

THE FREETHINKER

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

Sub-Editor—J. M. WHEELER.

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COMIC BIBLE SKETCH.—No. 244.



A SHADY MIRACLE.

And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.—2 KINGS xx., 10, 11.

GLADSTONE ON CHRISTIANITY.—III.

THAT Pagan civilisation degraded woman "immeasurably" is the reverse of truth. Does Mr. Gladstone mean that, socially or politically, woman occupied a superior position in some remote era, when piety and justice were supreme? No, he cannot mean this, for it is simply absurd. What then does he mean? Unless he means *nothing*, his words would imply that as Greek and Roman civilisation advanced woman sank lower and lower. But nothing could be falser than this. With regard to Rome, in especial, it is a singular fact that the corrupt period of the Empire was precisely the time when the legal rights of woman were firmly established. "That very immorality," says Thulié,¹ "that gangrened civilisation, served to ameliorate her social condition." Every step taken in our own day to emancipate woman from political and social bondage is a return to the laws passed under Roman emperors, before Christianity had made any sensible progress. The property of married women was secured, and its misappropriation by the husband was punishable as theft. Divorce was granted to both on the same conditions,² and in every respect the

legal equality of the sexes was admitted. The Justinian code, compiled in the sixth century, made marriage a Christian sacrament; but the Bible was not appealed to for its social regulations. "The emperor," as Gibbon remarks, "consulted the unbelieving civilians of antiquity."

When Mr. Gladstone says that the Pagan civilisations "effaced from the world the law of purity," it is difficult to regard him as serious. That gross immorality existed among the idle and wealthy, and often, though certainly not always, at the imperial court, we frankly allow. But may not the same be alleged of every age and every country? Catherine de Medici was extremely pious, but this did not prevent her giving a banquet to her royal son, at which her handsomest maids of honor officiated naked to the waist. Brantôme utters pious ejaculations amid his incredible filth. The court he paints was horrified at the thought of heresy, and rejoiced at the burning of Free-thinkers; yet, as Mr. Morison says, "one fails to see how it differed, except for the worse, from the court of Caligula or Commodus."³ Centuries earlier, before the Renaissance, when the Church was supreme and Christianity unquestioned, Europe sent army after army to wrest the Holy Land from

¹ *La Femme*, p. 45.

² Gibbon, chap. xlii

³ "The Service of Man," p. 152.

the Mohammedans. These enterprises were *religious*. The Christian warriors were soldiers of the Cross. They carried the "sacred emblem" on their shoulders. Yet history attests that they were the vilest savages that ever disgraced the earth. They were cannibals, and their bestiality is beyond description. Might not a Mohammedan have said that "Christianity had effaced from the world the law of purity"?

Mr. Gladstone would reply that the law of purity was not *effaced*; it was taught though not practised. But this argument can be used against himself. Purity was equally taught (and practised) by Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus, to say nothing of minor moralists. The wise emperor wrote: "Such as are thy habitual thoughts, such also will be the character of thy mind; for the soul is dyed by the thoughts."⁴ Does not this carry the law of purity into the very citadel of man's nature? Epictetus said: "For since the Gods by their nature are pure and free from corruption, so far as men approach them by reason, so far do they cling to purity and to a love of purity."⁵ Seneca wrote: "If sensuality were happiness, beasts were happier than men; but human felicity is lodged in the soul, not in the flesh."⁶ Such was the effacement of the law of purity in the Pagan world!

Mr. Gladstone's panegyric on Christianity is as false as his censure on Paganism. Some parts of it are too vague to be answered, but where he is definite an answer is easy. First, he says Christianity abolished slavery. It did nothing of the kind. Before Christianity influenced the Roman empire, the evils of slavery were mitigated, and the institution was thus tending to extinction. Slaves were protected by the laws, and if they were ill-treated they obtained their freedom or a less cruel master. Manumission became so frequent that the law had to impose some restraint, lest the free citizens should be overwhelmed by the multitude of new comers.⁷ Learned and artistic slaves sat at their masters' tables and educated their children. Slavery was, in fact, a caste and not a traffic, though slaves were bought and sold. They were the offspring of captives of war, and not kidnapped like negroes. It was reserved for Christianity to steal men from distant countries for the express purpose of making them slaves. No such infamy as the African slave-trade, carried on by Christians under the protection of Christian laws, ever disgraced the nations of antiquity.

Constantine was the first Christian emperor. Did he abolish slavery? No. He liberated the slaves owned by Jews, if they embraced Christianity, but the slaves of Christian masters enjoyed no such advantage. According to the old law, a free-woman who had intercourse with a slave was reduced to servitude; but Constantine humanely decreed that the slave should be burnt, and the free-woman executed in the ordinary way.

Stoicism branded slavery as immoral, but where is there a word against the institution in the New Testament? Christianity tolerated slavery for centuries. During Mr. Gladstone's lifetime slavery was legal in our West Indian colonies. Men under thirty can remember the abolition of slavery in the United States. This very week slavery has been abolished in Brazil. If Christianity abolished slavery, it took a frightful time to do the work. Might not civilisation have done it more rapidly?

Christianity "abolished human sacrifice." When and where? Does Mr. Gladstone suppose that human sacrifice was tolerated in the Roman empire? Or does he imagine that the stories of Abraham and Jephthah have any special tendency to discredit human sacrifice? The gladiatorial shows were suppressed by Honorius. Let Christianity receive the credit of that, if you will; but set against it the terrible holocausts of Christian persecution. Is the slaughter of a gladiator any worse than the slaughter of a heretic? Was not the latter more infamous because done in the name of God?

Christianity "restored the position of women in society." We have already seen what was the position of woman under the best Roman law. In what respect did Christianity improve it? As a matter of fact, Christianity degraded woman by two methods; first, by adopting the Jewish story of the Fall; secondly, by preaching up virginity. Paul's

view of woman's position is contemptible; she is as inferior to man as man is to God. Saint Jerome called her "the demon's door, the road of iniquity, the scorpion's sting." Saint Chrysostom called her "a sovereign pest." "When you see a woman," said Saint Anthony, "be sure you have before you, not a human being, not even a wild beast, but the devil in person." Saint Augustine's insults are nearly as extravagant. Saint John of Damascus styled her "a child of lying, the advanced sentinel of the Devil," and "a malignant she-ass." Gregory the Great denied her "any moral sense."⁸ That is how Christianity "restored the position of woman in society."

Polygamy was not proscribed by Christianity, because it did not exist in the Pagan civilisation which Christianity supplanted. Monogamy was legal in Greece and Rome, and had been so for centuries. When Christianity opposed polygamy among the barbarians it simply carried forward the morality of Pagan civilisation. The Bible never censures polygamy or enjoins monogamy. It is a big book, but it never gives a right sentence on this subject.

That Christianity "put down divorce" is undoubtedly true, but the result was of questionable value. Vagrant affection was compelled to pay an outward respect to the marriage-tie, but those who could not be divorced found a compensation in adultery. Mr. Gladstone appears to regard divorce as immoral, but in this he is out of touch with the law of every civilised state. The Church still brands divorce with its anathema, but the secular law, even in the most Catholic countries, has been constrained to permit it under certain conditions.

Christianity put down divorce, yet it certainly did not put down war, nor did it make "peace, instead of war, the normal relation between human societies." The *Pax Romana* was a reality, which Christendom has never equalled. Rome boasted a Goddess of Peace, and a splendid temple was erected to her by Vespasian. At no time did the Roman armies number four hundred thousand men; yet now, after eighteen centuries of the gospel of peace, Europe is armed to the teeth, six million soldiers are grasping arms, and every Christian nation is anxiously discussing its defences. Surely, in face of these facts, Mr. Gladstone's eulogy of his creed is the idlest verbiage. We admit that philosophers deprecate war, but they always did so. Marcus Aurelius, though himself an emperor, and obliged to take up arms against the barbarians, detested war as "the disgrace and calamity of human nature."

Mr. Gladstone is right, however, in saying that Christianity "changed essentially the place and function of suffering." Suffering was always regarded as an evil before Christianity preached it as a blessing. Fortunately the modern world is returning to the old opinion, and the party of progress is everywhere warring against the evils of this life, without waiting for the rectifications of another world.

Charity itself has been narrowed by Christianity into mere almsgiving. Paul's great panegyric on this virtue is perhaps the finest thing in the New Testament, but the very word he uses (*caritas*) was borrowed from Pagan moralists. Cicero anticipated him before the birth of Christ in his *caritas generis humani*. This kind of charity is far superior to almsgiving, which often produces as many evils as it alleviates; and, after all, the charity of which the world stands most in need is that highest kind which is known as justice.

"Humility and forgiveness" are fine phrases, but they are seldom more. Generally they are little else than cheap devices for popular oppression. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," is a sweet text; but, as a matter of fact, the soil of England is chiefly owned by the House of Lords. The clergy, also, have taught humility by enjoining the "lower orders" to remain contented in that state of life to which Providence has called them, and to order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters. As for "forgiveness," we have simply to point out that, until recently, the criminal jurisprudence of Christendom was a ghastly scandal. Even in England, in the early part of the present century, men and women were hung in batches for small felonies; and when Romilly tried to terminate this infamy, he was vigorously opposed by the bench of Bishops. During the eighteenth century, men were hung, drawn, and quartered wholesale, and malefactors' heads were exposed on Temple Bar. Thackeray in his *Four Georges*, gives two samples from the public journals of 1731. At Cork, on January 15,

⁴ "Thoughts of M. Aurelius Antoninus." Translated by G. Long. P. 112.

⁵ "Discourses of Epictetus." G. Long. P. 366.

⁶ "The Morals of Seneca." Edited by Walter Clode. P. 68.

⁷ Gibbon, chap. ii.

⁸ Thulié, pp. 201-206

Tim Croneen, for murder and robbery, was "sentenced to be hanged two minutes, then his head to be cut off, and his body divided in four quarters." In England, "Mary Lynn was burned to ashes at the stake for being concerned in the murder of her mistress." Going further back we find torture common in ordinary trials. The Inquisition carried this practice to a devilish extreme; but, as Joseph de Maistre argued, in defending that institution, it only developed the habitual procedure of the secular courts. Not until the Revolution (October 9, 1789) was trial-torture abolished in France. On the whole, it is safe to say, that for exquisite, deliberate, and ingenious cruelty, Christendom has eclipsed every antique state with any pretence to civilisation.

Here I must conclude. I have said a great deal more than Mr. Gladstone can easily answer. Details are of the utmost importance in such a discussion, but Mr. Gladstone simply indulges in general statements. Courage, not to say audacity, may suffice to make them; but it requires something more than courage to defend them.

G. W. FOOTE.

ACID DROPS

OUR Collective Wisdom is composed of very queer elements. Probably there are as many fools in parliament as in any six or seven hundred men who might be casually gathered in any street in the Kingdom. These gentlemen display their miraculous sagacity on various occasions, but chiefly when religion or morality is the topic of discussion. There is Mr. Samuel Smith, for instance, who has just induced the Collective Wisdom to pass a resolution, deploring "the rapid spread of demoralising literature in this country." His puritanic eye is fixed on "the vilest of French novels," which are now translated into English, than which "nothing more diabolical was ever written by the pen of man." He does not specify any works, so it is impossible to say whether he means Zola, Daudet, Maupassant, Bourget, or whom. Very likely the pure-minded Samuel Smith has read all the books he censures, and speaks about "indecent" with an intimate knowledge. But if he detests these French books, why does he give them a splendid advertisement? Surely he does not suppose the authorities will make themselves the laughing-stock of Europe by carrying on a crusade against current French fiction. If we did not know the honorable gentleman as a weak-headed, fanatical pietist, we should be tempted to think him an advertising agent for firms like Vizetelly and Co.

SIR ROBERT FOWLER seconded the motion. Well now, that is rich.

MR. DE LISLE, the God-appointed scourge of Bradlaugh, supported the motion. Then Mr. F. E. Powell aired his grievance. He was indignant at "the circulation of literature respecting certain Acts of Parliament." That is, he wants to suppress criticism of the loathsome Contagious Diseases (Women) Act, the very title of which is an incredible abomination. Mr. Powell, and his like, must learn that the Act is far more unclean than the criticism; and they would do well to reflect on John Stuart Mill's remark that social diseases cannot, any more than bodily diseases, be cured without plain speaking. For our part, it seems to us the height of hypocrisy for the legislature to pass, and the government to administer, such a filthy Act, and then to cry out against opposition to it as "indecent."

SUCH a debate would not have been complete without a speech from that pink of propriety, that paragon of virtue, Mr. Matthews. To borrow a phrase from Burke, he turned "the splendid bile of his virtuous indignation" on "certain blasphemous publications," which he had often been pressed to prosecute; but, "considering their limited circulation, he thought it would cause much more mischief than good to call attention to their sale." Mr. Matthews—pious soul!—would like to imprison the editor of the *Freethinker*, but he is afraid of a row. Could the thing be done quietly, as in Russia, where an obnoxious editor is taken from his bed and marched off to Siberia, Mr. Matthews would be delighted. But in England, even under a Tory government, there is some liberty left; at least the forms of law have to be respected; the press cannot be prevented from reporting even a blasphemy trial; and Mr. Matthews is therefore apprehensive that the country would ring with our noise. Exactly so. Bigotry is still ready enough to torture us, only it fears to nip its fingers in the rack. Its cruelty is undiminished, but it has grown cowardly.

SINGULARLY, not one of these gentlemen turned his attention to the Bible, which literally reeks with blasphemy and obscenity. Does it not state that God Almighty showed Moses his posteriors? What could be more blasphemous than that? Does it not narrate, in the plainest language, lasciviousness which would disgrace Holywell Street, and bestialities which would shock Mrs. Jeffreys? Physician heal thyself! Let Mr. Samuel Smith, Sir

Robert Fowler, Mr. De Lisle, and Mr. Matthews, cleanse the Bible before they presume to denounce any other publication.

SOME day or other the House of Commons may pass a resolution like this:—"That this House deploras the wide circulation of a volume called the Bible, which is full of blasphemy and obscenity, and calculated to deprave the minds of young persons; and is of opinion that the authorities should take steps to abolish or abate the scandal."

ACCORDING to the *Star*, Mr. Gladstone had a long talk with Mrs. Humphrey Ward before writing his review of *Robert Elsmere*. "He has a profound conviction," it appears, "that he is as much designated by Providence to refute the theological heresies, in his opinion therein contained, as he is to restore peace to Ireland." Colonel Ingersoll is still in good health. Strange, but true.

GOD has allowed one of his cathedrals to be burnt down. He exploded a quantity of natural gas in the vaults beneath the Protestant cathedral at Buffalo, and so caused its destruction through the fire that ensued.

THE Rev. Stewart D. Headlam has brought an action for libel against a religious journal. The Christian Socialist, as he loves to call himself, told the crowd that the landlords of the country had stolen the land and that the Dukes of Bedford and Westminster were robbers. The *Record* ventured to describe this as violent language, and by mistake represented it as uttered on Sunday, whereas the actual day was Monday. The Christian Socialist could not stand so malicious and uncalled-for a libel. The jury gave a verdict for the defendant.

BARON HUDDLESTON is shocked at the Rev. S. D. Headlam's statement that if Jesus Christ came to earth again and visited Trafalgar Square, he would be arrested. "He could not imagine anything more disgusting." Indeed! Why, Jesus Christ was arrested the last time he visited this planet; and what is there astonishing in the idea that if he visited it a second time he would be "run in" again? Baron Huddleston forgets his New Testament. He appears to regard Jesus Christ as a highly respectable character, who dined with Lord Mayors and shone at Primrose League meetings, instead of consorting with publicans and sinners.

PERHAPS, after all, the truth is simply this. Baron Huddleston is one of those pious time-servers, who would stand up for Jesus Christ or Mumbo Jumbo—whichever happened to be the idol of the dispensers of loaves and fishes. Such gentlemen as this were probably in Jesus's mind when he cried, "Woe unto you, hypocrites!"

THE Anti-Sunday Travelling Union employs forty-two of its members on Sunday in travelling about on foot and distributing tracts against Sunday travelling. They favor railway stations and omnibus and tramcar centres, and thrust their leaflets on the passengers, who are threatened with the Lord's anger for breaking a commandment which only applies to Saturday. The Union urgently pleads for more funds, and earnestly thanks the Lord of the Sabbath for his manifest acknowledgement of its efforts. What form this acknowledgement takes we are not informed, unless it lies in the succeeding statement that there is a slight financial deficit.

A NEW Joan of Arc has arisen in France. She declares that Jesus appears to her in visions and commands her to found a religious house for "Spouses of the Sacred Heart of Penitent Jesus." The nuns or spouses are to avert God's anger from France by their prayers and pious works until they secure the restoration of the monarchy.

A PRIEST named Stephen Guillet figures as the co-respondent in a divorce case. Mrs. Swires, being a Roman Catholic, became acquainted with him as a priest at Norwich, and subsequently ran away with him to Paris, where they lived together as man and wife.

THE Bishop of Peterborough is up in arms. Godless education—that is, pure, unadulterated education—looms before him like a red rag before a bull. "Rather than secular education should be established in this country," he is reported as saying, "he would ten times sooner see the Church schools in the hands of Wesleyans, Congregationalists, or some other denomination." Probably his lordship will not have a choice in the matter.

THE Bishop said—and there is some sense in his remark—that he "could not understand what undenominational education meant. He could not imagine a common denominator for the 180 religious fractions in this country." Of course while schoolmasters teach the Bible they are bound to give their own interpretation of its doctrines. They cannot honestly do otherwise. The only method of avoiding the religious difficulty is to cease to compel the schoolmaster to teach religious doctrines. Perhaps, however, he might imitate the undenominational method referred to by his lordship as prevailing in parts of Africa, where words from the Koran are written on a slate and then washed off, the

children drinking the water. Bible texts might thus be inwardly digested without perversion by the rival Christian sects, but although this would prevent denominationalism and secure liberty of conscience to the teacher, the method is hardly likely to be adopted.

ROME has, not for the first time, disgraced itself. The Municipal Council has at length refused a public site for the statue of Giordano Bruno. Clericals, Conservatives and Moderate Liberals—heaven save the mark!—united in this vote. But the question is not finally settled. It will be made a test question at the next elections, when some of those Moderate Liberals will probably make room for better men.

THE *Daily News* correspondent at Rome telegraphs this news with ill-concealed satisfaction. He actually sneers at the agitation which has been carried on in the University, as though that were the home of ignorance and imbecility. Neither does he understand that Giordano Bruno was so noble a character, that all the staff of the *Daily News* combined would not be worth a single beat of his heroic heart.

"HAVE you read the Bishop of London's sermon on behalf of the Purity Society?" was recently asked of a lady. "No; one must draw the line somewhere, and I draw it at Zola and the Purity Society."

CONTINUAL contact with the obscene literature from which he had to preach on Sundays has ruined the morals of the Rev. William Lord, West Creek, New Jersey, and he is accused of assaulting a young lady in the parsonage.

THE Rev. R. Wallace, Chillicothe, seems to have been reading his Old Testament too closely. Starting hotly off in Solomon's track and engaging himself to three fair sisters at once, he has had to be suspended from the ministry.

IN an article on "Atheism and Immortality" the *Rock* makes the desirability of heaven a grand argument for immortality, and ignores the equally effective argument against immortality derivable from the undesirability of hell. As Christ says that only the few are saved while the many take the broad path to eternal destruction, the argument of undesirability ought to demolish the fear or hope of immortality. In devoting the concluding eight lines of its leading article to Hell, the *Rock* takes its stand on the assertion that "if Hell exists, all the unbeliever in the world will not destroy it." Exactly, and if it doesn't exist, all the belief in the world will not create it, except temporarily on earth in the shape of religious wars and persecutions.

THE last number of the *New York Truthseeker* illustrates the elevating influence of Christianity by giving, under the heading "Religious Personalities," some forty instances of ministers and leading Church members who have recently proved that their piety does not prevent their coming within the clutches of the law. Most of the offences are of a sexual character.

EXETER HALL is shocked to learn that London spends at the rate of seven shillings per head annually on its theatres, while the Church can only raise at the rate of fourpence-halfpenny a head from its own members for missionary purposes.

THE *Christian Commonwealth* says that the Agnostic "actually will not admit that there is any world at all." Christians delight in demolishing their opponents by this kind of rubbish. Agnosticism has nothing to do with the philosophic doubt as to the reality of things. It applies only to the existence or non-existence of deity and the supernatural. Yet the *C. C.* says that the Agnostic "simply does not know whether there is a world or whether there is not."

THE Canadian Customs authorities must be a set of bigots or fools—perhaps both. They have seized the *Truthseeker Annual* and Ingersoll's *Defence of Freethought in the Blasphemy case*, on the pretence that they are immoral, and the dealer liable to a fine for importing them. There is an evident need for Freethinkers of pluck in Canada.

THE Catholics in America are taking proceedings for the canonisation of a native saint, Peter Claver, who is already beatified. A bishop is prepared to swear to any amount of miracles having been wrought by the Blessed Peter Claver's relics. The miracles were all wrought about 1863, when the Americans were too much taken up with their own civil war to notice them.

THE *Church Times* laments that the country clergy are much deluded by projectors of bubble companies, who deluge them with prospectuses of profitable speculations. Is it because the clergy are a credulous class, or because they are known to hanker after the Mammon of unrighteousness?

A CORRESPONDENT of the *Church Times* gives a description of the celebration of Easter at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. It seems to have been a strange performance. A crucified figure is taken from a cross, carried about, and, after

being perfumed and shrouded in linen, is buried. We suppose it is resurrected on the quiet and put away until the next year's performance.

TURKISH soldiers have to be present to preserve the peace. During the ceremony an awkward incident occurred; an ink bottle fell or was poured on a Turkish officer. "Angry recriminations for a few moments interrupted the even flow of the sermon, Greek heads and tall hats disappeared, and a Turkish soldier 'went for' the author of the 'accident' with much celerity. He, of course, disappeared into the dark recesses of the Church of the Resurrection as a hunted rabbit would fly to the galleries of its burrows, and the function again pursued its course. Little importance is attached to such little pleasantries, and a slight *fracas* over the possession of a chair in the morning probably provoked the black act of vengeance." Such is Christianity in its earliest home.

THE Salvationists are "going it" at Upper Kennington. They have—at least their bills say so—Hallelujah Germans, Hallelujah Canaries and Nightingales, Converted Boozers and Boxers, and Salvation Ranters. We have no doubt about the last.

THE *Christian Herald* tells how a poor, thin, sparsely-clad woman, who earns 8s. a week by making shirts, gave a sovereign to a mission. She had made a vow to do so and had resolutely put by something every week out of her scanty earnings. This is a pleasing incident to Christians, but there is another side to the widow's mite business. It is too much like plundering the wretchedly poor by working on their feelings with the false pretences of religion.

TALMAGE quotes as if from the Bible a passage which says, "All blasphemers shall have their place in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." There is no such text in the Bible. It is a colorable imitation which none of his hearers would probably be able to detect. Talmage's assertion is contradicted by Christ, who distinctly says in Matt. xii, 31: "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men," except only the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. How can "all blasphemers" be damned, if all manner of blasphemy is to be forgiven?

If Talmage's assertion is not a coined falsehood, Paul, who wrote nearly half the books of the New Testament, will finally be plunged into fire and brimstone; for he acknowledges that he had been a blasphemer (1 Tim. i., 13). According to the Old Testament and to the priests of his nation, Jesus too was a great blasphemer, and so would have to be consigned to the burning lake.

TALMAGE gives two more instances of men being struck dead for profane swearing, and says he believes such cases of instantaneous visitation of God occur somewhere every day, but somehow are not reported. One case is localised as "in Scotland," and the other is at Catskill, in New York State. Neither name nor date is given in either case. Christians evidently don't care to have these cases inquired into. On the other hand plenty of cases occur in which God strikes people dead while praying or preaching, and in these cases names and particulars are given at the time in the press. So far as accurate reports go, entering the pulpit must be far more dangerous than the exceedingly common practice of profane swearing.

A "Mr. LOCK" tells us of his miraculous cure in the faith-healing column of the *Christian Herald*. This pious gentleman describes himself as very ill and suffering from a complication of diseases, "really through sin—through the recklessness of my life from my youth up." After doing a hard day's work for the Lord one Sunday, he says: "I felt the power of God upon me, as though electric batteries had hold upon me . . . Then God said 'Go to your Bible' . . . and since then I have been a new man entirely." Whether such Christians as this ought to be classed as lunatics or liars, or as both, is difficult to decide.

THE Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews, flatters itself that as many as 1,500 Jews leave the synagogue for the Church of Christ every year. As it also estimates that there are only 3,000 converted Jews in the United Kingdom, it looks as if many of the converts speedily relapsed into their ancestral faith. Probably they are converted early and often—as often as it pays. The Society also alleges that there are a large number of "secret believers" in Christianity among the Jews. But how many secret disbelievers in Christianity are there among the supposed converts who believe in Christian money whether they believe in Christian doctrine or not?

THE *Christian Commonwealth's* remedy for all evil is to follow Christ in all things. Christ got himself crucified through opposing the religious prejudices of his age and nation. The editor of the *C. C.* doesn't care to seek martyrdom by any such course. Neither does he work miracles by faith, nor cast out devils, nor rely on prayer in practical matters, nor take no thought for the morrow, nor turn the other cheek, nor forgive offenders and criminals unto seventy times seven, nor obey any of Christ's teachings except so far as he thinks fit.

MR. FOOTE'S LECTURES.

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.

II. ELLINGHAM.—Glad to hear that Freethinkers are increasing in your district. Sorry we cannot find space for your article.

II. HISCOCK.—We prefer to say nothing about the matter for the present. By the way, how is it you have no Freethought publications for sale on Clerkenwell Green?

D. SCARR asks us to print G. L. Mackenzie's *The Word of God* as a tract for general distribution, and offers to take a quantity for use on Peckham Rye. Would any other readers follow suit?

B. DENT.—We gave the facts of the case at the time Mr. Edwards held his meeting, and we referred to them again in a leading article a few weeks ago. There seems, therefore, no need to go over the whole ground afresh. At the same time, we admire the spirit of your letter, and quite believe you mean to do your utmost to uphold the right of free speech in Victoria Park, should it be threatened.

R. READING.—Thanks for the cuttings. We fancy you won't find that couplet in Longfellow's Dante.

W. BUNTON.—Your communication is interesting, but we regret that we cannot find space for it. We have really more copy than we can use.

I. A. W.—Glad to hear you approve the course we have taken. Something must be done for Secular organisation. Fortunately the London Federation is going ahead at the centre.

D. WAUDBY.—Pleased to hear from you again. We have dealt with Mr. Gladstone's article ourselves.

NUMBER ONE sends £1 for the London Secular Federation's open-air work.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Open Court—Western Figaro—Liberty—Liberator—New York World—Truthseeker—Freethinker's Magazine—Freethought—Boston Investigator—Secular Thought—Menschenthum—Hartford Evening Post—West Sussex Gazette—Women's Suffrage Journal—La Vespa—Southgate Times.

SUGAR PLUMS.

OUR next number will contain a full, descriptive report of the National Secular Society's Conference at South Shields.

INGERSOLL'S opponents are bent on making him the most talked of man in the United States. General G. L. Sheridan is now going about delivering lectures on "Ingersoll, the Modern Pagan."

THE New York *Truthseeker*, just to hand, gives a page of extracts from Mr. Gladstone's reply to Colonel Ingersoll. Perhaps our view of this performance may change when we receive the *North American Review*, but judging from these extracts Mr. Gladstone's article is scarcely worth a reply. He will be a pitiable spectacle in the hands of "our Bob." The only sentence we care to quote from Mr. Gladstone at present is this:—"Colonel Ingersoll writes with a rare and enviable brilliancy."

THE *Boston Investigator* has reached its fifty-eighth year. For fifty years it has had the same publisher, Mr. J. P. Mendum, and the same editor, Mr. Horace Seaver. They have kept the flag of Freethought flying so bravely that whenever they think fit to let new blood come to the front, everyone must feel they have honorably won their rest. But they seem determined to die in harness.

WE see from the *Boston Investigator* that Mr. L. K. Washburn has taken up the subject of "Was Jesus Insane?" upon which Mr. Foote wrote and lectured half a dozen years ago. The writer says that some of his Christian hearers left the hall, and others looked uneasy. To look at the gospel stories with the eyes of present-day common sense usually makes Christians uneasy.

HAVING dropped the weekly contents-sheet of the *Freethinker*, we have printed a permanent bill for exhibition outside or inside news-shops or Secular halls. Our friends would do us a real service by getting these bills displayed. Copies (one or more) will be sent post-free, on application, to any address. News-agents who *did* exhibit the old contents-sheet will find the permanent bill just as useful.

MR. FOOTE is going to publish his articles on Mr. Gladstone's defence of Christianity in a pamphlet form. The articles will be amplified, and furnished with footnotes and references. Reference will also be made to Mr. Gladstone's reply to Colonel Ingersoll. The pamphlet will be ready next week.

Two new numbers of *Bible Heroes* will be ready next week. They deal with Elijah and Elisha. "Saint David" is selling well. "Poor Job" is replete with information, and "Sultan Solomon" should interest every married man, and every man who intends to be married. As the lady remarks "He must have been clever, the rascal, to manage seven hundred wives." She was discreetly silent about the three hundred other women with whom Solomon was acquainted.

OUTDOOR lecture stations should always have Freethought literature for sale, or half the good that might be done is left undone. One or two stations seem to have neglected this duty lately. We shall be happy to give 500 or 1,000 back numbers of the *Freethinker* for gratuitous distribution to any Branch that applies for them.

THE Camberwell Branch held its open-air meeting last Sunday morning at the new stand in Station Road. The police did not interfere, but a Christian Evidence lecturer tried to cause a rumpus. Can it be that such men, finding their own audiences so insignificant, wish to pursue a policy of despair? Do they want to break up our meetings because they cannot hold their own?

MR. G. STANDRING has successfully opened up new ground at Hornsey. He has lectured for the last two Sunday mornings on Jolly Butchers' Hill, and the *Hornsey Times* reports that he had capital audiences. Mr. S. Standring pegs away there to-day (May 20).

As our readers are aware the Ontario Government has refused to grant a charter sanctioning the formation of a Secular Publishing Company. Mr. Charles Watts, in his paper *Secular Thought*, makes an energetic protest in an open letter addressed to the Government. He quotes with effect the dictum of Lord Coleridge in the trial of Mr. G. W. Foote that "it is no longer the law that none but holders of the Christian religion can take part in the State or have rights in the State, but, on the contrary, others have just as much rights in civil matters as any member of the Church of England has."

THE German Freethought Conference takes place at Cologne on the 26th, 27th, and 28th of this month. Dr. Büchner will be present and read a paper on "Frederick the Great as a Freethinker." Herr Stern, the translator of Spinoza's Ethics, will speak on Schopenhauer, and Dr. Specht discourses on "The Basis and Ideal of Freethought."

A HINDOO Tract Society has been established at Madras for the purpose of opposing Christianity. Five students have been expelled from the Christian College, which is supported by large funds from England and Scotland. According to the *Times*, the title of this college is misleading. "No converts are made," we are told, "and as an institution maintained for the object of propagating Christianity the College is an utter failure." Then comes the pregnant addition—"The same may be said of other large missionary colleges."

BRAZIL has just passed a Bill for the immediate and unconditional abolition of slavery. This is good news. But what an awful time these Christian states do take in recognising the elementary rights of man.

MR. J. H. LEVY contributes an interesting letter on the Passover to the *Jewish Chronicle*. He claims to establish it "as a probable historical fact by finding for it a *vera causa*." The truth is he thinks that Egypt was struck with a plague which passed over the chosen people. This he illustrates by what Prof. Creighton says of the yellow fever, that negroes cannot take the disease though it lurk in their very quarters. Mr. Levy also finds a deep moral lesson in the fact that insanitary conditions forced upon the oppressed generates disease which becomes a secondary disease in the oppressor, to which disease the oppressed were not subject.

MR. LEVY'S explanation is ingenious but it does not cover all the ground. The peculiarity of the tenth plague was that it slew all the first-born. The peculiarity of the Passover, as originally instituted, was that it was a sacrifice. The first-born children which were devoted to the Lord—that is to sacrifice—were redeemed by the substitutionary offering of a lamb. The festival may indicate that at some time there was a plague in Egypt, but it also serves with much else to indicate that human sacrifices were once common among the Jews.

"WE presume that the *Crimes of Christianity*, by G. W. Foote and J. M. Wheeler, of the *Freethinker*, is intended to be a slashing indictment of our national faith; but so far as the first volume goes it is simply a compilation of the dark deeds of barbaric ages, and leaves unquestioned the Christianity of to-day. However, from the records of the Roman Empire, the reigns of the Popes, the stories of the Crusades, and other sources, the writers have been able to concoct a very sensational volume; and they have set off the dark and dismal pages of oppression, cruelty, and bloodshed with a very amusing section devoted to the so-called "relics," which travellers like Mark

Twain and others have not spared. The persecution of the Jews during so many centuries is described with much force, and the whole compilation shows a wide research and a consummate knowledge of authorities, who are quoted chapter and verse in shoals. There is one thing Mr. Foote must have been rejoiced at when he appeared before the judge on the prosecution of the *Freethinker*; that he did not live in those dark ages; or he would never have had the chance of producing this volume, which shows what a vastly different thing the Christianity of the nineteenth century is to that of the gloomy period of which he and his collaborateur have so ably written."—*Western Pigaro*.

THE OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA.

MANY Protestants are unaware that their Bible consists only of a selection of the books held by the Catholic Church to constitute the word of God. The Jews themselves were divided in opinion as to the number of works in their sacred canon. The Samaritans admitted only the Law, the so-called books of Moses, the Jews of Palestine held to the Law and Prophets. Believing that prophecy ceased with the second temple they ended their canon with Malachi. Disputed works or those written and compiled later were put in a third and inferior division at the end. These comprised the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, I. and II. Chronicles, and the Song of Solomon. The Jews of Alexandria, leavened by Greek philosophy, took a broader view. They included in their collection, writings even of their own time which commended themselves to the religious views of the community.

These so-called Apocryphal books, which are important as illustrating the development of Judaism and filling the apparent gap between the Old Testament and the New, were inherited by the Christian Church from Alexandria. They were affirmed as canonical by the Council of Carthage (392) and reaffirmed by the Council of Trent. The writers of the Anglican Homilies frequently quote them as "Holy Scripture," and portions of them are appointed to be read in all churches of the Church of England during part of September, October and November. They were not called into question until the time of the Reformation, when it was found that a number of the abuses in the church, such as for instance prayers and offerings for the dead, found sanction in these books, which formed no part of the Palestinian Bible, and they were therefore, while not altogether rejected, relegated to an inferior place as not competent to establish any doctrine. Bible printers began to omit them and they have fallen into neglect by the mass of people. Nor are they likely to be resuscitated, despite some recent attempts. The Bibliolater is saddled with enough difficulties already. A Catholic Cardinal said no dogma should be objectionable to those who had once swallowed the Trinity. Nevertheless, believers desire to minimise the number of absurdities they accept. There are no more objections to the authenticity of the books of the Apocrypha than to those ascribed to Moses or Daniel. Nor are any of the stories related any more outrageous than those of Lot's wife being turned to salt and Elijah going up to heaven. But Protestants feel instinctively they have enough to bear, and the less they have to do with the Apocrypha the better. A cursory glance at the books, however, will suffice to show that they are of very considerable value to the critic.

I. Esdras was certainly not written by Ezra, but may be confidently assigned to the beginning of the last century B.C. It contains some fine lines such as, "As for the truth it endureth and is always strong; it liveth and conquereth for evermore." These are worthy of going beside the best that can be picked from the canonical books.

II. Esdras is a most important work for the study of early Christianity. The writer personates Ezra, and professes to write at Babylon in the thirtieth year after the first destruction of Jerusalem—an impossible conjunction since the real Ezra did not appear till a hundred years later. Probably the work was written at Rome thirty years after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, *i.e.* at the end of the first century. This date is confirmed by a reference to the twelve wings of the eagle, *i.e.*, the twelve Cæsars of the Roman Empire. It is full of the gloomy fanaticism amid which Christianity spread. Its main doctrine, closely similar to the words attributed to Christ, is, "There be many created, but few shall be saved." The terrible consequences of Adam's fall, the eternity of hell-fire, the satisfaction of the redeemed minority in contemplating the

torments of the reprobate, God's arbitrary favoritism towards the few and utter indifference to the perdition of the many; in short, all the germs of Christian theology, are there. In spirit the work is very similar to the Revelation of St. John. The Jews are the cocks of creation, "the other people are nothing and be like unto spittle." This book also refers to the law as burnt, and suggests that the Holy Ghost needs to re-write it. Altogether it powerfully indicates how much the rise of Christianity depended on the destruction of Jerusalem.

Tobit is some three centuries earlier. It is rather a pleasant specimen of Jewish folk-lore. It exhibits some of their angelology and demonology. Uriel is introduced in II. Esdras, Gabriel in Daniel, and Tobit makes us acquainted with Raphael. Tobit becomes blind by sparrows muting warm dung into his eyes while he sleeps by a wall; but being a pious man, the angel Raphael is sent to heal them and to show his son Tobias how to drive away Asmodeus, the demon, and marry Sara, the daughter of Raguel. Raguel coolly informs his prospective son-in-law, "I have given my daughter in marriage to seven men who died that night they came in unto her: nevertheless, for the present be merry." Tobias, armed with directions from the archangel, is married. He follows his instructions, burns the liver of a fish, "the which smell when the evil spirit had smelled, he fled into the utmost parts of Egypt, and the angel bound him." Tobias and his wife spend the night in prayer, while the father is digging the eighth grave outside. Many commentators have defended the belief in the stories of incubii and succubii from Tobit. Calmet, and others say that the flight of Asmodeus to Egypt may explain the frequent temptations to sensuality by which the Egyptian monks were assailed!

The story of how Judith, the widow of Manasses, delivered Israel from Holofernes, which follows, is probably no less an utterly unhistorical romance than the book of Esther. But it is far more finely conceived. The Bible work shows the Jew and Jewess only in their sensuality and revenge. The apocryphal work displays the heroic spirit which animated them in the Maccabæan period. The additions to the book of Esther which are found in the Apocrypha do not improve it. They are evidently added to give some appearance of piety to the Bible book, though at the cost of all probability and unity of conception. Utterly at variance with the canonical story Esther is made to pray and declare that she abhors "the bed of the uncircumcised" Ahasuerus, and only goes from necessity.

J. M. WHEELER.

(To be concluded.)

CHRIST'S PARABLES.—X.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN (Luke xviii., 9-14).

THIS parable has passed into literature as the typical picture of pride and humility. As such it has its good features, and may even merit some amount of commendation. But at the same time it is necessary to show that such an apparently faultless parable is not nearly as perfect as Christians imagine.

In the first place, the parable is based upon superstition rather than morality. It makes attitude before God everything, while actual conduct towards fellow-men is left out of the question. The Pharisee thanks God that he is not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. The universally despised and execrated Publican, or tax-collector, smites his breast and cries "God be merciful to me a sinner." And Jesus says: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." But why are either of them "justified" by what they say to God? Why should prayer to heaven condone deeds done to fellow-men on earth? How does either subsequent humility or pride justify a bad action and clear the conscience? Religion teaches false ideas of this kind, and so far is a most subtle and dangerous enemy of morality. Self-glorifying prayer and self-humiliating prayer are equally irrelevant to the goodness or badness of the preceding conduct. The *only* approximate method of justifying one's self after doing wrong is to repair the wrong and to do the right. Pleasant emotional substitutes for so disgustingly cold and mechanical a view of morality are both fallacious and gravely mischievous. No amount of passionate indulgence in breast-smiting or grovelling before

God will wash away the past or compensate those who have suffered from our bad actions. An ounce of honest reparation is worth a ton of repentance. Deeds, not tears, are the essentials of right conduct.

Nothing is alleged against the Pharisee except the pride which causes him to despise cruel and wicked men and to thank God that he is not even like this tax-gatherer. Nothing is urged in favor of the Publican except his humility or self-abasement. Perhaps his acts had been such as to lead to a more bitter repentance than would be felt by more virtuous and respectable members of the community. From such parables as the Prodigal Son and from the warm welcome Jesus gave to Mary Magdalene and other impulsive unfortunates, it is evident that the Son of Man loved the emotional repentance and devoted homage born of sin infinitely better than he loved and welcomed and rejoiced over the righteousness of those who needed no repentance. The Publican at least was following a dishonored and unpatriotic avocation. He was serving the enemies and conquerors of his nation in the hateful task of rigorously enforcing highly unpopular taxes from his fellow countrymen. They regarded him as a despicable extortionist, who could only be classed with the most shameful and vicious classes who prey upon the community.

Christ's statement that "everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased" is certainly not true as far as this world is concerned, and it can hardly be true in the next, seeing that salvation is made to depend on belief and not on humility. Such sweeping statements or promises merely spring from and minister to crude desires for a reversal of a state of things which is felt to be unsatisfactory. It is forgotten that the reversal may be still more unsatisfactory.

Meekness and poorness of spirit spring largely from weakness and even from cowardly baseness and slavishness of disposition. An ideal expectation of the universal exaltation of the humble, and the universal overthrow of the exalted, is the foolish dream of a mind that feels rather than thinks. Humility is not by any means the supreme virtue, nor pride the supreme vice or crime. The one is as much a vice or a fault as the other. Christianity denounces the pride which may oppose its supremacy, and then fosters a spiritual pride besides which earthly pride is as nothing. Christianity cannot crush pride, for it will pride itself on its humility and meekness as readily as it will on anything else.

Pride is a useful and essential element of human nature. It supports men through the work of life and enables them to discharge its duties easily and pleasantly. It raises them above mean actions and contemptible ways. Call it self-respect, and no one will condemn it, except perhaps the fanatical religionist who sees a snare to the soul in the insidious commendation of a forbidden sentiment under a more plausible name. Why should not men be proud of a good character and take pride in their abilities and good workmanship? Proper pride is a most excellent thing both for the individual and society. Yet Christianity denounces it without drawing the necessary distinction between the use and the abuse of a natural and necessary feeling. The Roman Catholic Church ranks pride as the first of the seven deadly sins, and humility as the first of the seven virtues. Thus Christianity teaches men false and mischievous views of morality. Because pride, like every other feeling, is capable of misuse and excess, it is to be slandered and crushed as the first of the deadly sins. For my own part, I always observe that it is those who have most pride themselves who object most strongly to it in others and who pride themselves most on a humility which they know it would be sheer madness to doubt. It is our own pride that revolts against the pride of others. Those who possess least self-esteem, and who feel the pain and difficulty caused by a want of it, are the least likely to denounce so useful and comfortable and proper a feeling—a feeling moreover without which life would be unendurable. Christianity does not even give its God the credit of having constructed man wisely in giving that supreme animal or lord of creation so abundant a share of the pride necessary for the maintenance of his exalted position and divinely-deputed authority. It rushes to the extreme of wholesale condemnation, just as it did with marriage and scepticism and many other good things. The act which preserves the human race from extinction was regarded as necessarily sinful, and celibacy was regarded as a great virtue which must be enforced among all priests and nuns. All this is a distortion of true morality and a frightful

source of much needless suffering. The Church naturally commends the vice of humility, not merely as an exaggerated reaction against the opposite fault, but as being really submissiveness and slavish docility, while pride meant resistance to the decrees of God and the Church. Given an infallible guide in God or his Church, given eternal hell and heaven as the consequences of scepticism or complete devotion, human pride or independence of spirit is indeed the first of sins, and utter submission is the only proper attitude that the human soul can assume. Thus by its monstrous assumptions Christianity entices or terrifies mankind from the path of truth and right conduct.

Turning to the parable again, I would ask, What particular wrong has the Pharisee done his fellows? and what good has the Publican done? The Pharisee has *acted* perfectly so far as the parable goes—for his fasting and giving tithes are thoroughly in accord with Christian teaching, and they indicate, moreover, a self-sacrificing sincerity which might have been turned to better use if freed from the religious bias. Whether the Publican gives away a tenth of his income, and whether he *could* truthfully thank God for keeping clear of grave sins, we are not told. He confesses he is a sinner, and only implores mercy for himself—not help to repair his sins or to compensate those whom he may have wronged, not mercy for others, but remission of divine anger or punishment which he rightly or wrongly feels he has himself incurred. From the religious and thoroughly selfish point of view this parable teaches a good and useful lesson; but from the Secular and humanitarian aspect its lessons are meretricious and unsound. W. P. BALL.

THE CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE SOCIETY.

THE meeting of the C. E. S. this year was distinguished by the presidency of Professor Stokes, who expressed his opinion that sceptics only attacked caricatures of Christian truth. Christianity did not pretend to be founded on scientific evidence, but upon a chain or net-work of other, particularly internal, evidence. The report read by Mr. Engstrom referred to the formation of the London Secular Federation, and declared that in the presence of this new movement it would be unwise to lessen their labors in a field where they have been so much blessed. It went on to quote the *Record*, that "Christianity is not in possession in South London," and to deplore "an undoubtedly large increase of scepticism among women." The Society claims to have issued over a hundred thousand tracts, and asks that its income should be raised from one thousand to two thousand a year, especially in order to meet the Atheistic lectures delivered in the provinces. Last year they were in luck, or rather under the blessing of God; Miss Smyth, of Tunbridge Wells, died and left them a thousand pounds, part of which has been used for current expenses, the remainder invested. The two secretaries now only share £492 between them.

The Bishop of Carlisle, who is almost as bald as Elisha, and has a most uncomfortable habit of sniffing and grunting, moved the adoption of the report. That science was not in conflict with revelation was evident, because a scientific man like the chairman thought otherwise. As for historical criticism, there was Dr. Butler on the platform, while as a proof that common sense and hard headedness were on the side of Christianity, he instanced the Lord Chancellor (formerly Sir Hardinge Giffard). The Bishop was much concerned about the women becoming sceptical, He remembered that Strauss had been translated by one woman. Comte by another, and that *Robert Elsmere* was written by a woman; deplored that in churches there were ten women to one man, and evidently felt that when the women left the game would be up. Yet there was some consolation. It brought joy to his heart to read that even in Paris the Church of Notre Dame was crowded at the Easter festival. Dr. E. White, who followed, extolled the Bishop of Carlisle as "one of the ablest minds in England." He thought infidelity was not advancing. The glory of Jesus Christ was so great that he would always hold his own. The Rev. W. Peplow based his text on Esther, where Abasuerus issues the edict permitting the Jews "to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all the power of the people and province that would assault them." He seems to wish a similar edict in England to-day. The Rev. M. Butler followed, but, instead of showing his critical powers, drivelled away about the good work of the Society until our reporter left. A collection was taken up while a hymn was sung in the middle of the proceedings.

A NEW and important Darwinian work, *Le Transformisme*, by Edmond Perrier, has just been published by Baillière, of Paris.

W. J. BARKER has a good letter in the *Reading Observer* on Prophet Baxter's ravings. Baxter has been holding forth to a lot of fools in that town on the Coming Christ. Perhaps there was a sprinkling of sensible folk at the meetings, and Mr. Barker's letter will counteract in their minds the prophet's rubbish.

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- These Tracts are numbered, but the old heading, "Freethinker Tracts," has been omitted, so as not to frighten people. Number 5 consists of a selection from *Bible Contradictions*. The circulation of such leaflets wholesale will be very beneficial to the Freethought Movement, as they are all specially designed for the common reader.

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