

# THE FREETHINKER

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

Sub-Editor—J. M. WHEELER.

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THE BATTLE OF BELIEF. (Dedicated to the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone.)

## MR. GLADSTONE ON CHRISTIANITY.—II.

MR. GLADSTONE points out that, while the ancient religions were tribal or national, Christianity was "diffusive." But so was Buddhism, which preceded it by many centuries. Religion, like morality, follows social development. It was the pulverisation of nationality by the Roman empire which made a "diffusive" religion possible; and, before Christianity appeared, Stoicism had assumed the character of a universal philosophy.

Watching the growth of Christianity, we see how it became "diffusive." At the outset it was a Jewish schism, and nothing more. Jesus Christ was a Jew of Jews. During his lifetime he expressly declared that he was only sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, and he warned his disciples against preaching to the Samaritans or Gentiles. The order for universal propaganda is put into his mouth after the Resurrection; that is, it is a posthumous utterance, invented by the Church to sanction its new departure. Even in the Acts of the Apostles—semi-apocryphal and of unknown authorship as it is—we see the beginning of division. There is a split between the Jewish and the wider school, marked by what Matthew Arnold calls "the current compliments of theological parting." Finally Paul, the only man of genius among them, breaks away decisively from the Judaic party, and becomes the great Apostle of the Gentiles. The Jewish schism of Jesus Christ was buried without hope of resurrection; Chris-

tianity, which was a very different thing, spread and developed among "the heathen"; and so thorough was the change that not a scrap of writing from the primitive Church of Jerusalem is left. Every Christian document is in Greek, written by Greeks, and for Greeks. The very words of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, on which and on whom our salvation depends, are, with the exception of two or three sentences, utterly lost. We have only, at the best, a Greek translation; and theologians discuss Greek particles when they should be discussing Hebrew, or whatever Syriac dialect their Savior employed.

Mr. Gladstone is equally accurate in speaking of the dispensation "by which the Hebrew race was kept in social isolation through fifteen centuries, as a cradle for the Redeemer that was to come." Written fifty years ago this sentence might pass current; written now, it is simply astonishing. Mr. Gladstone ignores all the conclusions of modern Biblical criticism; for him, the great scholars of Germany, Holland, and France, and even of England, have lived and toiled in vain. Nay, he ignores the Bible itself. That is a very singular "social isolation" which begins with borrowing from Egypt, traffics with Tyre and Phoenicia, and is finally dipped in the foreign bath of two exiles. Mr. Gladstone actually mentions "the Levitical law" as part of the isolating dispensation. Does he not know (surely he should) that the Levitical law was a late invention of the theocracy? To talk of it as operating for fifteen hundred years before Christ is inexcusable. A

rudimentary acquaintance with Biblical criticism would have saved Mr. Gladstone from such a grotesque blunder.

We come now to his historical eulogy of Christianity; and what is it but an echo of the stale platitudes of the professional apologists?

"It both produced a type of character wholly new to the Roman world, and it fundamentally altered the laws and institutions, the tone, temper, and tradition of that world. For example, it changed profoundly the relation of the poor to the rich, and the almost forgotten obligations of the rich to the poor. It abolished slavery, abolished human sacrifice, abolished gladiatorial shows, and a multitude of other horrors. It restored the position of woman in society. It proscribed polygamy; and put down divorce, absolutely in the West, though not absolutely in the East. It made peace, instead of war, the normal and presumed relation between human societies. It exhibited life as a discipline everywhere and in all its parts, and changed essentially the place and function of suffering in human experience. Accepting the ancient morality as far as it went, it not only enlarged but transfigured its teaching, by the laws of humility and of forgiveness, and by a law of purity perhaps even more new and strange than these."

There is the Christian side of the picture. But the other side must also be painted for the sake of contrast, and Mr. Gladstone paints it hideously in the darkest colors. He does the trick dexterously, but it is more worthy of a party orator than an historical student. We recognise the cunning of the old parliamentary hand, but we sigh for a little justice and honesty.

"What civilisation could do without Christianity for the greatest races of mankind, we know already. Philosophy and art, creative genius and practical energy, had their turn before the Advent; and we can register the results. I do not say that the great Greek and Roman ages lost—perhaps even they improved—the ethics of *meum* and *tuum*, in the interests of the leisured and favored classes of society, as compared with what those ethics had been in archaic times. But they lost the hold which some earlier races within their sphere had had of the future life. They degraded, and that immeasurably, the position of woman. They effaced from the world the law of purity. They even carried indulgence to a worse than bestial type; and they glorified in the achievement."

This is not the *language* of street-corner preachers, but it is precisely their *sentiments*. They cannot emulate Mr. Gladstone's periods, but they share his preposterous views. Anything cruder, more one-sided or distorted, is hard to conceive. Mr. Gladstone, with little regard to truth, says the best he can of Christianity; with as little regard to truth, he says the worst he can of Paganism; and he fancies it a fair comparison.

Let us examine Mr. Gladstone's two pictures. His Pagan picture is simply ludicrous. Philosophy and art are treated as mere trifles, and not a word is said about the ancient science which modern Europe could not parallel before the days of Galileo. Nor is there an allusion to the daily life of the people, below emperors and aristocrats, who carried on the world's business; who loved, married, reared children, and were buried in tombs, on which we may still read touching inscriptions. Mr. Gladstone rushes to Rome in its worst days, when a luxuriant aristocracy, fed on the spoils of a hundred provinces, committed the worst excesses. But even there he sees no light and shade. The indignant satire of Juvenal is regarded as true of all Roman society. What if an historian should take the satire of Dryden as true of all English society? Would it not be the grossest blunder? Charles the Second, and his Rochesters and Nell Gwynnes, were as bad as any Roman profligates; but there was still a good deal of sound morality in the nation, as there doubtless was in the worst days of Nero or Caligula.

Mr. Gladstone treads on dangerous ground when he talks of the profligacy and bestiality of Greeks and Romans. Can he name a vice that has not been amply illustrated by Christian practitioners? Can he name a crime in which Christians have not equalled Pagans? Was not Rome, under some of the Popes, worse than Rome under any of the Emperors? Was there not more general debauchery in the Middle Ages than at any other period in history? Did not the rapid spread of syphilis in Christendom, as soon as it was imported, testify to the promiscuous license of the believers in Jesus? Are the Christian chapters in the history of prostitution less foul than the Pagan? Cannot Christendom show a hundred filthy books for everyone that Greece and Rome have bequeathed us? Do not portions of our Christian capitals reek with as much moral pestilence as ever befouled Athens or Rome? And was not the state of things far worse a

century or two ago? How long is it since the most stupid debauchee in England was called the first gentleman in Europe? Mr. Gladstone is a man of blameless life, but he must know there is bitter truth in Thackeray's remark that our mouths may be cleaner than our ancestors without our lives being purer. "Often," says Professor Mantegazza, in his great ethnological study on the passion of love, "often a people appears chaste only because it is hypocritical; two things that are very different, but often found together. We moderns do not celebrate the festivals of Osiris, the Bacchanalias, nor the Indian orgies, in the first month of Spring; but at Paris and the other great capitals of Europe, in the silence of night and behind the walls of public and private houses, there is abandonment to orgies which the most audacious pen dare not describe."

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

#### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY CONFERENCE (1888) SOUTH SHIELDS.

FREETHINKERS requiring accommodation will please communicate at once with the Conference Committee Secretary, Mr. S. M. Peacock, 35 Baring Street, South Shields, stating whether they prefer private or hotel. Private accommodation can be obtained for about 2s. 6d. per night, including bed and breakfast, and it is hoped that all friends from a distance will attend not later than the Saturday night preceding the Conference. Members of the local Committee, wearing Mr. Bradlaugh's colors, will be at the railway station, and full information may be obtained in the ante-room of the Free Library Hall from 12 noon to 10 p.m., and from 10 p.m. to 12 midnight, at Mr. Peacock's house.

For the benefit of those remaining in the district for a few days, it is understood that, if necessary, a steamer can be chartered for sea-trips along the Northumberland and Durham coasts, on the Monday. Most of the expense of this excursion will be borne by local friends, but those desiring to avail themselves of the trip should send early notice to allow time to make the necessary arrangements.

On Sunday, dinner will be provided in the Golden Lion Hotel, tickets 2s. 6d. each, to be had at the doors of the Hall on entrance. Tea, ditto, at 1s. each. Mr. Forder will be in South Shields a day before the Conference, so that strangers may expect to see at least one familiar face on arrival. The following are some of the best places to obtain dinners, etc.:—Golden Lion Hotel, Royal Hotel, Criterion Restaurant, Hutchinson's Dining Rooms, and Leaver's ditto. These are all good places and reasonable.

S. M. PEACOCK.

#### ACID DROPS.

KINGDOM-COME is still a paying business. The Wesleyan Methodist attempt to evangelise the West-end of London has been a big boom. £14,517 has been spent on it, and the money has been specially raised. According to the report, "the work has been done by unpaid agents." Surely this is a piece of masterly irony. It is astonishing what these jobs do cost when nobody gets anything.

£37,344 was spent last year by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews. The chosen people have been dosed with 5,600 Bibles, 4,018 New Testaments, 47,219 missionary books and tracts, 119,748 periodicals, and 59,301 other printed medicines. How many converts have been bagged is a mystery. The Society has existed for sixty-five years, and there appear to be three or four thousand Christian Jews knocking about somewhere in the world. Reckoning the Jews as seven millions, and allowing nothing for their increase, it will take 113,750 years to convert the lot.

THE Jews who *are* converted are a queer set. It takes a good deal of cash to make them Christians, and a good deal more to keep them so. Conversion is the last resource of the bankrupt in purse and character. When a man has no money and no reputation, and the arguments for Christianity are written in gold, they are lustrous and convincing. Some Jews, it is said, do a regular trade in this line, and get converted in every city, till the grand tour is completed.

THE Religious Tract Society spent £208,662 last year. This will show Freethinkers how powerful religion is still to raise the wind. One feature of the Society's business is worth noting. It examines the London School Board children in Scripture, and gives nearly six thousand of them prizes and certificates. Thus the young idea is taught how to shoot in a Christian direction; and while this sort of thing lasts the battle of Freethought will be a terribly stiff one.

MADAME DISS DE BARR, a New York medium, has been doing a roaring trade in spirit paintings. She pressed the spirits of Raphael, Vandyke, Rembrandt, and Michael Angelo into her ser-

vice. But, alas! this brutal, materialistic age does not appreciate these things properly, and Madame is arrested on a charge of fraud. What is still worse, the court is shown how she did the trick. Poor, persecuted creature!

MRS. AYRE is a "clairvoyant," and Mr. Featherstone is a "trance speaker." Last Sunday afternoon they gave a performance at Mexborough. There was a large audience, for, besides demonstrating "Who and What is God?" they were to call up the spirits of people's dead relatives. Mrs. Ayre described the spirit of the dead father of one of the audience, but that person jumped up and said he was alive and hearty. The result was a row, and the Ayre and Featherstone troupe are done for in Mexborough.

The Spiritists have certainly added a new terror to death. No one of any note can shuffle off this mortal coil without being speedily called upon by some medium to return and give his views of matters. According to the last number of the *Medium*, poor Matthew Arnold has lost all his former lucidity and distinction, and is maundering away in a most drivelling style. The most intelligible message from M. A.'s spirit is the following: "At present mercenary considerations are excusable with Sensitives, for the condition of humanity in this early period of Spiritual Reform are such as to make large calls on the vital energy." We suppose the "Sensitive" wanted a few guineas to repair the large call on his vital energy in passing under "the control" of the spirit of Matthew Arnold.

W. E. COLEMAN, an American Spiritist and writer in the *Carrier Dove*, declares that Madame Blavatsky, the Theosophist, is addicted to drinking and smoking and swearing, which, in all good Spiritists' opinion, must injure the nature of her communications with the Mahatmas.

THE Rev. R. N. Sharpe, vicar of St. Mary's Church, Rochdale wanted to drive a cat out of his garden, and he employed a long pole and a terrier for the purpose. With the pole he fetched the cat down from a tree, and then the terrier had an innings. The sickening spectacle was diversified by more pole from the vicar, and at the finish the cat was seen biting its fore-paws in agony. Some working men saw this display of Christian tenderness, and Mr. Sharpe was prosecuted. He did not appear in court to give evidence, yet the magistrate took a lenient view of the case, and thought there was no intention to torture the cat. 'Tis a lucky thing to be a parson when you are brought before the beak.

THE following passage occurs in Mr. J. Bach McMaster's new life of Benjamin Franklin. On returning to Philadelphia, after his early visit to London, where he worked as a compositor, Franklin "founded the Junto, wrote his famous epitaph, grew religious, composed a liturgy for his own use, and became the father of an illegitimate son." Note the fine gradation from piety to fornication.

Two rival shows came into collision at Plymouth. One was a Salvation Army affair and the other a Circus. The latter won by means of two elephants. Leviathan was too much for the Salvationists, who all remembered they had corns.

PROVIDENCE has fitted up some splendid gad-flies in China. They show wonderful marks of design, and a few specimens should be shown at Christian Evidence meetings. Mr. H. E. M. James, in his book on *The Long White Mountain*, says they are "huge fat insects," so they are constructed for a prosperous life. "The rapidity with which they can pierce a mule's tough hide is inconceivable. In a few moments, before one could go to its assistance, I have seen a wretched beast streaming with blood." That's the sort for you! Your Christian Evidence lecturer might give his specimen a public feed to show how beautifully God has adapted it to get its living on the cheap. Here and there a lecturer's skin would perhaps be too thick, but on the average that Chinese gad-fly would get through.

MR. SPURGEON at a recent conference referred to a cornet-playing evangelist as seeming to say to the enemies of the Cross "You be blowed." This is a sacred joke by a Christian leader, not a profane one by a misguided Freethinker.

EDGAR MORTARA, the Jewish child who was kidnapped by the Pope's police and kept in spite of his parents' protests and the opinion of the civilised world, now re-appears as Father Mortara, a canon of the order of Saint Augustin. He is attracting great curiosity at Madrid by his eloquent sermons. The Church has stolen his soul as well as his body. The only excuse she had for stealing him from his parents was that a Roman Catholic nurse had surreptitiously baptised him. As the Romish Church has lost her temporal power, she is no longer able to carry out such open defiance of human rights. The power she so grossly abused is gone from her for ever.

NEVERTHELESS such attempts are still made. At Nottingham only a few days ago, a nun seized a child who was walking past a convent in procession with other inmates of the Midland Orphanage. Before any resistance could be made the screaming

child was carried inside and the door was closed. One of the children fainted with fright. The child, whose name is Pleasance Brinniloy, is nine years old. Her father was an Italian organ-grinder, and he is said to have been a Roman Catholic although he attended a Protestant church.

A YOUNG preacher has been praying direct to the Lord to "bless the Y.M.C.A." Another thanks the deity for what he has done for the world "both B.C. and A.D." Of course the Lord is fully acquainted with all our slang abbreviations, and will understand them without an angel interpreter for each of the hundreds or thousands of languages of this and other planets.

TEN members of the Salvation Army were fined at Portsmouth for creating an obstruction by playing trumpets, etc., and singing and shouting. A witness stated that when he had his wife and daughter lying ill, he asked the Army not to play, but they refused to desist. Four of the Salvationists declined to pay the fine of 10s. each, and were sentenced to three days' imprisonment.

"GOVERNMENT *versus* God in India" is the heading under which a public meeting at Exeter Hall is announced. But does it not savor strongly of pious blasphemy to suppose that the British Government is stronger than God, and that it prevails against him either in India or anywhere else?

THE Dunoon faith-healing case has terminated disastrously. The Rev. Duncan Macgregor, together with Mr. Scott and others, decided that they must try the faith cure on Mrs. Gillespie, who since the recent birth of her last child has been suffering from a kind of paralysis. They terrified the woman with passages of Scripture until she went into hysterics and had to be lifted into bed. They then continued their exhortations and anointed her with oil in the name of the Lord, as ordered by St. James. Mr. Scott called next day, but finding she was no better, he declared she was possessed of a devil and was beyond cure. After a few days, being hopelessly insane, she had to be removed to Lochgilphead Lunatic Asylum. Yet after this wretched result, the reverend miracle-worker has the audacity to advertise a special sermon in his church on "The Trial by Faith."

A PIOUS railway clerk, named Bousfield, has had to pay £15 for breach of promise. He throws the blame on God. He wrote to the young lady: "If it is God's will that I should be married to you in January next, He will supply the means to do His holy will." God didn't send the expected promotion and rise of salary, so the pious clerk felt that God intended the marriage to be broken off.

SISTER EVA PARKER, of Chicago, assigns her baby to the Rev. Mr. Brushingham, who converted her at a revival. She says she did not speak about it before the advent of the little stranger, because she had always upheld ministers.

WE have received a handbill inviting "All Christians who are seeking to become bones of the bride of Christ" to the Temperance Hall, High Street, Stratford, where we presume they will meet with the author of this document, who must be the bride of Christ's funnybone. Those who desire to become part of this curious structure are further told to learn "the special preparation they must undergo in this third and last watch previous to the Coming of the Bridegroom." We presume a preparation of ossification is intended, and that doses of lime-water will be administered by way of sacrament.

HARRY CLAYDON, leader of the Farnley Mission, was fined 5s. for obstructing the thoroughfare of the Chelsea Embankment. A witness complained of the shoutings, and the noise of the drum and musical instruments used by the Mission on Sunday evenings opposite his door. The defendant refused to promise the magistrate not to offend again.

WE do not believe in disturbing other people's meetings, but there was a certain poetical justice in Sir Charles Warren's reception the other evening at the Oxford Music Hall. He was announced to lecture on Palestine, a subject which occupies his mind when it is not engaged in promoting disturbances in London. Admission was free, and the Socialists showed up in strong force. Warren has been chivvying them for a year or two, and they chivvied him for a few minutes. The dictator was unable to deliver his lecture and the meeting ended abruptly. This might be called "tit for tat, or the biter bit." Perhaps Warren will reflect in future that shutting people's mouths is a game that many can play at.

THE *Christian Commonwealth* is greatly concerned at the reported offer of Sir A. B. Walker, to erect a cathedral in Liverpool at a cost of £250,000. Walker is a big brewer and the owner of a large number of drink-shops in Liverpool. The *C. C.* says he has thriven on the weakness, the misfortune, the vice, the misery, the sin of his townsmen, by selling "liquid fire and distilled damnation," and the curse of God is on the money thus gained. The quarter of a million of these ill-gotten gains, which it is alleged the brewer would bestow on God, is compared to the thirty pieces of silver for which Judas betrayed his Lord, and

which in his remorse he cast before the chief priest and elders as blood-money straight from hell. The *C. C.* trusts for the honor of the Church that the "corrupted riches," the "cankered gold and silver," the "blood-money" will not be accepted now as it would have been fifty or even twenty years ago. *Echo* murmurs "Walker."

BUT why should not Walker and other liquor dealers be "anxious to throw a halo of respectability over the horrible traffic?" Why should not this "unholy alliance" between Beer and Bible continue? Did not Christ say that the *publicans* and harlots entered first into the kingdom of heaven? The more objectionable the calling the greater the susceptibility to religious influences, and the greater the need of salvation whitewash. If a man has helped to injure his fellow men what can he do better, according to Christian dogmas, than make amends to God? It is God who forgives sin, and if a man flatters the governor and squares him with a good present, the interests of his fellow workmen are quite a secondary consideration. Such at least is Christian teaching.

THE *Church Evangelist* is printing some cock and bull stories of Infidel death-beds. One of them is new, if not true. A Hull captain, a notorious blasphemer (most captains do something in that line), was struck with paralysis while cursing God. He became a maniac and died in an asylum. That is where the editor of the *Church Evangelist* might end his days, were there not so much method in his madness.

VOLTAIRE has died thousands of times already, but the *Church Evangelist* makes him die again. The story is a tissue of lies from beginning to end. No authority is given, but that is not wonderful. Quacks do not publish the ingredients of their medicine.

TALMAGE, in his recent sermon on "The Sin of Profanity," takes the cake as champion liar with a new version, to the effect that "in the last moment, supposing Christ stood at the bed, he exclaimed 'Crush the wretch! Crush the wretch!'" Now, the famous expression *Ecrasez l'Infame*, with which Voltaire ended many of his letters, was never applied to a person. *L'Infame* was the intolerant system of religion, the priestcraft and bigotry, which he and his friends opposed. Talmage's story is not only without evidence—it is without plausibility, and, to any one who knows Voltaire, carries *lie* legibly written on its face.

"GENERAL" BOOTH says we must look at the lamb with both eyes, not squinting; but what's a man to do who is born with a squint? He also says we should give our talents to God—our cash of course to the "General."

DOWN at Newcastle the "General" complained that people spent more money on soap than on salvation. From this he deduced the remarkable conclusion that "we must be a dirty people." Such is the logic of salvation.

MR. STEAD, of the *Pull Mall Gazette*, is doing a European tour, and sending home special letters to his journal, which are of course very interesting. Here and there, however, the writer slips in his piety, and then he is grotesque. Here, for instance, is a funny sentence: "What an enormous machine, with what illimitable energies, is the human soul which is wound up anew by the great mechanic every night when it slumbers and sleeps!" Here is philosophy for you! The soul a machine, which even the body isn't; and God a mechanic, with a patent, universal key, winding it up every night! When a man dies in his sleep (such cases do occur), we suppose the "great mechanic" forgot to wind him up properly, or broke the mainspring through bungling.

NEARLY all Mr. Stead's article, in which this sentence occurs, is about guns, fortifications, armies, generals, and the chances of an early war. What a pity the "great mechanic" doesn't wind up his machines so as to go on with their work without so much quarrelling!

STORMS in India. Hailstones from one to two pounds. Thousands of huts destroyed. Hundreds of people killed, and ten times as many injured. God is love!

POPULAR preachers are nothing if not omniscient, so the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes tells his congregation who are the originals of the chief characters in *Robert Elsmere*. As Omar Khayyam says of a superior person, "He knows, He knows."

MR. HUGHES "improved the occasion" at St. James's Hall last Sunday afternoon. First came a brass band, and tootled what the *Echo* calls "lugubrious music" for half an hour. Then six strapping young women, dressed in black, mounted the platform and silently prayed. They gave place to the chief performer. Mr. Hughes is neither eloquent nor profound, says the *Echo*; but he has a good voice and a jaunty manner, and he has learnt from Booth how to run a show. Fashionable people drop into the mission service. Lord Aberdeen comes to be evangelised, and sometimes a live M.P. Ladies, of course, are in the majority.

Lady Colin Campbell, Lady Dilke, and Mrs. Crawford, are often seen there; at least the *Echo* says so; but we suppose the last two ladies don't *sit together*.

THE British and Foreign Bible Society boasts of sending out during the past year more than four million copies of the Bible, or "portions" thereof. But the Rev. T. E. Davies is not satisfied. He says that at the present rate it will take the Society six hundred years to complete its task.

THE Salvation Army claims that it has held 458,640 open-air meetings. But how many people has it converted? The average effect of a meeting must be very slight. The Holy Ghost is probably tired of putting forth his power in converting people a thousand at a time, as he used to do.

THE Church Army is trying to catch up to the Salvation Army. It boasts of having held 40,000 out-door meetings during the past year, and 50,000 indoor, these gatherings being attended by no less than 7,000,000 people. But the more the riff-raff are drawn into the Salvation movement by noise and tomfoolery, the more the quiet thinkers are giving it up from the persistent force of fact and reason.

THE Religious Tract Society has issued in all 2,602 millions of tracts and leaflets. This is many more than the total population of the globe. And still the bulk of the population remains unconverted.

YESTERDAY, as I stood on the pathway of the Strand, watching the busy distribution of the religious literature in front of Exeter Hall, a characteristic incident occurred. A Bishop—one of the Suffragans—drove up in a Hansom, and was deposited at the door of the Hall. With a smile that was childlike and bland, the Right Reverend Father in God placed a shilling in the hand of the cabman. "Wot's this?" asked the jarvey, as with outstretched palm, the coin lying in the centre of the grimy paw, he eyed the Bishop. "Your fare," replied the ecclesiastic. "My fare, is it? My fare, eh—to drive you nigh upon three mile for a shillin', eh? If you don't gimme sixpence more, I'll see if I can't make you. A pretty sort of a parson you are, to want a three-mile ride for a shillin'." With which, after much demur on the part of the Bishop, the cabman got the money he demanded, and drove away.—*Echo*.

ACCORDING to a paragraph in the *Echo*, portions of a dry parchment-like substance were recently found nailed to the door of certain very old churches. On these being removed minute hairs were observed springing from the surface, which on examination proved to be of human origin. The parchment represented the hides of some unfortunate individuals who had been flayed for sacrilege.

CONVOCAION is anxious that the clergy shall be eligible on the new County Councils contemplated by the Local Government Bill. In former times the clergy used to insist upon their immunity from all concern in secular affairs, but now the temporal matters command almost all the interest of mankind they are anxious to have a finger in the pie.

DR. MARTINEAU while officiating for the Unitarian body has always felt that the name Unitarian is not sufficiently distinctive, since every Trinitarian who holds that three ones are one also claims to be Unitarian. At the Annual Conference he put forward a singular proposition. Drawing attention to the fact that they were historically descended from the Presbyterians of the Commonwealth, he suggested that they should in future call themselves "the English Presbyterians." The conference shelved the old man eloquent by appointing a committee to consider the matter.

THE committee will probably discover that there is already a body of English Presbyterians, deriving their being from "ayont the Tweed," as indeed did some of those of the Commonwealth. The Presbyterians of the Westminster Assembly too fully disclosed that "New Presbyter is but old priest writ large," as Milton put it, for Presbyterianism to become palatable to patriotic Englishmen. In bigotry and intolerance they went even beyond the Episcopalians they strove to supplant, and solicited Parliament to pass a draconic ordinance inflicting death on any who denied the fundamentals of Christianity.

THE English Presbyterians have also been holding their synod. The Moderator, Dr. Oswald Dykes, admitted their "position in England was one of difficulty." They have not improved their position by admitting to the ministry some of the worse class of street evangelists. They are trying to shelve the Westminster Confession, and it is said in their anxiety to shorten their creed have forgotten all about the claims of the Holy Ghost.

A COUPLE of Yankee neighbors became so hostile that they would not speak to each other; but one of them having been converted at a camp-meeting, on seeing his former enemy, held out his hand, saying, "How d'ye do Jack? I am humble enough to shake hands with a dog."

**MR. FOOTE'S LECTURES.**

Sunday, May 13, Hall of Science, 142 Old Street, E.C., at 7.30, "After Death—What?"

MAY 20, N. S. S. Conference; 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. H. RAWLING.—Kindly send all future orders direct to Mr. Forder. Papers sent.

ALEC M'PIERSON.—Received with thanks.

D. KAY.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

J. T.—Cuttings are always welcome. The suggestion shall be considered.

W. C. (Hastings) sends ten shillings for the London Secular Federation's open-air propaganda.

W. H. PENN.—We dealt with the matter some weeks ago.

J. ROSS (Aberdeen).—Mr. Forder asks us to state that the letter with stamps you refer to did not reach him.

C. SEARS.—We gave Miss Weston's tract a couple of paragraphs, which is more than it deserves, and cannot recur to the subject.

E. C. PRINCE.—The author of the Tract is evidently a rare old Presbyterian fossil. It is a fearful and wonderful mixture. But few are likely to read it. Fancy a man in this age who believes that all who go in for infant baptism, instead of adult baptism, will burn in hell! Christianity fills the world with lunatics at large.

T. CLARKE.—We cannot make head or tail of your letter. You and J. C. seem to have had some fun with each other.

G. THACKRAY.—The delay arose through your addressing the letter to Stonecutter Street. Glad to hear the Middlesborough friends are anxious for another visit from Mr. Foote.

GEORGE CHAMBERS.—The miracles of feeding the four thousand with seven loaves, and five thousand with five loaves are related as two distinct events, but the incredulity of the disciples would show that such wonders never took place and it is likely the two stories are different variations of one legend.

JAMES GRAY.—Probably Mr. Forder could supply you with any American or Colonial Freethought papers you may require. The Gladstone-Huxley Debate on Genesis was published in the *Nineteenth Century* over two years ago. It ran through several numbers.

E. T. GARNER.—Mr. Forder will supply you with the *Service of Man*. The new edition is 5s.

O. KAY.—See "Acid Drops."

J. FITCH.—You are a very reckless person. We never stated that the new Emperor of Germany was "an Atheist." As you appear to think we did, we invite you to indicate the place.

MR. FOOTE has been asked to represent more than one Branch at the N. S. S. Conference. But he is obliged to decline such invitations. Unless a Branch is represented by one of its own members, the representation is quite fictitious. Every Branch should make an effort to send a *bona fide* delegate.

DEVILSHOOF.—We do not remember it, but will make a search.

T. D.—Thanks. We may find an odd corner for the dialogue some day. At present we are overcrowded.

G. N.—We may utilise your anecdote. Your verses show some facility of expression, but your lines do not always scan.

J. RONSON.—Thanks for your interesting letter, and for the good work you are doing for the cause in a benighted, priest-ridden district.

J. NEATE, 385 Bethnal Green Road, London, E., will pay for the carriage of parcel if Northampton Freethinker will send it.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Reynolds' Newspaper—Lucifer—Liberty—Freidenker—Western Figaro—Church Reformer—Truthseeker—Radical—Open Court—Women's Suffrage Journal—Rochdale Observer—Northern Weekly Leader—Star—Portsmouth Evening News—Boston Investigator—South London Observer—Vespa.

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.**

The London Secular Federation held its monthly Council meeting at the Hall of Science on Thursday, May 3, Mr. G. W. Foote, the president, in the chair. There was a large attendance; and Mr. R. O. Smith, the honorary treasurer, reported that the financial position of the Federation was improving, although more money would be required for the summer campaign. Grants were made to several Branches, and a fresh social party was arranged for. Among the serious business, there was a practical discussion as to what should be done to maintain our open-air stations against police or other interference; and a sub-committee of three was appointed to confer with the president, and report on how to promote the cause of Secular education at the approaching School Board elections. We believe the Federation will resolve to make a gallant fight in every possible division if the Freethought party will only support it with the sinews of war.

MR. FOOTE began his open-air lectures at Camberwell Green last Sunday morning. When he had spoken a couple of minutes up came a policeman, an inspector, and a superintendent. The last produced a pocket-book, in which his instructions were written in pencil. He read out that, owing to a general complaint of the inhabitants of Camberwell Green, all lectures were now prohibited there by the authorities. Perfect politeness and something more were visible in their manners and faces. The officers clearly disliked the job. Mr. Foote begged the crowd to be orderly, and follow him to Station Road. They did so, and the platform and audience were soon standing in a more open space. The gathering was large and very attentive. Towards the end it was swollen by part of the congregation of the neighboring Catholic cathedral. How long it will be before meetings are interfered with there is impossible to say; but, in any case, the "authorities" must be shown that Freethinkers have many moves to play before the game is ended.

ALREADY the "inhabitants of the Green" are being canvassed in favour of the meetings being continued there, and the issue promises to be successful. On the side of the Green where the lectures have been hitherto held, all the inhabitants live in one house attached to a brewery. There is a school, which is shut; a brewery, at rest; and the house in question. By no possibility could the people living on the other side of the Green hear the speakers, nor, when the trees are covered with foliage, could they even see them. Surely this is straining the interpretation of "a nuisance."

THE real fact is our *opinions* are objectionable, and other meetings are stopped on the Green simply because the "authorities" know they cannot make fish of one sect and flesh of another. When Mr. Foote left the Secular Hall, in the evening, after lecturing to a crowded audience, he walked some distance up the Walworth Road, and counted no less than six *al fresco* meetings in as many minutes. Every one was at the corner of the main thoroughfare and a by-street, which was completely blocked. Of course these meetings were *Christian*. One was simply scandalous. A man was preaching just inside the gate of a gospel-shop, his audience stood on the pavement, and all the passers-by had to go into the road. The "authorities" permit this, yet they stop meetings at Camberwell Green where no one's convenience is interfered with. Should there be any further "chivvying" of Freethinkers, our best course will be to start lecturing at every corner where preachers are allowed to hold forth. That will teach the bigots a lesson.

THE Camberwell Branch's annual balance-sheet is a healthy document. The receipts are £199 11s. 2½d., and there is a balance in hand of £13 2s. 2d.

MR. W. BLAKE ODGERS is the gentleman who assured the Unitarians that there was no need for any alteration in the Blasphemy Laws as they were perfectly safe. We are glad to see this gentleman is now warning the same body against the fatal spread of Secularism. "I know as a fact," he says, "that the *National Reformer*, the *Freethinker*, and other such publications, are freely circulated and eagerly devoured in many of the colleges of Cambridge." This is excellent news!

PREBENDARY JONES welcomes the Oaths Bill, and looks forward "hopefully to the time when a man's word will be better than his bond." Good! But suppose the clergy set an example. There are many lies in nearly every sermon, and they know it. We hope to hear that Prebendary Jones is going to start a Truth Society in the Church. Its motto might be, "Physician, heal thyself."

THE Manchester Secular Hall Company's annual report looks healthy. No less than 1324 shares have been taken up, and when these are all fully paid the Company will be able to clear off half the mortgage. We shall be glad to hear as good a report from the Branch.

THE result of the polling at Lee has been the triumphant return of all the candidates nominated by the reform party. The clerical element is decidedly out of favor at Lee, judging from the result of this contest. Amongst those nominated as representatives of the "old party" were the Rev. Benjamin Bucke, vicar of Holy Trinity, Lee, and his churchwarden, Mr. E. Merritt. The reverend gentleman was, however, only able to muster 180 votes (Mr. H. Gill, the lowest on the list of successful candidates, securing 308), while Mr. Merritt follows him with 174. A second clergyman comes at the bottom of the list with 10 votes.—*Star*.

M. SABATIER, in his recent work on the Apocalypse, advocates a novel theory started two years ago by Dr. Vischer and sanctioned by Prof. Harnack. His theory is that the work was originally Jewish, and composed about A.D. 70; and towards the end of the century it was adapted and enlarged by a Christian editor.

LUCIAN, the Voltaire of Paganism, who treated the gods of the Pantheon as unceremoniously as the *Freethinker* treats the gods of Christianity, is represented in "Cassell's National Library." Professor Henry Morley, who edits the series (and a capital

series it is, and how cheap!), writes a preface to this little volume. Naturally he has something to say on Ridicule, and his remarks are very sensible. "On the whole," he says, "ridicule adds more vigor to the strong than it takes from the weak, and has its use even when levelled against what is good and true. In its own way it is a test of truth, and may be fearlessly applied to it as jewellers use nitric acid to try gold. If it be uttered as gold and is not gold, let it perish; but if it be true, it will stand trial."

#### ON AUTHORITY IN RELIGION.

CHARLES LAMB has pointed out that we must not hastily set down as fools all who believed in such absurdities as witchcraft. In matters pertaining to the visible world these persons were rational enough. But they had been trained from childhood to believe there was an invisible world of spirits constantly affecting the sensible world. They had no means of understanding such agency other than by its declared effects, and the belief was confirmed by any amount of testimony. The case of Joseph Glanvil (1636-80) is a striking one. Here was a man of acute mind and scientific attainments, one of the founders of the Royal Society, yet a fervent supporter of the truth of witchcraft as an essential part of religion. The author of the *Vanity of Dogmatizing*, in which he shows the advantages of doubt in matters of science, he wrote also *Considerations on the Being of Witches*, wherein he attacks the opponents of the belief in witchcraft as leading directly to Atheism. He saw not only that the belief in witches was founded upon the Bible, and that, as Wesley said, "giving up witchcraft is in effect giving up the Bible," but that the self-same arguments which would discredit Satanic agency would eradicate all belief in the supernatural whatever.

Belief in witchcraft, once universally prevalent and now almost utterly extinct, affords a good evidence of the nullity of authority in unverifiable matters. The oft alleged consensus of authority for the existence of God is really of the same kind as for witchcraft, with this difference—that whereas there was a general agreement as to what was meant by witchcraft, there has been no such agreement as to the meaning of "God." Not to descend into the particulars of individual belief, the conceptions held by Christians and by Mohammedans are essentially different, while Buddhism proper discards the idea, and educated Confucians adopt a similar attitude to that of the western Atheists.

A similar consensus of authority is claimed for Christianity. The claim is even more ridiculous, for eminent Christians have been at loggerheads as to what Christianity really is from the days of the apostles. Pascal, Butler and Lardner are eminent Christians, yet each understood by Christianity a totally distinct system from the other. Wesley and Whitfield alike prayed for the guidance of the Holy Ghost, yet each came to a different conclusion on the question of works, election, and the relation of God to his people. Christianity has been in the world some eighteen hundred years, and instead of Christians showing any tendency to unite, they tend rather to increased diversity. Who shall decide where doctors disagree? St. George Mivart, Mr. Gladstone and Dr. Martineau are eminent Christians, yet each accepts and teaches a different form of Christianity quite incompatible with the rest. Where is the real consensus of authority? If it be said, In the great Catholic Church, the answer is that the foremost minds in every nation have departed from that Church, and it is equally true that the foremost minds are departing from Christianity.

Christian evidence-mongers are fond of giving a string of the names of great and good men whose testimony is on the side of Christianity. Milton, Locke, Newton and Faraday are usually prominent in such lists. All these were authorities in their individual departments, but their testimony to Christianity is of a very dubious character. Each was in fact opposed to the general consensus of authority on the question. Milton did not believe in the Trinity, and his Christianity would do away with all churches whatever. Locke's philosophy led to the latitudinarianism and deism of the eighteenth century. Newton was heretodox on the Trinity, and his other theological speculations are now admitted to have been no better than the vagaries of a great mind. Faraday worshipped with the obscure and narrow sect of the Sandemanians. Indeed, one who declares he knew him well has put it on record that he said, "I prostrate my reason in this matter, for if I applied to it

the same process of reasoning which I use in the matter of science, I should be an unbeliever."<sup>1</sup>

But what are the grounds which justify basing opinion on authority? If the matter is a practical one, we must know that the authority has had ample experience. Nothing but actual and prolonged experience can make one an expert in any business or science, and in proportion to this acquired knowledge, everyone is justly an authority to one not so instructed. No one but a fool tells his tailor how to cut out his coat. If the matter is a speculative one we must know more. It is not sufficient for the authority to show that he has given prolonged study and thought to the question, we must be assured that the subject is one which the mind is competent to deal with. If a man tells me he has bent his mind for fifty years on the problem of the conditions of possible life on the other side of the moon, I can only lament that so much time has been misapplied.

The dim perception that the individual mind can obtain no light upon such subjects as the being of God or a life after death, frequently induces a reliance upon authority. The man who will not think of taking a statement on trust in the market, as little thinks of questioning the utterances that fall from the pulpit, and to which he has been accustomed from childhood. The difficulty in securing rational views upon religion is that there is so much to unlearn. A little attention suffices to show that there is not and cannot be authorities upon matters upon which nothing can be known. Was Locke's mind more adequate to the task than that of Spinoza, Hume or Clifford? Did Wesley know more of the mysteries of nature than Humboldt or Darwin? Did the mind of Paley play with more assiduity or force around the theological problems than that of Strauss? Great names may be cited on all sides. Confucians, Brahmanists, Buddhists and Mohammedans can boast their adherents of distinction. Even modern Catholicism has De Maistre and Cardinal Newman as examples of great minds that have succumbed to its influence. Freethought dismisses the appeal to names, and claims trial by reason. On that ground a single champion may prove a match for all comers.

J. M. WHEELER.

#### CHRIST'S PARABLES.—IX.

##### THE WEDDING FEAST. (Matt. xxii., 1-14.)

In this parable Christ likens the kingdom of heaven to a king who prepared a feast for his son's marriage. The invited guests made light of the matter, and went to their farms or businesses instead of coming to the feast. Some, "the remnant," even slew his servants; and these "murderers" the king destroyed and "burned up their city." As there were no guests, the king sent forth his servants into the highways and byeways to press everybody they could find to the marriage festivities. "So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests." According to Luke xiv., 23, the servant was to "go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in."

Pausing at this point, we may condemn so indiscriminate and arbitrary a gathering together of bad and good for the wedding feast, which typifies heaven. Why does not the king, who represents God, select *good* people for his favors? To collect all who are found on the highways and byeways, totally irrespective of merit or character, is the hasty act of a petulant despot, who, when he is disappointed in one direction, rushes to the other extreme like an angry fool. Surely a king of a country—and still more the king of the whole universe—could find people who deserved recognition and who would grace his feast with wit, or with solid virtues. Why must he disgrace his court with a rabble of thieves and harlots and drunkards mingling offensively with people of good character and honest proclivities? Why must Christianity pollute its heaven with such guests? And if it is alleged that they are to be reformed, why are they not reformed first—reformed during their whole lifetime—and not taken to heaven by turning to Christ at the last moment?

The industrious farmers and shopkeepers who scorned the king's feast and preferred to attend to their own business, seem to have displayed a very unusual spirit of manly independence. They may have been rash, but there is

<sup>1</sup> Letter in *Spectator*, Feb. 1870.

sound honesty and love of freedom and self-respect in such superiority to a king's festivities. God, indeed, thinks that such people are "not worthy." The lickspittle courtier, the cringing sycophant, the cowardly slave, are the "worthy" in *his* eyes. Such would be accepted at once by the God who is always depicted as an Eastern sultan whose will is absolute law, and whose arbitrary thoughts and wishes are the absolute standard of morality and conduct. The spirit of freedom, of independence, of manly self-respect, is absolutely foreign to the teachings of Christianity.

The parable goes on to relate the fate of a man who had not on a wedding garment. The king notices this omission on the part of his compulsory guest, and says to him, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?" The poor wretch, hurried in from the highways to the midst of the court festivities, "was speechless," probably with fright and the helplessness of ignorance. Thereupon the king says to his servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." What absurdly tyrannical conduct to invite or drive people into a palace from out of the streets and then to violently expel them because they do not happen to be dressed in suitable garments! If the king forces or bids *all* to come in, surely he should also clothe them to his own taste or requirements, and not subject them to severe punishment typical of the torments of hell for an error of taste or the compulsion of poverty and haste. What would be thought if Queen Victoria compelled beggars and other passers-by to come in to Buckingham Palace, and then sent them to the tread-mill for not having on court-suits or evening dress? Some Christians explain this part of the parable by saying that in eastern countries the host furnishes the wedding garments for his guests, and that the man showed insolence and wilful ingratitude in not choosing to put one on. If the custom is so, it is a pity Christ did not explain it in a parable which is to instruct the poor and simple of all ages and of all nations. The reader might then understand that the man without a wedding garment had some amount of choice and responsibility in the matter. Even then, as he was apparently there on compulsion, it is difficult to see why he should be expected to put on signs of rejoicing unless he wished. The assumption, of course, is that loyalty to king and God must be supreme over all other considerations, and that no choice whatever can be allowed in such matters, the slightest breach of etiquette, or the slightest indication of dislike, being a crime of the greatest magnitude. God is an unreasonable tyrant, who allows no spark of independence. All who do not put on the garment of salvation, all who do not wear robes washed in the blood of the lamb, will be bound hand and foot and cast into the realms of darkness and despair. "For many are called, but few are chosen." So the parable ends. Only the elect few will be saved after all, and not the multitude. Surely such parables as this are debasing rather than elevating—religious rather than moral.

W. P. BALL.

#### THE WORD OF GOD.

JEHOVAH caused some scribes of old  
To write a guide-book, we are told,  
In order that we all might know  
The way in which we ought to go,  
To find that transcendental stair  
That radiates from everywhere:  
All round the surface of the globe,  
From down as far as man can probe;  
From mine, sea-bed, Artesian well,  
From any depth that's short of hell,  
Through Timbuctoo, or Peckham Rye,  
Right up to "Mansions in the sky."  
Had we been able by ourselves,  
Without God's *Bradshaw* on our shelves,  
To find, from earth, this heav'nward-way,  
The book had ne'er seen light of day.  
'Tis therefore clear that ev'ry man,  
Must earnestly its pages scan,  
If he, from hell's unpleasant flare,  
Would fly to "castles in the air,"  
Not made by hands, but by a ghost;  
If not, of course, he'll have to roast.  
Unfortunately, these old scribes—  
The "medicine-men" of savage tribes,  
That hated, murdered, fought, and fleeced,  
By Jahveh's orders, in the East—

Could write no lingo but their own,  
So wrote for savages alone;  
And as the ghost, who helped their craft,  
Retired when he'd inspired the draft,  
All copies and translations were  
Deemed quite beneath his ghostly care.  
These ancient drafts of priceless cost  
Have long been quite destroyed and lost;  
And no one knows the tongue or speech  
In which the great I Am did teach;  
No Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free,  
Can tell what lingo spoke J. C.  
Not all the eyes of Babel's days  
Can read what's gone from mortal gaze.  
The oldest scripture we possess—  
Some copy of some old M.S.;  
Some bastard script unauthorised,  
By man contemned, by God despised—  
When studied by the help of pray'r  
Makes parsons scratch their heads and swear;  
So that, of all God's guide divine  
We have not one trustworthy line!  
What are we wretched wights to do?  
We're in a worse than Irish stew.  
The truth must in the face be looked,  
We're clearly, and for ever, booked;  
'Tis true, as that we all must die,  
That ev'ry one of us shall fry.  
Since Time's devoured God's protocol,  
As old Ezekiel did the roll,  
And, as a new edition he  
Will not inspire, 'tis clear that we,  
Through lack of it's essential light,  
Engulphed shall be in endless night;  
Illumined only, now and then,  
By fitful gleams, when "Kiekie-ben"  
His energetic imps permits  
To poke the fires and turn the spits!

MORAL.

Now all ye gods a warning take  
From Brother Jahveh's sad mistake,  
And try to bear this well in mind:  
That, if you wish to mortal kind  
To send a message meant for all,  
It must be sent right round the ball,  
Addressed and registered to each  
Of ev'ry nation, tongue and speech;  
For, really now, upon my word  
It is, your godships, most absurd  
That souls in hell should ever roast  
Because a pigeon or a ghost  
Around some fellows never fluttered,  
Nor uttered things that can't be uttered,  
To keep them right in their translation  
Of broadsides of some ancient nation!  
If you would save us from the Roast,  
Send ev'ry one enough of ghost  
To be a prophet to himself;  
Do this, and I'll bet lots of pelf  
That you will raise—I'll lay the odds—  
The present low repute of gods.

G. L. MACKENZIE.

## REVIEWS.

*The Radical*, May: Standing.—Contains a portrait of W. Abraham, M.P. A note on James Thomson is full of inaccuracies. Mr. Standing regrets he will have to discontinue his paper unless financial aid is forthcoming.

*Percy Bysshe Shelley*. A Monograph. By H. S. Salt. London: Sonnenschein and Co. (2s. 6d.)—Still another Shelley volume! Mr. Salt gives a compendious account of the poet's life, opinions, and character. He has done his work admirably, with an eye to exactitude and proportion, and the insight which comes of sympathy. Shelley, in his view, is neither to be lauded nor apologised for, but simply presented as he was. This spirit animates, in particular, the chapter on Shelley and Harriet. Following the monograph are some interesting appendices, one of which, on Shelley's religious opinions, was first published in *Progress*. Mr. Salt concludes that opposition to Christianity was of the very essence of Shelley's thought, and if he had been "converted" he would "no longer have been Shelley, but a very different person." Another appendix exhibits the autobiographical character of *Julian and Maddalo*. Mr. Salt should analyse the *Epipsychidion* in the same way, and we believe he would find it no less self-revelatory.

Sunday-School Teacher: "What crime did Joseph's brethren commit?" Jewish boy: They sold him too cheap, sir."

It is fortunate that when Daniel went into the lion's den the beauties of the prophet-sharing system hadn't been talked up so effectively as they have to-day.

A travelling ventriloquist attended church one Sunday morning recently in western Missouri. The sermon was a long one and he fell fast asleep. While in this unconscious condition he performed one of his ordinary professional tricks—that of imitating the sound of a dog fight on the outside. In less than ten seconds the church was empty.

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