

THE FREETHINKER

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

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COMIC BIBLE SKETCH.—No 236.



HOLY HEALING.

Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.—JOHN v., 2—4.

THE CHURCH AND INFIDELITY.

THE last volume of "Present Day Tracts," issued by the Religious Tract Society, contains a temperate and interesting essay by the editor of the series, the Rev. J. Kelly, entitled "The Present Conflict with Unbelief." The writer makes the frankest admissions as to the perils that threaten the Church of Christ. He winds up with some oracular promises of triumph for his own side, but these are rather prophecy than argument, and we fancy that many of his orthodox readers will be more terrified by his statements than comforted by his assurances.

Mr. Kelly says that a cursory glance will show "the extent of the present conflict." It goes far beyond the old limits of controversy, and extends even to "the existence and character of God," to say nothing of miracles, the origin of man, and the natural origin of every form of religion. "The conflict with unbelief at the present time," he allows, "goes down deeper and covers a far more widely-extended area than it ever did in any previous period of Christian history."

After quoting a sentence from Mr. Morley, stating that "everybody, male and female, who reads anything at all,

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now reads a dozen essays a year to show with infinite varieties of approach and of demonstration that we can never know whether there be a God or not, or whether the soul is more or other than a mere function of the body"—Mr. Kelly remarks that Mr. Morley took no account of the masses of the people, among whom unbelief, if less "culchawed," is far more serious. "There are," he says, "two weekly papers exclusively devoted to an anti-theistic propaganda, and a third pretty equally devoted to political and social questions and to Atheism." Mr. Kelly remarks that "The conflict among the masses of the people is also carried on by means of tracts, pamphlets, lectures, printed and delivered, and public discussion. In their workshops and in their homes there is much free discussion, on all the vital questions in dispute, among working-men."

With respect to "the temper" of the conflict, Mr. Kelly feels that "the amenities of controversy are observed in the literature for the educated," but among Secularists a very different spirit prevails. We presume, therefore, that Mr. Kelly thinks the advocates of Secularists, or their auditors and readers, are *uneducated*. Probably, however, he would find himself mistaken if he engaged in a public controversy with them. Certainly they do not believe in

what Hamlet calls "words, words, words." They prefer plain English to the circumlocutions of a bastard culture, and they like to see every problem stripped of the fog of dilettantism and half-heartedness. They believe, with Renan, that truth is far more valuable than politeness. They hold that the sharpest exposure of falsehood and the severest scorn of hypocrisy are signs of a wholesome regard for truth and honesty; and that courtesy to individuals is quite compatible with burning hatred of a fraudulent and mischievous faith. Still, it is only just to let Mr. Kelly entertain his own opinion; and uncomplimentary as it is, we print it without the slightest annoyance.

"In their press, the most outrageous and outspoken blasphemy, of the coarsest and most revolting kind, pictorial caricatures of the most sacred subjects and themes, of God and of Christ, and the expression of the most unmeasured personal contempt for the champions of Christianity, are not indeed the only weapons used, but are weapons constantly in use. In the public discussions with the advocates of Christianity, which form so marked a feature of the conflict as carried on among the masses, the rules of courtesy seem to be generally observed, as far as can be judged from the printed reports, but unbridled license is resorted to by many writers in the Secularist press."

Mr. Kelly is so sore on the subject, that he refers again to "the pictorial caricatures which appear in the *Freethinker*." Later on he recurs to these awful pictures, and shudderingly speaks of Secular assailants of Christianity who dare to "question the sanity of our Lord"—from which we infer that Mr. Kelly has read our pamphlet, *Was Jesus Insane?*

One of the "saddest facts," in Mr. Kelly's view, is that "not a few of the leaders of the army of unbelief were born and trained in the Christian fold, and once professed the faith they now seek to destroy." Very sad, no doubt; but how often in history has the same complaint been made! Men reared in Judaism and Paganism adopted Christianity, and opposed the creed of their parents. Men brought up by Catholic parents turned Protestants, and denounced the faith of their childhood as idolatry. So has it ever been, and the same old complaint has broken from the lips of the deserted.

"Ralph, thou hast done a fearful deed
In falling away from thy father's creed."

But there is something still worse. Mr. Kelly deplors "the uneasiness and unsettlement of mind felt by many people within the Christian Church." These shaking souls still keep within the fold, but they see that "infidelity" has a great deal to say for itself, and they are unable to answer it satisfactorily.

Dealing with what he calls "special features of the conflict," Mr. Kelly glances at Evolution with a suspicious eye. But he remarks that "it is as yet simply an hypothesis awaiting conclusive proof—proof which perhaps *may* never be forthcoming." Surely such a sentence betrays a fatuous clinging to a fool's paradise. Mr. Kelly need not imagine that the fate of Evolution depends on the discovery of all "the missing links in the chain of evidence." There is, indeed, little reason for supposing that these will ever be discovered. Enough, however, is known to justify belief; and the stress of evidence is so exclusively in one direction, that Evolution is adopted by the vast majority of scientists as the only tenable theory. Mr. Kelly cheats himself if he fancies that Evolution is in peril unless it provides a museum of all forms, past and present, from the monad to man, without a single break in the chain. He is less sagacious than the Bishop of Carlisle, who perceives that Evolution is established, and that Theology must be reconciled to it or perish. Still, one must admit Mr. Kelly's honesty in doubting "whether the theory of Evolution is consistent with the whole teaching of Christianity—its whole teaching concerning man, for instance—concerning the origin of the human race, the Fall, the first and second Adam, etc."

Mr. Kelly passes on to "Substitutes for Christianity." His remarks on the Religion of Humanity are not very profound. He would do well to read Mill's volume on Comte with some degree of attention. This might be less convenient, but it would be more satisfactory, than relying on a quotation from Professor Flint. Nor, on the other hand, can we follow Mr. Kelly in his remarks on Pessimism, which he considers a malady of unbelief. Is it not a fact that Christianity is deeply pessimistic? Is not "vanity of vanities, all is vanity," its perpetual refrain? Does not Jesus depreciate the pleasures of this life even more than Buddha? And does not Paul say that it is only the belief in the Resurrection that keeps Christians from being the

most miserable of men? Moreover, is it not a fact that the literature of religion, from the earliest times to the present, exhibits a gloomy temper; while the literature of unbelief has nearly always been distinguished for its joyous spirit? Mr. Kelly appears to see something appalling in Sir William Thompson's theory that the sun will be exhausted in five or six millions of years; but surely this dread of such a remote catastrophe shows that religious, and not secular, minds are most prone to despondency.

Passing on to the "Higher Criticism," Mr. Kelly remarks that the evidences for the books of the Old and New Testament are unshaken, and that "negative critics are consistent only in their negations"; a statement which betrays an astonishing ignorance of the subject. Equally astonishing is the remark that "confirmations of the truth of the Bible in both its parts are constantly coming to light from many sources—from ancient monuments, from Palestine exploration, from history, from science." Does Mr. Kelly suppose that sceptics ever regarded the Bible as an *absolute* fiction, without any geographical or historical facts in its composite narratives? Or does he imagine that any *vital* part of the Bible has been corroborated by archaeological discoveries in the East? What has turned up to prove the Creation Story? What has given color to the story of God showing Moses his "back parts"? What has given fresh credibility to the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the Ascension? We pause for a reply.

We confess, however, that there is much force in Mr. Kelly's criticism on Matthew Arnold, whose "method of commending the Bible seems to the common sense of an ordinary mind like nothing so much as betraying it with a kiss." Yet, after all, there is *some* truth in Matthew Arnold's view of Jesus, while Mr. Kelly's view is simple infatuation. It is impossible to discuss with a writer who, without reference to texts or incidents, bursts into a rapture of panegyric. Mr. Kelly holds that the godhead of Christ explains everything; and he naively adds that if Christ was God "there is an end of the controversy in all its forms." This is simply saying to an opponent, "If I am right, you are wrong; but I *am* right you know, and therefore of course you are wrong."

Mr. Kelly describes Jesus as "one who had knowledge of the human heart and the thoughts of men such as no mere human being ever possessed." Indeed! We venture to say that Shakespeare knew infinitely more of the human heart than Jesus. Jesus made "love" a commandment, as though we could love or hate at pleasure. Shakespeare knew better than this when he said "The quality of mercy is not strained." Neither can we agree with Mr. Kelly in seeing in Jesus "one in whose mind there is the most perfect balance of all the powers." Jesus lacked several important faculties, and such as he did possess were in our opinion deranged. Still less, if possible, can we see in him "one in whose character there is every conceivable perfection without one single flaw." This is the language of worship, not of criticism. Mr. Kelly should know, though apparently he does not, that Professor Newman is not the only Deist who has questioned the perfection of Christ. Almost *every* Deist has drawn attention to his defects and failings. Even Mill, whose eulogy on Jesus, in the posthumous Essay on Theism, is such a godsend to Christian apologists, spoke very differently in the Essay on Liberty.

No less indiscriminating is Mr. Kelly's praise of Christianity. It is obviously addressed to believers who regard it as a divine system. Christianity may have "an adequate remedy for the universal malady for sin," but if the remedy is certain there must be a serious defect in its application. Mr. Kelly carries the same *faithful* spirit into his conclusion. He holds that unbelief is spreading, that it *may* triumph for a time, and that those who "underrate its strength and resources" may experience defeat and disappointment. Yet he is positive that Christianity will triumph in the end. For what reason? Because it must. In other words, Mr. Kelly is sure because he is sure. We are perhaps presumptuous in declining to regard him as an oracle, but we must obey our own reason. If the woman who hesitates is lost, the religion which condescends to speculate on its longevity is doomed, for the speculation is a symptom of decay, and what decays will die.

G. W. FOOTE.

He (at church): "Lovely anthem." She: "It's by Sullivan."
He: "Are the words by Gilbert?"

REPEAL OF THE BLASPHEMY LAWS.

I BEG to assure the readers of the *Freethinker* that the Committee of the National Association for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws have not lost sight of the important duties entrusted to them. Several difficulties have stood in the way of very active public work. The Irish Question has absorbed attention, and my own health, now improving, has been poor, but numerous and continuous applications for information have been received and answered. A grave obstacle to our work arose out of the unfortunate change made in Mr. Courtney Kenny's Bill by the insertion of what is known as the Indian clause. The Committee have on several occasions expressed their opinion that the clause would give a new sanction to vexatious interference with the expression of opinion on religious matters, and would enlarge the area of persecution. I am rejoiced to learn that the bill has been again introduced free from the objectionable provision. As soon as the state of public affairs permits, a meeting of subscribers and friends will be convened to elect a new Committee, and devise plans for aggressive work. In the meanwhile, as our funds are nearly exhausted, the Treasurer, J. Clair Grece, Esq., Redhill, Surrey, will be happy to receive subscriptions. I shall be pleased to receive the names of new members, and to supply information.

W. SHARMAN.

Preston, March 10, 1888.

ACID DROPS.

THE German Emperor's death was the theme of many a sermon last Sunday. Dr. Parker, at the City Temple, after the usual banalities of the occasion, remarked that the Crown Prince had "proved himself a true Christian." But, as the new Emperor is well known to be a sceptic, it struck even Dr. Parker that such a statement required some explanation. He therefore added that "In form, ceremony, and ecclesiastic relation, one need not inquire what he was; but in docility, in resignation, and in cheerful submission to a trying situation, he had surely been an example to all men." Surely this is very cool impudence. Parker claims every sceptic who isn't a rogue or a madman as a Christian. Two hundred years ago he would have helped to burn them; now he pretends that they belong to his faith without knowing it. Well, after all, though the insult is great, Christianity must feel hard-up when it borrows—or rather steals—good men from the other side.

THE new Empress is also known to be heterodox. She was a constant patron of Strauss, even when he was most denounced for impiety. Dr. Parker was, of course, discreetly silent on this point.

THE Bishop of Peterborough, who is a thorough-paced courtier, spoke of Emperor William's death as a tragedy, "perhaps the very saddest and strangest that human history had to record." Indeed, my Lord Bishop! Have you forgotten Calvary? Even apart from that, have you not read of many a horrid martyrdom in "human history"? Do you not know that while you were speaking some poor wretch was dying, leaving his wife and little ones to hardship and want? Can you not see that such a death-bed is infinitely more tragic than that of an old emperor, who lived out an unusual span of ninety-one years, died surrounded by friends, and left all his children and grand-children in affluence?

"CLEAR your mind of cant, sir," exclaimed Dr. Johnson. It is a capital piece of advice, and we recommend it to the Bishop of Peterborough.

"HANG him up to the lamp-post!" "Smother him!" Such were the pious ejaculations heard outside a noted chapel in North Bristol the other Sunday night. It appears that the Rev. W. Pritchard, Wesleyan minister, and Mr. W. Gibbons, superintendent of the schools, had a misunderstanding about "precedence." The result was a row in the chapel, which the police quieted; and a worse row outside, where part of the congregation were "waiting" for the minister. Fortunately the man of God concealed himself inside, and passed out by a private egress when the coast was clear enough. The funniest part of the affair was that some Freethinkers, returning from a Secular meeting, stopped to see what was going on, and mildly chaffed the Christians on their loving haruony.

THE Vicar of Sowerby Bridge received one of our 'Tracts, on the "Parson's Creed," and was so disgusted that he threw it into the fire. He announced this fact in the church, the result being that some of his congregation wanted to see the "disgusting" thing. One of our readers has procured a hundred copies for distribution among the inquiring saints.

THE *Christian Herald* reports that at the close of a series of special services held by the Rev. Robert Baggins at Victoria Park, London, a woman rose and testified to her joy in the Lord, concluding with the exclamation, "Praise the Lord." Uttering the words, she fell forward, and "passed at once into the presence of the King." That is, she died on the spot, of religious excitement. Of the innumerable illnesses, nervous disorders, lunacies and deaths caused by religious fear or frenzy or fanaticism Christians prefer to say as little as possible. When they do notice a death they try to glorify it as a triumphant admittance to the presence of "the King." When Enoch and Elijah went to heaven, they probably did so by falling dead on the spot.

THE *Christian Herald* welcomes "a Greek murderer" to the fold. This lamb, moreover, has not been jerked to Jesus, so that he seems to have escaped all the inconveniences of his "very sinful life" and to have received all the blessings. He feigned madness and was let off. During an illness the words spoken to him by a British missionary at Nazareth "were blessed by God." "The words of the sinner's Friend brought to his eyes tears of sorrow, repentance and joy, and as he recovered his health, he found his all in Jesus." Pity his murdered wife could not share in his glorious prospects. The murder of his wife was only "one of the gross crimes" which he had committed. And Christians are proud to say, "Of such are the kingdom of heaven"—proud of having rewarded such miscreants with the hope or the certainty of eternal bliss.

THE Rev. A. Solari, vicar of Ocker Hill, Tipton, has committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor. He is said to have lost a large amount of money through a bank failure. This shows how Christianity supports people in trouble.

A BOARD-SCHOOL teacher named Silverlock has also committed suicide through being requested to resign. His belief in God did not prevent him throwing himself in front of a train at High-bury Railway Station. In a farewell letter he says if God will pardon him he hopes to get to heaven. He is enticed by the prospect of a place where there are "no dull, stupid boys, and no inspectors."

THE *Catholic Monitor* exults over the spread of Catholicism in Boston. The *Boston Herald* deplors the increase of crime in that city. Catholicism and crime appear to be closely related as cause and effect.

THE *Christian Advocate* (U.S.) holds that the Church of Rome is "organised malediction upon the Evangelical faith," and that "the virtues of priests are more dangerous than their vices." The *Catholic Monitor*, speaking of Protestant clergymen, says "they are the unholyest set of humbugs in the whole wicked world." Protestants and Catholics agree in describing each other as a bad set, although they may agree in nothing else.

THE *Cornhill Magazine* contains some amusing reminiscences of a clergyman. One parson of his youth, he says, went fast asleep while he was preaching. He was always slow, and on this occasion got slower and slower till he stopped altogether. This woke up those who nodded, and on looking towards the pulpit they saw him sleeping while he stood. He passed from a sermon into a snore. So did another preacher in Rutlandshire, as related on the authority of "a parson there." This second sleeper had gone to take the duty for a neighbor a few miles off in August. He walked to the church, and, being in good time, looked into the vicarage. A servant said, "You seem tired, sir; won't you have a glass of ale after your walk?" Yes, he would, and he did; and felt refreshed. The afternoon, however, was very hot, and the rustic congregation, who had been reaping and binding all the week, mostly fell asleep. There was a nasal murmuring among the people. The doors, too, were wide open, and the humble bees sailed slowly down the aisle, adding to the hum. Thus when the preacher went into the pulpit he caught the sentiment of the congregation, and, after putting his face reverently between his hands for a few seconds, he remained in the same attitude fast asleep.

THREE ex-nuns set up a sham convent at Paris. These holy sisters had forty-six girls under their charge as boarders or novices. The other day, however, the Mother-Superior and her two confederates were marched off to prison by the police. Evidently religion is a paying game, else swindlers would not undertake religious enterprises.

THE Rev. B. Edwards, of Ashill, Norfolk, is in his hundredth year. He still sticks to his salary of £1,050 a year, although he can do very little work in return. As he has enjoyed his income for seventy-five years one would think he might retire and make room for some one who could do the work properly.

BENJAMIN BARRETT is a burglar of pious proclivities. He was found at the Salvation Army Refuge, in West India Dock Road. Being arrested on a charge of breaking into a chapel in Christ Street, he exclaimed, "Ah, thank the Lord, I am innocent!" It was proved that he pawned a table-cover which had been stolen from the chapel, and that he had previously been sentenced to twelve months' hard labor for breaking into the same chapel.

THE Rev. E. H. Julius has left £160,000 behind him. This is how he obeyed Christ's command to sell all he had and give to the poor.

A PREACHER named John Angell Gibbons, was charged at the Salford Police-court with stealing a parcel containing a rug, overcoat and walking stick. The culprit is connected with a mission room at Hyde, and is the son of a minister. The magistrates allowed him the option of a fine of 50s. and costs in lieu of going to prison for a month.

MR. W. ST. CHAD BOSCAWEN, lecturing at the British Museum upon the discovery of the buried city of Sepharvain, said tablets had been found of very ancient date concerning Sargon, one of the earliest kings of that place. His mother was a princess, who bore him in a secret place, and then, for fear of her people, she placed him, as Moses was placed, in a little ark of bulrushes, and cast him upon the broad bosom of the Euphrates, on the banks of which river stood the city.

MR. BOSCAWEN also described the Temple of Sepharvain, which, he said, contained its holy of holies, in which stood a figure of the great Sun God, and in which reposed the most precious records of the nation. The priests lived, as did the Levites, by the altar, and their vestments must in many ways have resembled those employed in the gorgeous ritual of the Hebrew service. Christian evidence-mongers will doubtless find in this buried city further corroboration of Holy Writ. To our minds the facts illustrate how much of the Jewish mythology and ritual was founded upon the more ancient faith of Babylonia.

THE United Methodist Free Churches complain of a deficit on the Mission funds. It appears that at the last year's meeting in Exeter Hall the total subscriptions were £142, and the expenses of collection £72, or more than half.

DR. SPEDDING has been dismissed from the dispensary at Belfast, for an admixture of drunkenness and piety. He insulted a dying young woman, who was one of his patients, and insisted on reading a psalm from the Bible to her after frightening her by telling her she was going to die. He was so intent on saving her soul that he refused to leave until a policeman was fetched. The young woman has since died.

SOME pious Spaniards in Morocco recently entered the house of a widow named Athias, a British subject, and ill-used the inmates, carrying off a lad of fifteen, whom they subsequently had privately baptised by Franciscans.

THE Salvation Army barracks at Derby has been burnt down. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

TWENTY-TWO Salvationists were summoned at Torquay for parading the streets on Sundays with instrumental music. Fifteen were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

A PRIVATE in the Salvation Army named Gaythorne Nayler, was charged at Leeds with the manslaughter of his daughter, aged seven months. He refused to call in a doctor when the child was ill, as he preferred to leave the child in the hands of its Heavenly Father, because he was bound to obey the advice of God before man. As it could not be positively sworn that the child's life could have been saved if a doctor had been called in, the prisoner was discharged.

A NEWSPAPER published in the Argentine Republic reports one of those atrocities which priests alone seem capable of committing. A Jesuit named José Rodriguez accused his servant, a lad of fourteen, with having stolen some money from him. He maltreated the boy in order to obtain a confession, but the boy, not having taken the money, could not acknowledge himself the thief. The case was brought before a magistrate, and the boy declared innocent. This so enraged the disciple of Loyola that when he had the boy home he ordered him to undress, tied his hands and feet, and hung him to the ceiling, while he cowhided him brutally. He then lit a fire at the back of the house and threw upon it the boy, who by this time was half unconscious. The heart-rending screams of the unhappy lad attracted the attention of some passers-by, who came to the rescue. The priest was with difficulty saved from being lynched, and now awaits his trial. Another example of how Christians practise the precept "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

NERVOUS preachers and probationers have given rise to many stories. Most have heard of the timid young curate who, struggling through his first service, read that "immediately the cock wept and Peter went out and crew bitterly." Another nervous preacher gave out the first line of Bishop Heber's missionary hymn as "From Iceland's greasy mountains." When he came to the sermon he got more mixed still, and announced that "it was easier for the knee of an idol to go through a rich man than for a camel to enter the kingdom of heaven." It must have been the same individual who declared, as he mopped his forehead, "Not one tit or jottle of his word shall fail," and then perceiving a titter explained, "I mean not one tottle or jit shall pass away." Everybody in the church, except the pastor himself, seemed to

enjoy it when he lost the place in his manuscript, and while hunting for it spoke of "Esau, who sold his message for a birth of pot-right," and then explained that he "sold his birthright for a pot of message."

MR. L. K. WASHBURN, writing in the *Boston Investigator*, notices that the death rate among the Catholic population of Montreal is 37 in the 1000, while among the Protestant minority it is only 15 to the 1000. At one time all the property in Montreal was owned by Catholics. Now four-fifths of it are in the hands of the Protestants, who constitute only one-fifth of the population. All this shows that the more thorough Christianity of Roman Catholicism is a wretched assistance so far as this life is concerned.

HEARTRENDING accounts have been received of fearful disasters on the Alps from the fall of great avalanches. The Alpine troops with the Carabineers, under the direction and leadership of the authorities, have been working heroically in the task of rescuing the people of the small villages which have been buried in the masses of snow. By the latest accounts more than 200 bodies have been taken out. This is how God takes care of his children. One place caught fire under the snow, and only charred bodies were dug out. At another place a starving and terrified man dug his way out through the snow after five days' labor with his torn and bleeding hands.

DR. J. K. CAMPBELL preaching in Mary Kirk Established Church, Stirling, recommended Christianity because it devoted its chief care to the feeble and blighted specimens of humanity. Dr. Campbell did not trace out the consequences of this devotion. The farmer who bred from his feeblest stock and made seedlings of his blighted potatoes would be considered insane.

Home Words, the Woodville Parish Magazine, is truly Christian in its fraternal expressions in regard to a rival body. It says "the Church purifies the mind and elevates the heart by music that is sacred and reverent and fit for the worship of God; whereas the 'Salvation Army' degrades and befools both heart and mind by the vulgar tunes and uproarious singing of the penny music hall."

CARDINAL MANNING has been enlightening the world as to what is the sin against the Holy Ghost. Scripture does not inform us, but Cardinal Manning seems to have had some private inspiration on the subject. "They are sinning against the Holy Ghost," he says, "who do not believe in sin, or in their own sinfulness." This is about the hundredth theory on this vexed question, and is probably as correct as the rest. Cardinal Manning does not try to reconcile it with the plain language of Jesus, who speaks of "blasphemy" against the Holy Ghost. Now "blasphemy" is a kind of libel, and how on earth can a man who "does not believe in sin" be guilty of libelling the Holy Ghost? Of course Cardinal Manning will not condescend to satisfy our scruples. He is a priest, and to question a priest is flat blasphemy; a sin, indeed, which is never forgiven (by the priest) either in this life or in the life to come.

THE *Christian Herald* narrates how a preacher lost his reason while preaching most earnestly with the tears rolling down his cheek. The audience was much affected, but they found that the preacher was so mad that he had to be sent off at once to a lunatic asylum. He did not recover his senses for two years. On his recovery he explained that he went mad through "a species of revelation" showing him men dragged down to perdition and shouting wildly, "lost! lost! lost!" It was that horrible thought and vision that brought on madness. That portion of Christianity is indeed well calculated to produce insanity in every intelligent and humane mind capable of realising its infamous horrors.

FUNNY stories come from America. The latest is of a cherubic wanderer—a baby born with a halo. The spiritist papers report that there is a child out West who in its cradle "goes into trance and develops an aureole." No doubt the babe of promise will fulfil his destiny by finding a place in Barnum's Museum. If Jesus Christ lived in these days, his parents would have got up a caravan and taken a tour round the country with the greatest magician of his age.

TALMAGE declares that all liars shall have their place in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. What a miserable man Talmage must be if he believes his own statement.

ACCORDING to a report from Canton, two Buddhist priests have been burnt alive. They were so enraged at being scourged for assaulting two beautiful nuns, that they rushed upon their Abbot and endeavored to kill him with long knives.

OBITUARY.—It is my painful duty to record the death of Edward Turnbull, a member of the West Hartlepool Branch, N.S.S., at the age of 63. A Freethinker for 40 years, he was one of the organisers of the branch. His funeral was a Secular one. The service was read by Mr. McNance, and was listened to attentively by a large number of persons. He leaves a widow to mourn his loss. This is the first Secular funeral in the Hartlepoons.—J. Dixon, Sec.

MR. FOOTE'S LECTURES.

Sunday, March 18, in the Co-operative Hall, Darwen; at 10.45, "Bible Blunders"; at 2.45, "The Blood of Christ"; at 6.30, "Mansions in the Sky."

MARCH 25, Manchester.

APRIL 1, South Place Institute, London; 8, Plymouth; 15, Huddersfield; April 22, Liverpool.

MAY 13 and 27, Hall of Science, London.

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.

J. GOUGH.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

D. SMITH (Sowerby Bridge).—Mr. Foote will be happy to pay you a visit. Please write, stating what hall can be obtained, and whether you wish a Sunday or a week-night.

J. GRAY.—Much obliged. But the article in the *Sunday Chronicle* was noticed at the time.

G. WEIR.—We are not surprised that the Rev. Dr. Adamson has plenty of reasons against a public debate. If you succeed in dragging or enticing a canny Scotch "meenster" into discussing his creed with a Freethought lecturer, it will convince us that the Age of miracles is *not* past. The ten or twelve years, during which Paul rejected Christianity and persecuted the Christians, is legendary and conjectural. Nothing certain is known as to the duration of the interval between Christ's crucifixion and Paul's sunstroke.

J. A. W.—The Book of Job is in Hebrew, but it is full of strange idioms; the imagery is all foreign to Palestine, and the ideas are totally opposed to those of Judaism. See Mr. Froude's fascinating essay in *Short Studies*, vol. i.

M. TARTUFE.—Mr. Wheeler will be very glad if you can add any Spanish names to his *Dictionary of Freethinkers*. Thanks.

W. H. COWHAM.—That is an old joke about a dying man with a rascally acquaintance on either side, likening himself to Jesus Christ between two thieves. Glad to hear of the young man converted from Christianity by the *Freethinker* and the *Bible Handbook*.

EIN GOTTESLEUCHNER.—The piece by Diderot has for title "Les Eleutheromanes ou les furieux de la Liberté." It describes emancipated man as saying:

"La nature n'a fait ni serviteur ni maître,
Je ne veux ni donner ni recevoir de lois."
Et ses mains ourdiraient les entrailles du prêtre,
Au défaut d'un cordon pour étrangler les rois.

The piece was not published till Sept. 16, 1796—twelve years after the author's death, so it could scarcely be in any way responsible for the Reign of Terror.

E. ANDERSON.—"God" is generally derived from the Saxon *Gott*, which means good.

C. S. (Nottingham).—You are very young and have a good deal to learn.

C. A. L.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

D. BOVANS.—Received with thanks. Our readers assist us considerably by sending us newspaper cuttings. Who is "M" in the *Ardrossan Herald*? His letter is below criticism.

W. C. SAVILLE.—Shall appear.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Lucifer—L'Union Démocratique—Le Journal du Peuple—Freidenker—L'Union des Libres-Penseurs—Jus—New York World—Liberty—Menschenthum—American Idea—Boston Investigator—Truthseeker—Grimsby News—Qui Vive—Women's Suffrage Journal—Ironclad Age—Coventry Herald—La Vespa—Pall Mall Gazette—Sunday Chronicle—New York Herald—Freethought—Pudsey District Advertiser—Home Words—Neues Freireligiöses Sonntags-blatt.

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.

MR. FOOTE'S new lecture, "Was Shakespeare a Christian?" was delivered at the London Hall of Science last Sunday evening. The dreadful storm somewhat thinned the audience, but those present seemed highly gratified. The lecture, which lasted an hour and a half, was listened to with the deepest attention, and the lecturer received a perfect ovation at the close. Perhaps the most striking feature of the evening was the profound, the almost reverential silence which prevailed while the lecturer recited some of the most pregnant and majestic utterances of Shakespeare on life and death. On the other hand, the illustrations of Shakespeare's profanity excited the wildest laughter.

DR. McCANN delivered the second of his course of lectures at the London Hall of Science on Thursday, March 8th,

taking for his subject "Man's Nature." He spoke fluently and vigorously, but there was nothing novel in his discourse, nor was it even presented in a novel way. No attempt was made to discuss the materialistic and evolutionary account of man's nature, its origin and development. Amidst a lot of rhetorical fireworks, Dr. McCann simply succeeded in re-stating the orthodox position. Perhaps this is quite satisfactory from his point of view, but as the Christian Evidence Society designs these lectures for the conversion of "infidels" it is difficult to see how they can serve their ostensible object.

THE Christians were present in much stronger force than on the first night. Evidently there had been a special whip up, for more than one C. E. S. out-door lecturer was present, and many Christian faces seemed somewhat familiar. These people applauded frantically whenever they saw a chance. One pious man in front kicked with his feet as though he were descended from a Mexican mule. The state of his intellect may be judged from the fact that on the previous evening he said to the lecturer, "Sir, I'm satisfied there's a Gord now, without the Bible; yes, without the Bible."

MR. J. M. ROBERTSON opposed Dr. McCann in a very thoughtful, keen, and intelligent speech, which was most attentively listened to and heartily applauded. He made a great hit by showing how Dr. McCann had refrained from defining any of his important terms, and how loosely he had used them all in the course of his lecture. Dr. McCann's reply was astute, but —; well, it was hardly the reply of a man who was anxious to convince unbelievers. It was, in fact, addressed to the gallery—we mean to the Christians.

MR. FOOTE, though suffering from a bad cold, gave Dr. McCann another criticism. Feeling, although good-tempered still, was running pretty high, when Mr. Foote sat down; and Dr. McCann did his best to keep it flowing. It was announced that the third lecture would be on "Prayer." This is a fruitful subject for fun, and Dr. McCann must not feel annoyed if his jokes on Darwin, Huxley, Lubbock, Reade, and other men he doesn't understand, are paid back with interest.

LONDONERS should attend the Concert and Ball at the Camberwell Branch's hall next Wednesday evening. It is a benefit evening for the London Secular Federation. Tickets of G. Standing, 3 Finsbury Street, E.C., or at 61 New Church Road, S.

THE "Bible Handbook for Freethinkers and Inquiring Christians" is now at the binder's and will be ready next week. It contains the whole Four Parts, with a new Preface by Mr. Foote. There are two editions; one in paper covers at 1s. 4d., and the other, printed on superior paper, and bound in cloth, at 2s. Every Freethinker should have a copy of this work at hand in discussing with Christians.

Bible Heroes will resume publication next week. Nos. 13 and 14, beginning the Second Series, will be published on Wednesday; and two fresh numbers will be issued on the first and third Wednesday in each month until the work is completed.

THIS month Mr. S. H. Preston, of New York, starts the publication of a new Freethought magazine, to be called the *Thought of the Times*.

N. S. JOHNSON, a Scandinavian, of Sioux Falls, Dacota, has published in his mother tongue a book of 190 pages, entitled *Er Biblen Guds Ord?—Is the Bible God's Word?* Freethought is slowly penetrating among the Scandinavians, and the influence of writers like Bjornson, Ibsen, Kielland and Brandes is sure to make the movement a permanent one.

A PROJECT has been started to erect a monument to Servetus in Geneva, at the place where he was burnt to death with green-wood fagots in 1553. A monument to Servetus will not only be a monument to Freethought, it will be an enduring memorial that Protestant bigotry can be as rancorous and perfidious as that of the Inquisition.

UNDER the voluntary morning prayer and chapel system the attendance of the Harvard students has fallen from eight or nine hundred to one hundred and fifty or less. A few goody-goody students are now beseeching their comrades to come up and be saved, but the unregenerate young sinners mock them with scorn.

Jus, the resolute advocate of Individualism, speaks out plainly on the Bishop of London's cant about the observance of the Lord's Day. It says: "Puritanism has done quite enough harm in this land already. It has killed our arts, stamped out our old national fairs, games, and sports; driven the people to drink through sheer weariness and dreariness; smothered trade and commerce in hypocrisy, lies, and adulteration; contorted our social manners and customs; and spread a veneer of sanctimony over all the boils and blains of our modern régime of cant and cruelty."

ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY.

"No scholar—not even the variest—has ever read with adequate care those records which we still possess, of primitive Christianity. He should approach the subject with a vexatious scrutiny."—*De Quincey.*

ONLY those who have never considered the subject fancy that the origin of Christianity presents a simple problem easily explained. The prevalent orthodox opinion, that it was a God-given revelation, has many difficulties to which we have often called attention. The fact that to this day Christianity has not converted the world and is rejected by the very nation to whom it was sent, should be sufficient to nullify a view which has not a single fact in its favor and which is irreconcilable with the facts that the gospels are themselves discrepant, that there is no Pagan corroboration of their marvels, and that the whole atmosphere amid which they arose was replete with credulity and fraud.

After long study of the subject, I shall not attempt an explanation of the origin of Christianity within the limits of an article. I only offer a few hints as to the direction in which I think light may be found.

Whatever Pagan element may exist, or may be conjectured to exist in it, Christianity is mainly founded on Judaism. But did it originate in Palestine, or among the Jews of the dispersion? That is the first point to which I would direct the attention of the inquirer. The evidence of the New Testament itself tells in favor of the latter view. Every book is written in Greek, with which tongue that learned Jew Josephus informs us, very few of his countrymen were acquainted, and which he learnt himself with difficulty. The Old Testament is quoted not from the Hebrew, but from the Septuagint Greek version, made in Egypt, and to use which was considered a sacrilege in Palestine.

As far back as B.C. 588, Jews were already settled in Egypt, for, as Jeremiah says, "they obeyed not the voice of the Lord to dwell in the land of Judah (Jer. xliii., 4, 7). When Ptolemy captured Jerusalem, B.C. 320, he took many Jewish captives to Alexandria. Many others went there of their own accord, and formed a considerable colony in this great emporium of trade with the east. The north-east angle of the city was known as the Jews' quarter. The population of Alexandria was mainly composed of Greeks, Egyptians and Jews.¹ The perpetual contact and mixture of the three different races facilitated the fusion of ideas. The Jews, unable to obey the literal injunctions of their sacred books, placed on them a typical signification. This is found not only in Aristobulus and Philo, but in all the early Christian Fathers. Some curious instances are collected in the recent pamphlet by Celsus. One specimen of the way in which the Old Testament is dealt with in the New may suggest how much of its narrative may have been built from these supposed types. Isaiah prophesies that there shall come forth a Branch (*nezter*) from the stem of Jesse; so the writer of the gospel according to Matthew makes Joseph dwell "in a city called Nazareth," that it might be fulfilled, He shall be called a Nazarene.² The very phrase "a city called Nazareth" indicates that such a "city" was to both writer and readers a matter of second-hand knowledge.

The writings of Philo, who so continually Platonises, conclusively prove that the Jews in Alexandria tended to broaden their religion and assimilate it to Greek philosophy. Much of the ritual was onerous and even impossible to the dispersed Jews. Circumcision especially subjected them to Pagan contumely, and whoever first taught them that circumcision profited nothing certainly brought glad tidings. The pre-Christian communities of Therapeuts, Essenes and Gnostics exhibited the tendency to give new interpretations to the old faiths. With the disastrous events culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem (and of Christianity there are no records earlier than that event) the Messianic hope rose to a pitch of fanaticism among the Jewish population; and the expectation of a speedy approach of the end of the world, which was shared in by many pagans, spread religious fervor and terror. In the Essene and Gnostic communities was found an organisation preserving all the ethical elements of Judaism, while open to newer and

broader influences, and from the conflict of controversies and creeds at length emerged the Christian Church.

Gibbon, in his celebrated fifteenth chapter, says: "It was in the school of Alexandria that the Christian theology appears to have assumed a regular and scientific form; and when Hadrian visited Egypt, he found a church composed of Jews and Greeks, sufficiently important to attract the notice of that inquisitive prince." The letter of Hadrian (A.D. 134) has usually been swiftly glided over by Christian evidence writers, who have dwelt at length on the possibly spurious epistle of Pliny, but it is of the utmost interest and importance, and is the first undoubted reference to the new sect. Hadrian declares that "The worshippers of Serapis are Christians, and those are devoted to the God Serapis, who I find call themselves bishops of Christ." Egyptian Christianity, which is the earliest Christianity of which we have any clear trace, was as evidently mingled with the Ptolemaic worship of Serapis as that was with the earlier worship of Osiris.

But what of Jesus and Paul? My opinion is, that most students of Christian origins centre over much attention upon the carpenter's wife's son and the tent-maker of Tarsus. The problem is best approached from the side of studying the conditions under which the new religion arose, and the circumstances which fostered its development. The great amalgam we call Christianity can be traced to no one person and to no one system. It is like a stream formed from numerous tributaries. The historical facts which stand out prominently are these: The Roman Empire by uniting the nations contributed to the decay of local forms of polytheism and prepared the way for a universal religion. A world-religion, Buddhism, which taught the conquest of the world by its renunciation, had arisen in India, and in the second century B.C. had spread throughout Asia from Ceylon to Siberia. Alexandria was the great centre of contact between the then existing religions, and there Christianity was mainly moulded. The fall of Jerusalem determined the rise of Christianity, as the fall of Rome was the making of the Christian Church.

J. M. WHEELER.

CHRIST'S PARABLES.—II.

THE UNJUST STEWARD (Luke xvi., 1-9).

CHRIST'S parable of the Unjust Steward is wretchedly unsatisfactory both in its direct teaching of dishonesty and in its lack of explanation.

The Unjust Steward, being accused of wasting his master's goods, is dismissed. In rendering up his accounts he falsifies them, and swindles his master. By fraudulent conspiracy with the debtors he writes them off as owing much less than the true amounts. By such means he hopes that the debtors whom he so dishonestly befriends will receive him into their houses when he is no longer steward. Being "thick as thieves" with him, his confederates will be afraid to desert him, even if gratitude does not induce them to assist him in his troubles. The astonishing part of the matter is that Christ goes on to say: "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

The whole parable is in praise of clever dishonesty, of fraud, and of leading others into fraud. Christ says nothing to condemn the steward who wastes his master's goods, and then provides against dismissal by still further treachery to his master's interests. Christ's comments are words of commendation for the unjust steward's prudence in thus making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness.

This parable is a puzzle to Christians. It obviously teaches theft and cheating and betrayal of one's employer. But dishonesty is so scouted by the good sense of mankind that prudent Christians have to say and feel that whatever the parable teaches, it cannot and shall not teach *that*. Whenever the teachings of Christianity are generally felt to be unpardonably objectionable, Christians resolve that they *shall not* mean what they evidently and obviously mean, but they shall mean something else, even though no one can say what that something else is. Thus Christians make themselves superior to Christianity, and reject God's Word at their own discretion. And this is the divine instruction which is so clear and simple that he who runs may read, and the poorest wayfarer cannot err therein! If the wayfarer tries to follow the Bible in this case, he will soon find himself in gaol; and if he pleads the Son of

¹ With these were some Asiatics, including occasional Hindus.

² It is absurd to suppose the Nazarenes, mentioned Acts xxiv., 5, and in early Christian history, were named so after a town, of the existence of which at that time there is no trace outside the gospel legends. They were Nazarites, or *separated* as distinctly religious.

God's approval by parable, the Christian magistrate will treat him as a lunatic, or as the silliest criminal he ever came across.

In spite of the culpable neglect displayed by Jesus and the Holy Ghost in not explaining the matter, one cannot help thinking that there *must* have been some less wicked meaning to the parable than the encouragement of deliberate roguery and betrayal of trust. Such teaching would hardly pay either in money or popular influence, for it would too readily shock the moral sense and the practical instincts of the listeners. Religion *must* ally itself with *some* amount of secular morality, or it will be swept away as a mass of moral putrefaction. But the sadly-needed explanation of this obviously immoral parable is so obscure and uncertain that I am free to confess I am quite unable to ascertain it, though I studied the Bible as a Christian teacher for years, and often taught and explained its parables to classes of school-boys.

I know that kindly Christians will indignantly say or insinuate that I am as good as a liar in saying this, and each one will soon be ready with his own particular interpretation, born of reference to some Christian text-book or of his own inner consciousness. But although these interpretations have all the infallibility begotten of true faith and the sublime self-confidence it imparts or springs from, yet they differ from each other and none are satisfactory, except to the particular persons who hold them.

The best suggestion I have come across is that Christ's recommendations are ironical. He praised the worldly wisdom of the dishonest steward, and said to his hearers: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." As Mammon is supposed not to be able to secure everlasting habitations, except of rather a warm description, some of the more intellectual Christians contend that Christ's advice is evidently sarcastic. He meant the opposite of what he said. But this is by no means what appears on the face of the parable; and the simple-minded believers to whom the story is addressed for their instruction, are by no means likely to suspect that Christ is talking to them in an ironical sense. If they are to be puzzled with such unexplained difficulties of interpretation, they will hardly know where to leave off interpreting Christ's sayings in the ironical or sarcastic sense. How are they to be sure that Christ was not wholly or partially ironical or sarcastic when he said "Love your enemies"? or when he promised thrones in heaven? or when he forgave their sins or promised to return quickly? or in many of his more extravagant and incredible sayings? Irony would fatally mislead and puzzle the class of babes and sucklings for whom the Gospel is intended. It is also somewhat foreign to the character of the comparatively commonplace writers of the gospels and of their hero. If irony was intended, it should obviously be plain and unmistakeable, so as to be universally self-evident and universally accepted as such. As this is obviously not the case, the explanation must fall to the ground, unless it is confessed that Christ deliberately left the parable so faulty and imperfect that ingenious guesswork is the only means of solving its possible meaning and application. Why should Christ leave an important parable in so imperfect and unexplained a condition?

Perhaps the parable was a satire upon the Pharisees for letting sinners off too easily and defrauding their master, God, of his rightful dues in the shape of thorough repentance, and so forth. Perhaps it means that we are to be lenient towards our fellow-servants that they may be lenient towards us. Modern Christians might even suggest that the steward was a sort of Irish Land Commission, granting extensive reductions of excessive rents. The Douay Bible has a note teaching that making friends of mammon or riches means making God's servants our friends by means of riches employed for their benefit. "The poor servants of God whom we have relieved by our alms, may hereafter, by their intercession, bring our souls to heaven." I have heard the parable "explained" by Protestants in a somewhat similar sense. We are to make God our friend by using our riches for his glory, so that he will receive us into his everlasting mansions. As the Unjust Steward studied his own temporal welfare, so are we to study, even more diligently still, our eternal salvation.

Bestowing plunder on confederates thus symbolizes honest alms-giving; while God is "the mammon of un-

righteousness," or else is the "friends" who are to be gained by the fraudulent-benevolent use of the misappropriated riches of the unrighteous mammon. But the Christian will strike out all ideas and words that do not suit his forced interpretation. Of course, by such means anything can be made to mean anything, and it would be impossible to frame a story which either as a faulty pattern, or an ironical warning, could not be twisted into meaning whatever Christians wished it to mean.

Christians say it is not the dishonesty of the steward which is commended: it is only his prudence, his forethought, his cleverness. One might as well give children the "Newgate Calendar" or the Bible, and say it is not the brutality of the murders that will be noticed or remembered, but only the boldness, the ingenuity, the fertility of resource, and so forth. If the story of the Unjust Steward is good for children, so too must be the story of Jack Sheppard and the history of Dick Turpin. All we have to do to make criminal records moral is to say, "See what these criminals achieved, and how clever, and persevering, and brave, and cunning, and unscrupulous they were: much more must you, my children, be courageous and devoted, and wise and determined, in the cause of religion." Such whitewashing, or pretence of analogy or contrast, would sanctify any story of crime or cruelty or obscenity or fraud.

The damning fact remains that the story, in its plain, obvious analogy and meaning, teaches dishonesty; and no wriggling can save it from condemnation as an immoral parable, which only escapes prompt and universal execration because people will not accept its lessons, but are compelled to say it means something else, though what it may mean they are utterly unable to decide.

W. P. BALL.

RESPECTABLE LIES.

A lie well established, and hoary with age,
Resists the assaults of the boldest seceder;
While he is accounted the greatest of saints,
Who silences reason and follows the leader.
Whenever a mortal has dared to be wise,
And seize upon truth as the soul's Magna Charta,
He always has won from the lover of lies
The name of a fool or the fate of a martyr.

There are popular lies and political lies,
And "lies that stick fast between buying and selling,"
And lies of politeness—conventional lies—
(Which scarcely are reckoned as such in the telling.)
There are lies of sheer malice, and scandalous lies,
From those who delight to peck filth like a pigeon;
But the oldest and far most respectable lies,
Are those that are told in the name of religion.

Theology sits like a tyrant enthroned,
A system *per se* with a fixed nomenclature,
Derived from strange doctrines, and dogmas and creeds,
At war with man's reason, with good and with nature;
And he who subscribes to the popular faith,
Never questions the fact of divine inspiration,
But holds to the Bible as absolute truth,
From Genesis through to St. John's Revelation.

We mock at the Catholic bigots at Rome,
Who strive with their dogmas man's reason to fetter;
But we turn to the Protestant bigots at home,
And we find that their dogmas are scarce a whit better.
We are called to believe in the wrath of the Lord,
In endless damnation, and torments infernal;
While around and above us, the Infinite Truth,
Scarce heeded or heard, speaks sublime and eternal.

It is sad—but the day-star is shining on high,
And Science comes in with her conquering legions;
And every respectable, time-honored lie
Will fly from her face to the mythical regions.
The soul shall no longer with terror behold
The red waves of wrath that leap up to engulf her,
For Science ignores the existence of hell,
And chemistry finds better uses for sulphur.

LIZZIE DOTEN.

PROFANE JOKES.

She: "Freddie, how often have I told you not to play with you soldiers on Sunday?" He: "Yes, but mamma, this is a religious war."

"Mamma, will heaven be just like church all the time?" "I hope so, dear," said her mother. "Well, I shan't say my prayers any more; I'd rather go to the other place."

An old lady, who was somewhat deaf, after a sermon about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, said she could not make head or tail of it. For it seemed to be, she continued, all about make the bed, shake the bed, and into bed we go.

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