on "Our Spiritual Possibilities." These possibilities were made manifest at dinner, and then at seven they buckled to "Our Spiritual Determinations."

SOME of the prayers offered up by members of the Salvation Army are sublime in their ingenuousness. At "knee-drill" recently, one of these howling dervishes, in the course of his appeal for the conversion of the Godforsaken on-lookers, asked the Lord to remember, "that they also have souls to be saved as well as we have." The Devil, who was passing at that moment, smiled, "for his darling sin is the pride that apes humility."

A CORRESPONDENT of the *Liberator* points out that not only are the leaves of the gratuitously circulated Bibles in China used for making fireworks, but that in Australia it is quite common for painters to find their gold leaf, which is manufactured in England, folded between leaves of the Bible, which are sewn together forming a little book.

IN Africa the Bible is in demand to serve as wadding for guns, while in India it is in great request, being utilised for wrapping up small goods, and yet more ignoble purposes.

AT St. Kilda the Lord God Almighty amuses himself on Sundays and week days by blowing about clouds of dust, with the breath of his nostrils and the winds he holds in his fists. The corporation, being pious, know not what to do. They spoil the Lord's amusements by the water-carts on the six days; but they do not like to meddle with his wind-and-dusty devotional sports on the Sabbath. It seems never to have occurred to them, to send him a pious tract on the sin and danger of Sunday sports, and inviting him to attend church on that day. Possibly he has no clothes to wear though; and if he attended church he might reveal himself as he did to Moses. It is a difficult case. The corporation have been tackling it for over a year; and it yet remains to be seen whether they or the Lord will get the better of it. If not permitted to sport on his own day, we presume that he will retire in disgust, and leave the world to its fate.—*Liberator*.

SPEAKING of the epidemic of dynamite explosions and plots Talmage says: "How to account for such coincidences of crime, or such concerts of injustice I know not, unless at such times there be something in the air that induces them. Satan is the prince of the power of the air. Being the prince of the power of the air, he may at times surcharge the atmosphere with malicious tendencies." The *Christian Herald* remarks that "Dr. Talmage here unconsciously confirms the views of prophetic writers, who say we are on the eve of the Seventh Vial, which is to be poured out into the air in order to cause the Great Tribulation." If we may judge from such samples, Christianity and madness are evidently pretty close akin.

PROPHET BAXTER, of the *Christian Herald*, after due study of the Bible prophecies, announces bad prospects for the next three years. Terrible European wars are to occur this year, and between 1888 and 1891 rebellion in India will cause the withdrawal of every British soldier from Ireland, which will then rebel. England will not be able to resist three million French soldiers swooping down on London (through the Channel Tunnel?) and levying an indemnity of £100,000,000 or more. England's only chance of escaping this evil fate is a close alliance with France, it seems. Surely there are cells still vacant at Bedlam to which this fanatical charlatan might retire.

TALMAGE thanks God that "for eighty years of transgression" there is "an eternity of forgiveness," and "for crime deep as hell, an atonement high as heaven." Talmage thanks God for the reversal of all morality and justice. The most hideous villains are to receive the highest rewards if they only turn to some particular belief at the last moment.

TALMAGE also says that we all commit deicide—that is, we frequently kill God. Every time we commit sin we re-crucify the Lord, and "that is deicide." Any extravagant rubbish is good enough for a popular preacher to utter.

DR. CROSS was jerked to Jesus last Tuesday morning at 8 o'clock. At half-past seven he took the Sacrament, so that he died with the body of Christ inside him. He joins the hallelujah band to be for ever with the Lord. But as his crime was peculiarly atrocious, and without a single alleviating circumstance, all who are going to the opposite place may congratulate themselves on the absence of his company there.

THE Rev. J. M. Lowther, rector of Bolton, shot himself dead on Tuesday morning, rather than appear at the Wigton petty sessions to answer a charge of indecently assaulting Jane Stoddart, a domestic servant in his employ. He was a cousin of Lord Lonsdale.

AN English comic ballad of some years ago, said—

"That all the books of Moses
Were nothing but supposes,
And he deserved rebuke, sir,
Who wrote the pentateuch, sir;
And as for father Adam,
With mistress Eve, his madam,
And what the serpent spoke, sir,
'Twas nothing but a joke, sir;
And a well-invented flam."

AT the University of Cambridge there was some discussion whether it was right to have compulsory attendance of the undergraduates at chapel. A don remarked, "Well, it is just a question of compulsory religion or no religion at all." On this Bishop Thirlwall observed that the distinction between the two was too fine a one for the subtlest mind to grasp.

MR. FOOTE'S LECTURES.

Sunday, January 15, Hall of Science, Old Street, London, E.C.; at 11.15, "Balfour's Irish Stew"; at 7, "Darwin on God."
Thursday, Jan. 19, Unicorn Music Hall, opposite West Ham Church, Plaistow, at 8, "An Hour in Hell."

JAN. 19, Plaistow; 22, Bradford; 29, Blackburn.
FEB. 5, Camberwell; 12, Milton Hall, London; 19, Liverpool.
MARCH 4 and 11, Hall of Science, London; 25, Milton Hall.
APRIL 1, Manchester.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

LITERARY communications to be addressed to the Editor, 14 Clerkenwell Green, London, E.C. All business communications to Mr. R. Forder, 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.

W. G. K.—Scarcely up to the mark.

B. MILES.—Thanks. Jokes are always welcome.

A. H. HUNTER.—You can only see the *whole* discussion between Ingersoll and Dr. Field by obtaining the numbers of the *North American Review*.

J. COLE, 60 St. James Street, Barnsbury, N., will be glad to see or hear from any Freethinkers in the district who are willing to organise.

A. SAULT.—An obvious printer's blunder; should have been 1780. For the inspiration of the Bible—Greg's *Creed of Christendom*, Giles's *Hebrew and Christian Records*, and *Supernatural Religion*. When you have read these we will refer you to others.

W. CABELL.—Probably your subscription was acknowledged in the *National Reformer*. We give suitable paragraphs to the Children's Party, but our space is too limited to print lists of subscriptions week after week for a local enterprise. The prices of publications we advertise do not include postage. We will add the price of postage in future.

D. H. WOOD.—Thanks for your good wishes for the London Federation. The date should have been 1651.

T. H. DUKE desires to acknowledge the following subscriptions to the Wallace Nelson Fund: J. Perceval, 5s.; Bradford Friends (3rd list), 3s. This fund was declared "closed" some time ago and we cannot print any further lists.

E. TURNER.—The man's wriggling is certainly amusing. He is like the fox who lost his tail, and was proud of the amputation.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Truthseeker—Ironclad Age—Jus—Women's Suffrage Journal—Western Figaro—Freireligioses Sonntags-Blatt—Boston Investigator—L'Union des Libres-penseurs—Fredeinker—Le Libre-Penseur—Thinker—L'Union Démocratique—Liberator—Le Courrier de L'Europe—Radical—The Earth and its Evidences—The Hampshire Independent—Friendly Message—Open Court.

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

SUGAR PLUMS.

COLONEL INGERSOLL has written a reply to the Rev. Dr. Field's rejoinder. We receive it just as we are going to press. It is already in our printer's hands, and will be on sale next Wednesday. The price will be twopence; the title "God and Man."

"DARWIN ON GOD" is the subject of Mr. Foote's lecture at the London Hall of Science (this evening, Jan. 15). He will deal with Darwin's utterances on the subject in the recently published *Life and Letters*. The morning lecture will be on "Balfour's Irish Stew."

MR. FOOTE had capital audiences at Manchester last Sunday, notwithstanding the untoward weather, the hall being crowded in the evening, and the meeting most enthusiastic. We hear that the Secular Hall Company is progressing favorably. Money, however, is needed for the work of the Branch, and an attempt is being made to raise an extra sum of sixty pounds by annual subscriptions. Over a third of the amount is already promised, and doubtless the remainder will soon be forthcoming. The Branch is introducing music on Sundays, and a choir is being trained for the purpose.

TO-DAY (Jan. 15), the Conference of the Lancashire Federated Branches will be held at the Manchester Secular Hall. Mr. Schweizer, who has done so much to promote this movement, will be present, and we trust there will be a good gathering and useful discussion.

THE FINSBURY Branch is holding successful Sunday evening meetings at the Patriotic Club, Clerkenwell Green.

THE United Radical Club, Kay Street, Hackney Road, have started a debating class on Sunday nights. The topics are both theological and social. There are a great number of Freethinkers in the club. The opening discussion is on the Bible God.

THE *Liberator* of Melbourne, edited by Joseph Symes, appears in enlarged form. The earnest and energetic editor impresses on Secularists the necessity of their being a fighting body, and by his own resolute attitude is evidently doing much for the cause of mental emancipation in Australia. We send Mr. Symes our heartiest good wishes.

MR. SYMES's old friends in England will be interested in his comment upon the severance of Mrs. Besant from editorial conduct of the *National Reformer*. He says: "Secularism is *not* Socialism, nor is it Anarchy; and that must be distinctly understood. I feel the highest respect for Mrs. Besant's character and wonderful abilities; but I am sorry she has gone over to Socialism."

THE Australian Secular Association at Sydney has taken new rooms together with a large hall situated at the corner of Hunter and Castlereagh Streets. Both the Sydney and Melbourne Societies are energetically forwarding the movement for the Freethought Building Fund. A design for the Freethought Hall at Melbourne is advertised in the *Liberator*.

IBSEN and Björnson, the two greatest Norwegian writers, are both pronounced Freethinkers. The latter is referred to by Theodor Von Bunsen in the *Nineteenth Century* as so "imaginative and bewitching an orator, so brilliant a writer, and so excellent an individual."

MAX NORDAU the author of the celebrated onslaught on orthodoxy entitled *Conventional Lies*, has published a vigorous romance entitled *The Sickness of the Century*.

MR. F. W. H. MYERS' article on "Charles Darwin and Agnosticism," in the *Fortnightly Review*, is very appreciative and remarkably well written. Speaking of the influence of Darwin's creed, he says: "On the moral side there is certainly no perceptible decline. Never, perhaps, did a biography give such an unmixedly pleasing impression both of its hero and of his friends. In these hundreds of unstudied letters there is not a sentence which we could wish otherwise written; nor are the surrounding group of correspondents unworthy of the central figure."

SIR JAMES FITZJAMES STEPHEN'S Rejoinder to Mr. Mivart in the current number of the *Nineteenth Century* is a crushing one. He shows that throwing over the Bible to abide under the shelter of the Church "presents great temptations to dishonesty and involves a disguised inconsistency." Mr. Mivart's whole theory is nothing more or less than a begging of the question—"I believe the Church to be infallible because the infallible Church says it is infallible." But as Sir J. F. Stephens points out, "It must necessarily require stronger evidence to prove that a given authority is competent to enunciate a 'hard' or improbable doctrine than to prove the improbable doctrine itself, for everything which shows an improbability in the doctrine is an objection to the authority of the person who asserts it to be true, and there are, besides, all the difficulties which are inherent in proving the means of knowledge and the trustworthiness of the particular person who asserts its truth."

THERE are many good points in the rejoinder. The rules of evidence held by Mr. Mivart, Mr. Justice Stephen compares to the rules of the Canon Law, by which certain acts of immorality could not be proved except, by a number of eye-witnesses proportioned to the rank of the alleged offenders, "I think four in the case of a bishop and seven in the case of a cardinal; I forget how many if the offender was a pope." Such rules have rather safety than truth for their object; and the practically impossible conditions of disproof under which Mr. Mivart wishes to shelter Church dogmas from refutation is a proof of the degree of protection which he thinks they require. Mr. Mivart's contention is that "our reason makes God so far known to us as to appreciate his utter incomprehensibility, since it is only God who can know what the word God really means—Existence in God and creatures is indescribable and incomprehensible." Mr. Justice Stephen makes the happy repartee that "The proposition 'God exists' is thus reduced to an assertion that an unmeaning predicate may be attached to an unknown subject, that something unintelligible may be said of something unknown."

THE same number of the *Nineteenth Century* contains a paper by Sir Henry Thompson on "The Progress of Cremation," which method of disposing of the dead seems to be making way upon the Continent. The Council of the Cremation Society of England are also, it is stated, prepared to undertake the cremation of persons making a donation of ten guineas to the Society. Sir Henry Thompson gives his professional opinion that for the eradication of zymotic diseases, the cremation of each body, the life of which has been destroyed by one of these contagious maladies, is "an absolutely essential step."

It appears that 787 cremations have occurred in Italy, 473 in Germany, and only 23 at Woking, in England. When Dr. Cameron introduced a bill in 1884 to legalise and regulate cremation he was opposed by the Government as well as the leader of the Opposition. In such matters it makes no difference whether the Government is Tory or Liberal; Mr. Gladstone will oppose cremation as heartily as Lord Salisbury.

SIR HENRY THOMPSON tells us why the English crematorium was erected at Woking. The Cremation Society made an arrangement "with the directors of one of the great cemeteries north of London, to erect on their property a building in which cremation should be effectively performed. This site, so appropriate for its purpose and so well placed in relation to neighboring property etc., would have been at once occupied had not the then Bishop of Rochester, within whose jurisdiction the cemetery lay, exercised his authority by absolutely prohibiting the proposed addition." So much for Bishops and progress. We may add that among the hundreds of letters Sir Henry Thompson received after publishing his first article on Cremation, there were several which complained bitterly of the "pagan" and "anti-Christian" tendency of his plan.

LITTLE straws may show the way the wind blows. The *Birmingham Daily Mail* inserts a letter pointing out the not very original joke that cricket is referred to in the Bible because "Peter stood up before the eleven and was bold (bowled)," and "Maid Rhoda kept the wicket." The *London Echo* improves on the old proverb "Man proposes, but God disposes," by reading it "Man proposes, but the girl disposes."

THE "ROCK" ON THE BISHOP.

IT is amusing and instructive to see a pious paper like the *Rock* commending an Atheist and condemning a Bishop. Yet this is what is seen in its recent article on "Belief and Doubt." The orthodox journal actually holds itself thoroughly justified "in praising an infidel article by Sir James Stephen," because this article, though "setting out from the extreme Freethinker's position," maintained in common with the *Rock* that the attempted explanations and perversions of God's Word by Mr. Mivart and others were illogical and unsatisfactory. "Mr. Justice Stephen," says the *Rock* admiringly, "demonstrated with admirable clearness that if it be allowable to explain away one part of the Bible, in all consistency the same reasoning should be applied to the whole."

The Bishop of Carlisle, however, writing in the *Nineteenth Century*, takes up exactly the weak semi-infidel position which the *Rock* and Sir James Stephen unite in condemning so strongly for its inconsistency and its want of moral fibre. The *Rock* accordingly calls the Bishop over the coals almost as vigorously as if he were an infidel in sheep's clothing. It says, "That he wilfully or ignorantly has misinterpreted, or failed to understand Sir James Stephen, is at the outset plain," although "Mr. Justice Stephen's meaning is as clear as it could be." The *Rock* goes on to say:

"But this is not our gravest charge against the Bishop's article. It contains one paragraph, of which, speaking in all calmness and deliberation, we say that we should have thought that an English Bishop would have been ashamed to put his name to it. Before we criticise this passage in detail, we would remind Dr. Hervey Goodwin that he has subscribed his belief in the Sixth Article of our Church, and that when he was ordained a deacon he stated that he believed 'unfeignedly ALL the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.'"

The Bishop, it seems, will not allow there is any comparison between the fundamental articles of the Christian belief and such comparatively unimportant matters as the biblical accounts of the Flood, the Creation, and the formation of Eve. He says:

"I object to the comparison. It is obvious that the account given of creation does not pretend to be historical in any ordinary sense; to say that the visible universe was created 'by the word of God,' and that God 'breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life,' is to make theological statements of the most important kind; but no one should wish to call it history."

To this poorly-disguised desertion of the faith committed to the saints the *Rock* honestly and indignantly replies:

"Why not? How does the Bishop of Carlisle or anyone else living dare to say that this chapter is not history—history as true as that of the Crucifixion or the Gunpowder Plot? If the word of God did not cause, literally, the world to be created, can the Bishop tell us what did? And let him gather together all the theories ever put forward, and see if they, collectively or individually, furnish him with anything one ten-thousandth part as satisfactory."

Again, the treacherously rationalising Bishop says:

"The account of the formation of Eve in like manner may have an important moral meaning, but I should apprehend that it never could have been regarded by thinking men as a literal scientific statement of the origin of the sexes."

The *Rock* reminds the Bishop of the self-evident fact that it *has* been so regarded by eminent Christians, and observes, justly enough, considering that God's character is at stake, that

"Its moral significance beside its literal truth is a small matter, and if this had been all the lesson it was meant to convey, this would have been recorded for us in a more obvious and comprehensible form."

The *Rock* says that the next statement of the Bishop is "sheer nonsense." As both are presumably inspired by the Holy Ghost promised to all faithful Christians, it is better to quote the Bishop's "sheer nonsense," which runs thus:

"The account of the flood is a very precious tradition, full of valuable teaching, and I doubt not recording some great event of actual occurrence; but I confess that until Bishop Colenso brought his arithmetic to bear upon it and some other portions of Old Testament history, I was quite under the impression that the common-sense of Christians abstained from criticising this ancient record by the canons applicable to ordinary history."

The *Rock* can understand how a Jesuitical Catholic like Mr. Mivart can quote approvingly the remark of another faithful Catholic, who explained the flood by saying: "No doubt there was a local inundation, and some of the sacerdotal caste saved themselves in a punt with their cocks and hens"; but it is amazed to find that such a view is held by one of our own Bishops, and it is still further amazed that the Bishop does not know that Christian common-sense *has* accepted the Bible narrative of the Flood as true and has discussed it amply on that footing. The *Rock* rebukes the Bishop for falling "so deplorably" into the background of the theological battle, and compares him to children who take up startling and novel views as new and glittering toys in preference to a good old book.

The Bishop of course holds that a line must be drawn between Genesis and the Gospels. But the faithful *Rock* demands:

"Who made thee a judge over us? Is the Bishop of Carlisle, is the whole bench of Bishops *en masse*, to say where a line shall be drawn when all is the Word of God?"

I confess that I feel considerably sympathy with the *Rock* in its protests. It is consistent and it is faithful in its contentions, while such treacherous views as the Bishop's are merely half-way houses to Atheism fraudulently placarded with Christian bills. His concessions are indications of defeat, and of the tendency to come over to the enemy so far as expediency allows. On the other hand, however, it is encouraging to see Bishops commencing our work for us; but at the same time the situation is made more embarrassing for us in proportion as Christianity abandons the Bible and withdraws to less definite and dogmatic teachings. But this is merely an inevitable stage in the conversion of Christendom to rational Atheism. The apparently least essential parts of Christian belief must perish first, and the rest will gradually follow.

W. P. BALL.

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A SCRAP of an old-time love song, written on a sheet of papyrus, has been sent home from the far east by a recent traveller, who has provided a translation as follows:—

Oh, dost thou remember our youthful hours,
When I was thy humble beau?
When we laughed and sighed in the daisy bowers
Eight hundred years ago?

Canst thou now recall the fond days of yore,
Our travels o'er land and sea,
When I was one hundred and fifty-four
And you were just ninety-three?

Canst thou summon up to thy backward view
The charms of our love divine,
When you were two hundred and seventy-two
And I was three hundred and nine?

Ah! then how our love did supremely thrive,
How we dwelt in a mutual heaven,
When you were three hundred and eighty-five
And I was four hundred and eleven!

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