

# THE FREETHINKER

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

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.

COMIC BIBLE SKETCH.—No. 259



## BIBLE CHOLERA.

(Respectively dedicated to Professor Gairdner and the British Medical Association.)

*The sword of the Lord, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel, . . . And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.—*  
1 CHRONICLES XXI., 12, 16.

## ARE SCEPTICS STINGY?

MR. BRADLAUGH'S announcement of his pecuniary embarrassments has more than served its purpose. The matter has been taken up by journalists who see that Mr. Bradlaugh is a good card to play with, especially in the dull season; and thanks to this not altogether disinterested, yet highly serviceable intervention, it is probable that Mr. Bradlaugh's liabilities will soon be cleared off. For our part, we are delighted at the prospect. It is simply deplorable that a statesman like Mr. Bradlaugh should be hampered by the expenses of a conflict in which, with untiring energy, unflinching courage, and unailing tact, he successfully championed the great principle of religious liberty; and the idea of his having to resign his seat in Parliament, in order to release himself from the pressure of such debts, is shocking to contemplate. Happily a committee is formed, with Mr. George Anderson as treasurer, and signs are not wanting that wealthy Liberals, who profess belief in religious freedom, are feeling a sense of their duty in the matter. They cannot help seeing, now the struggle is ended and mere personalities have vanished, that Mr.

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Bradlaugh was fighting their battle in vindicating his own rights; and their subscriptions will be a tardy yet welcome testimony of their gratitude.

This is as it should be. But why should Mr. Bradlaugh's new-found friends deal a bravo's stab at the Freethought party? During all that long struggle between the Freethought leader and the House of Commons, it was his own poor party which was his firm support. With steadfast and touching loyalty they stood by Mr. Bradlaugh all the more closely and tenaciously when his fortunes were at their lowest ebb. They cheered him in his attacks, they consoled him in his reverses, they applauded his triumphs, and they taxed themselves ungrudgingly to meet the heavy costs of the contest. Let anyone turn over the file of the *National Reformer* during those long weary years, and he will see how grandly the Freethought party responded to the incessant, though necessary, appeals to their generosity. Before the struggle closed, too, the sum of £5,000 was raised to enable Mr. Bradlaugh to carry on his publishing business in Fleet Street. True, the money was only lent, but that circumstance does not detract from the honorable motives of the investors. Even now,

although so heavily drained by past subscriptions, the Freethought party is quite ready—with or without outside assistance—to make another desperate effort to release its champion from the thralldom of debt. Yet directly on the heels of Mr. Bradlaugh's announcement of his trouble, before the Freethought party could take action, the *Pall Mall Gazette* rushes into the field with a shameful, nefarious article on "The Stinginess of the Sceptic." Now that Mr. Bradlaugh is victorious, and a power to be courted, this evening paper flies to his assistance; and in doing so it contrives to slander Freethought and flatter Christianity, in a manner which could only be accounted chivalrous by the soldiers of the Cross.

Mr. Stead's paper cannot help admitting that "those with whom Atheism has become a kind of religion"—in other words, the organised Freethought party—have rendered Mr. Bradlaugh *some* assistance. How much, however, and from what slender resources, it does not condescend to state, and perhaps it has not condescended to inquire. It simply makes a grudging acknowledgement of the bare fact, and proceeds to rail at "the vast body of well-to-do unbelievers" who have "left Mr. Bradlaugh in the lurch." No doubt the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which is in the secrets of every cabinet in Europe, knows pretty nearly everything. But even though we commit blasphemy in doubting its infallibility, we must express our misgivings as to the existence of the "vast body of well-to-do unbelievers." We do not deny that there are wealthy sceptics who keep their opinions, and their money, to themselves; just as quite a proportionate number of wealthy Christians would do if Christianity were unpopular, ostracised, and oppressed. But we doubt the "vast body." Well-to-do unbelievers *have* supported Mr. Bradlaugh, as the subscription lists will show. What the *Pall Mall* might safely assert—for that is the grain of truth in its impeachment—is this, that beyond the earnest Freethinkers there are many doubters, sceptics, half-believers, and indifferent believers, who give no kind of support to any cause. But that is a malady incident to human nature. Always and everywhere minorities do the public work of the world, the majority "assisting" in the French sense of the word, as a gentleman "assists" at a concert where he merely occupies a seat. Out of twenty professing Christians how many are active as workers or subscribers? And is the proportion among sceptics any less? We say emphatically, No. On the contrary, we venture to assert that sceptics, in proportion to their means, contribute more to the cost of fighting great causes than the average Christian. Perhaps the assertion is difficult to prove, but so is the opposite assertion of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

We are told of the "altruistic instinct fostered for centuries by the Churches," of the handsome way in which Christians support their ministers, of the readiness with which they subscribe to build churches and chapels; and, on the other hand, of the frugality of the sceptic, who "when he ceases to believe too often ceases to subscribe." Without admitting the allegation as true, we venture to remark that it invites a comparison of motives. The Christian has religious—that is, selfish—motives for giving; he frequently expects a rich reward hereafter, so that his subscriptions are very much of the nature of an investment. He has also much to gain from a worldly point of view, for Christianity is the fashionable creed, and it is notorious that to succeed in business, except in very special cases, it is necessary to have the good opinion of religious circles. Cut away all the selfish motives of future recompense, earthly profit, and "respectability," and how much pure "altruism" is left in the mind of the average subscribing Christian? Sceptics, on the other hand, when they do give, can only be actuated by unselfish motives; they expect no interest in heaven, and they stand to lose on earth. Surely a very little sagacity would enable the *Pall Mall Gazette* to see the force of this argument.

Mr. Bradlaugh himself has felt obliged to protest. Writing to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he says:—

"SIR,—In speaking for me you have done injustice to mine. The debt owing from the more than five years' struggle is roughly about £1,500. The bulk of the cost was borne by voluntary contributions, mostly from poor folk, which were acknowledged week by week in the *National Reformer*. My friends are poor but they are not "stingy."—Yours sincerely,  
C. BRADLAUGH.

But Mr. Stead sticks to his contention nevertheless. The cream of the joke, however, is to come. An anonymous Conservative clergyman unbosoms himself on the subject. He declares that "the stinginess, the illiberality in

every sense of the word, the bigotry and narrow-mindedness of the so-called Secularists or Atheists, is beyond belief,"—as though *anything* could be "beyond belief" to a Conservative clergyman. This gentleman predicts that "were a subscription list to be opened, many if not most of the subscribers would be found to be Conservative in their politics and orthodox in their religious opinions." Well, as George Eliot said, prophecy is the most gratuitous form of error. We do not pretend to this gentleman's powers of divination,—but we are quite capable of ascertaining what *has* happened. The "subscription list," as a matter of fact, has been open for years. Freethinkers have subscribed pretty liberally, but Conservative Christians have contributed an infinitesimal amount. They did not even recoup Mr. Newdegate for his losses in prosecuting Mr. Bradlaugh. Mr. Newdegate was an honest old blockhead; he acted up to his lights; and the Conservative Christians, headed by the Marquis of Salisbury, issued a begging circular for him. But they did not dip their hands very deeply into their own pockets in his behalf. The result was that he had to cut down his trees and burden his estate; indeed, it is reported that the discomfiture hastened his death. The Conservative Christians egged him on and left him in the lurch. Perhaps they meant to give, but they did not. Like this "Conservative and a clergyman," they *promised* "their mite," for that is all he does at the end of his heroic epistle.

In conclusion, we can quite understand the *Pall Mall Gazette* trembling lest Agnosticism should be "fatal to all the finer moralities which have sprung up under the shadow of the Cross." It is only the usual Christian practice of making the most of Christian generosity. Mr. Bradlaugh had ample experience of those "finer moralities" when he was struggling against deadly odds, when his name was an opprobrium in Christian households, when his character was the mark for Christian defamation, when he was lied about in all the organs of piety, and when "Conservative clergymen" showed their benevolence by libelling him in the pulpit. Freethinkers may rejoice that Christians (after Mr. Bradlaugh's victory) are ashamed of their meanness; but they would be more or less than human if they did not smile at the Christian's pharisaic grimace as he drops his conscience money into the Bradlaugh Redemption Fund.

G. W. FOOTE.

#### ESCHATOLOGY.

ESCHATOLOGY is the "science" of the Last Day, or the final end of worldly things. It is a science only in the religious sense, and has no more to do with scientific science than the tale of Jack and the Beanstalk has to do with the history of Rome. Eschatology is, in short, a biblical pseudo-science, taught by Jesus Christ and his apostles, and by Christian priests in general.

Eschatology is losing its fascination. The name and the idea are alike falling into disrepute. Devotion to such studies or beliefs is fast becoming a recognised sign of mental and moral inferiority. Nevertheless, many weak minds are still inexpressibly terrified at the expected approach of the end of all things as threatened in the Scriptures by God, who says it shall come as a surprise and as a thief in the night. Hence these religious weaklings—mostly women or sensitive children—never feel safe. The solemn declarations of their ministers, or sanctified friends, or quacks like Baxter and Talmage, are to them as the voice of God announcing the swift and perhaps immediate coming of the Day of Judgment. To terrify women and children by seriously threatening to burn them alive *now* would be regarded as cowardly and brutal in the extreme, and the persons so acting would soon meet with condign personal or legal chastisement. But a whole class lives by threatening that they shall be burnt alive *for ever*, and the horrible terrorism whereby many have been frightened into insanity is approved of as "sweet religion," which will keep men good and happy both here and hereafter.

Jesus—unless the Gospels misrepresent him—is responsible for inaugurating this long reign of terror. The Apostles and the early Christians followed his lead. Jesus is to return from the clouds in flames of fire, taking vengeance. The aspect of a wrathful God, approaching midst awful thunders, and lightnings, and earthquakes, is to be so unnerving that people are to cry out for the

rocks to fall on them and hide them for ever from his sight. The graves are to open and the bodies to rise. The universe becomes one huge conflagration. The flaming heavens roll together like a scroll of burning parchment, and the earth and all its works become a huge heap of ashes. From this overwhelming scene of horror, the saints, who are few in number, are to be snatched up through the air into heaven, while all the rest of mankind are hurled headlong into abysses of fire and darkness, where the worm dieth not, and nothing is heard but the groans and shrieks of tortured souls and endless weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

We Freethinkers, to whom all this atrocious outrage upon common sense and right feeling, is but a silly though wicked nursery tale, cannot possibly conceive the fearful and utterly unconquerable sensations caused by this "spiritual" terrorism in minds that really believe in its objective truth but do not happen to be protected from its dread and horror by the immeasurable self-assurance, and hideous callousness to human suffering with which the elect are commonly blessed.

If reason could prevail in such anxious minds the monstrous eschatology of the Bible would speedily perish as a baseless lie. Christ declared most emphatically that all these things should come to pass within the life-time of the generation to whom he spoke. Yet his return to judge the world is as far off as ever. If his words are utterly falsified in one respect, why should we believe them in another? The Apostles also declared that the end of all things was close at hand, and their inspired declarations have been as deceptive as their Master's.

The common idea is that as God mercifully promised Noah not to drown the world again, he intended to destroy it with fire the next time he took it in hand.

Science declares that it is far more probable that the earth will suffer from excessive cold than excessive heat. Apparently originating in a fire-cloud, or nebula, which condensed into huge drops or globes, of which the sun is by far the largest and the cooled-down planets so much the smaller that our earth is little more than a millionth part the bulk of the still heated and radiant central mass, the history of our solar system must be a history of cooling down through enormous ages. The cooling still goes on. The sun, and also the planets, are continually radiating forth their heat into space. The shrinkage of the sun helps to keep up the temperature, and the meteoric bodies that rush into the sun at almost inconceivable velocities must also develop enormous energy or heat in the collision, but the probability is that these causes cannot compensate for the vast and unceasing loss by radiation. Hence it is anticipated that in the course of many millions of years the earth will gradually become too cold to support life. Her oceans will freeze (if they have not previously sunk into huge crevices of the cooling and cracking earth), and she will then circle on around the dying sun lifeless and desolate as the moon now sails before our eyes. But as this is to be many millions of years hence, and as the enormous length of the ages of the evolution of the past assures us of the probability of enormous ages yet to run, we need not trouble ourselves about the shortness of this lease.

W. P. BALL.

## ACID DROPS.

BISHOP PARKER has written a "friendly" letter to King Mwanga telling him that the English people were much grieved at his having murdered Bishop Hannington, but that Christians forgive their enemies, and they would forgive him, and asking for freedom to go to and fro freely, and for religious liberty for the converts. King Mwanga is out of our reach, but if he had been as readily assailable by our forces as Cetewayo, would the bishops talk about forgiveness? Would they not cry out loudly for vengeance? Would they not send Bible and bayonets together to clear a road for Christ?

THE vicar of Dittisham waded up to his neck into the river Dart after his horse and trap, and rescued a young lady just in time. He forgot his Christianity, and never stopped to pray or to trouble God about the matter. The man was more than the Christian. The horse, whose fright caused the accident, got into deep water and was drowned.

SAM JONES, the popular revival preacher of America, has just received 1,000 dollars (about £200) for preaching for a week in a town in Missouri. Beecher spent 300,000 dollars over his beautiful country residence at Peekskill on the Hudson. Preaching is evidently a game that pays.

THE Bishop of Detroit came over to England to attend the Pan-Anglican Synod, at Lambeth. When preaching in a Westminster church he was seized with an apoplectic stroke; he has since died at the Langham Hotel. Though a vigorous, robust man of 41 years, paralysis of the right side ensued, the organs of speech being also affected. If this had happened to a Freethought lecturer it would have been a judgment. As it happened to a bishop, it is only one of the trials by which a loving God proves and purifies his elect.

PROTESTANT journals notice that parts of South America are so under the degrading influences of Romish superstition that at Bogota, the capital of Columbia, there is an established agency for the burning of Bibles and Protestant books. But these Protestant journals forget to notice that England, as a whole, is so under the degrading influence of Christian superstition, as to retain laws by which opposition to that degrading superstition is punished with two years' imprisonment. Putting people into gaol is a far worse act of bigotry than burning paper; but Protestants find it much more comfortable to find fault with the mote in other people's eyes than to pluck out the beam which is in their own.

THE Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth is disheartened at the result of keeping his church open during the day. People go into the pews to eat their luncheons, and even descend to the "blasphemous subterfuge" of munching sandwiches while on their knees in an attitude of prayer. Some call in for the purpose of chaffing the attendant, or for still more impious amusements. London doesn't seem to be particularly religious on week-days.

THE Dean and Chapter of Christ Church, Oxford, seized a hay-stack at Lower Hall, a fat ox and five pigs at the Upper Hall, two cows at Dryffryn, one cow at Penlr, a heifer at Tynytwl, and a cow and a heifer at Bridge End. The tenants are fully determined not to pay tithes. Christianity thus has to exhibit itself in its true colors as an organised system of plundering labor for the benefit of priestcraft.

THE Rev. W. Nicholson, of Stone, has been enlightening a Clapton congregation on the subject of "doubt." Doubt, says the Potteries luminary, spurts its deadly venom in our periodicals and reviews, and coils itself in the very columns of religious periodicals. Much of it was a disease of the heart. Men didn't like obeying God, and, to banish the dread of future retribution, they shake away the creed they learned at their mother's knee. (Here the worthy Nicholson was no doubt deeply affected, several portly matrons fluttered their cambric, and two or three budding sceptics were carried out fainting.)

Now, this is a charming little theory. It is so simple and easy. "All who differ from me," says the worthy Nicholson, "are bad men." Thus the Pharisaic bigot covers his imbecility of reason with his impudence of pretension. He never reflects—perhaps he is incapable of reflecting—that he is a sceptic to every creed but his own.

DON'T seek for evidences, shrieks the Stony sky-pilot—take Christianity as it is, in a spirit of faith, and you will find its value by experience. Knowing the properties of coal does not warm a scientist, but an ignorant yokel gets warmth by walking up to the fire. But why cannot the scientist walk up to the fire too, O man of God? Will his knowledge impede his steps? Will it not rather enable him to detect a painted fire, such as your "radiant Christianity"?

ACCORDING to the *School Board Chronicle*, a sinister movement is going on to undermine School Boards and School Board work, and to cover the ground afresh with the schools of the Anglican Church. This corroborates the view expressed in our last week's leading article. We beg Freethinkers everywhere to be on the alert to defeat this clerical design.

DR. PARKER is starring in Scotland, and among the wonderful pieces of information he has taken north of the Tweed is this—that "the old blank Atheism (whatever that is) is now regarded as vulgar, blatant, and profane." Now regarded, is rich. Perhaps Dr. Parker will kindly tell us when it was that he or his like did not regard Atheism as—well, we needn't repeat the adjectives.

THREEPENNY bits are still the favorite coin in Scotch collections. No less than 1,400 of them were found in the plates when Dr. Parker preached at Dunfermline. So many of those bothersome little coins could hardly have come together by accident, and we cannot help admiring the judicious way in which the Scotchman combines frugality with piety.

"THE Christianity of Christ" is becoming as sleekly a piece of cant as the Correggosity of Correggio, so satirised by Sterne. Here is the *Christian World* telling us that "the Christianity of Christ is not merely the religion of a mistaken though high-souled enthusiast, but bears upon it the unmistakable marks of a more than earthly origin." The high-falutin writer was too much in love with his fine adjective "unmistakable" to reflect that those "unmistakable marks" were somehow mistaken by

Darwin, Mill, Buckle, Clifford, Carlyle, Spencer, Huxley, Tyndall, and several other persons not very remarkable for blindness.

THE Rev. Mr. Bott, of Tottenville, New York, is in trouble for covering his wife's face with cuts and bruises.

CHRISTIAN and Jewish converts to Mohammedanism the last year number 222—far more than Mohammedan proselytes to Christianity.

AT Halifax, Nova Scotia, recently, the Rev. J. R. Hutchinson deserted his wife and child to elope with a young girl.

MR. BARNETT, of St. Jude's, Whitechapel, has in the press a volume entitled *Practicable Socialism*. Evidently Mr. Barnett considers some kinds of Socialism impracticable, and among them, we presume, the peculiar kind taught by Jesus Christ and practised by the Apostles.

PARKER says that the Devil "can damn you with bits of the Bible." The Bible must be taken as a whole, it seems, and "only he can quote the Bible who has it in him from the unbeginning beginning to the unending end." How many people can quote the Bible, we wonder? Can Parker himself?

THE Education Commissioners are anxious to drive the children in to the religious instruction at the commencement of the day's work in Board Schools. They recommend that the register of attendance should be marked before, and not as now after, the time for religious instruction, and that children too late for this marking should forfeit that attendance as a legal one. All the rest of the day is to count for nothing, as a penalty for being too late for the Bible lesson.

AT Monkton, in Kent, during divine service, a jackdaw belonging to Mr. Stapleton Cotton made its way into the sacred edifice with the congregation, and not only took a lively part in the responses, but also became exceedingly talkative at other times. The whole congregation were in a titter, the clergyman himself with difficulty kept a straight face, while the school children present broke out into open laughter. Things became so bad that the clergyman was compelled to order the children out of the church. Then an effort was made to capture the intruder, which had perched itself boldly upon the reading desk. The bird, however, flew to the rafters above, where it remained (still talkative) till the end of the service.

THE Rev. Thomas Clarke, who was committed for trial as an impostor, has been acquitted. He was not collecting money for the current work of his mission, which had ceased operations through the organ and church seats having been seized for debt. He was only collecting for the building fund of a projected new church.

THE Rev. H. Girdlestone complains that a biblical manual issued under the auspices of the Sunday School Association is "full of veiled blasphemy" in the shape of scientific facts. This manual is on "The Method of Creation," and it points out some of the discrepancies in the Bible accounts of creation. The Rev. H. Girdlestone says he is "not prepared to swallow so-called 'scientific facts' if they are contrary to Bible teaching." He will believe "the unchanging word of God" rather than scientific men who formerly made the sun go round the earth and now make the earth go round the sun. But the scientific men have discovered and corrected their error. The "unchanging Word of God" fell into exactly the same error, but has not the grace to acknowledge or correct the mistake. Why should the unchanging source of error be a better authority than honest seekers after truth, who are continually improving the knowledge and resources of mankind?

THE recent floods with which a beneficent God has favored Switzerland have done more damage than was anticipated. In the canton of Uri alone the loss amounts to upwards of 250,000 francs. Many farms have been devastated by the inundations, and the crops completely destroyed. A large number of poor people are thus destitute, and some practically homeless, and unless something is done for them they have absolutely nothing with which to face the hardships of the severe Swiss winter. God is more prompt in causing undeserved misery than he is in relieving it.

THE mischief which God has caused in Japan by the volcanic eruption is frightful. Five villages have been totally buried. Many of the people who escaped suffer from fearful burns, or from fractured limbs or skulls. Many of the bodies recovered are cut to pieces and others are parboiled. Ghastly sights are seen in the remnants of bodies hanging on the branches of the trees on which they fell after being shot into the air by the force of the eruption. The correspondent of the *Daily News* says that in some places "flesh hangs from the branches of the trees as paper from London telegraph wires." This shows that God doeth all things well, and that his loving care is over all his creatures.

"IN one case a woman fled from the eruption with a child upon her back. As she pushed on, urged by her frenzied fear, and

now and again stumbling over some cruel boulder which lay in her path, obscured from view by the blinding, burning hail, a large red-hot stone fell upon the infant's head, killing the little one and deluging the mother in her child's blood. She, however, escaped, and continued on till she reached Wakamutsa, where she fell exhausted, with the mangled remains of her child still tied on her back." What a loving God it must be who causes scenes of horror of this kind by the thousand. What had the woman and her infant and all the other sufferers done to be treated in this horrible fashion by our Father which art in heaven?

A NEWLY-BORN baby's body was found buried at Tredegar on Sunday, death having been caused by a terrible blow at the back of the head. The coroner's jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against Elizabeth Hancock, whose husband has been in Australia during the past five years. It is stated that the father of the child is a member of the Salvation Army.

GEORGE DANIELS, the Birmingham murderer, has sent his brother a pious letter, which duly appears in the newspapers. It is full of God, Holy Spirit, Heaven, and the other catch phrases of Christianity. Daniels appears to spend a lot of his time in reading the Bible and singing hymns. No doubt the chaplain has assured him of a reserved and ticketed seat in the New Jerusalem.

SUSANNAH HARDS, of Watford, disappeared on June 7, and has not been heard of since. It is thought she has committed suicide. She left a letter for her father, in which she said, "May the Lord take care of my children." We have not heard that the Lord has taken on the job. No doubt the poor children are receiving bread, not from their heavenly father, but from their earthly grandfather.

THE Bishop of Ripon concluded his lecture on Novel Reading by saying to the novelists, "You and I are brothers on one common errand." We thank the Bishop for the admission. We have always said that clergymen deal in fiction, and our view is now endorsed by a master in the trade.

ACCORDING to the Rev. R. Bayne, Scott's *Heart of Midlothian* is a novel "specially sacred and adapted for Sunday reading." But is it so good a Sunday novel as the *Life and Adventures of Jesus Christ*?

WALKING down Piccadilly, on a recent Sunday afternoon, was a disconsolate-looking figure bearing a label "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." Nobody seemed to mind him, but he may have been Jesus Christ after all, though some people were profane enough to suspect him of being a peripatetic advertiser.

A ROMAN Catholic writes to the *Times* in reference to the discussion on "Open Churches," that Catholics would never think of going to church except they believed in the Real Presence of God there. They go to worship their wafer-deity. In this the Ritualists are following close in their footsteps. We read in the *Wellington Journal* that at the anniversary of the English Church Union at Ludlow, the wafer was elevated with the exclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." If we asked for lamb at a restaurant, we should be considerably astonished if they offered us a wafer.

MRS. BESANT is asking for leave to address the Church Congress on Socialism. Does this mean that Mrs. Besant expects the Church to be the great agent in preparing for the Socialist millenium? Not many months ago she expressed satisfaction at the thought that Christianity did not ally itself with progressive movements. Has she come to the conclusion that Socialism is not a progressive movement, or changed her attitude to the Church?

MRS. BESANT will try to convert the Bishops. What if the Bishops should succeed in converting Mrs. Besant?

WOULD not a paper on Freethought be more in place at the Church Congress, and who could read it with greater effect than Mrs. Besant? A debate on that subject would have at least some utility, and would certainly be interesting if not exciting.

THE Rev. B. H. Evans warns the world against the artful tactics of the Devil, who allures men by a perversion and apparent adoption of salvation. He sets up "a false Messiah" which is himself, and thus he "secures the worship of the human race." "So exactly did he forestall the expected Christ, even in details, that our learned infidels now point to the monuments of Assyria and Egypt and say, 'There is your Christianity, long ages before Christ was born.'" But if the Devil produced the pre-Christian Christianity as a means of deluding mankind, how do we know that so clever a being has not also produced Christianity itself as a still more artful means of seducing mankind from the worship of the one and only God? Christianity is full of such devices as a cunning Devil would invent in order to entrap mankind.

## MR. FOOTE'S LECTURES.

Sunday, Sept. 2, Camden Hall, Camden Street, Liverpool: at 11, "Bible Morality: An Answer to the Royal Commission on Education;" at 3, "Plain Truth about Jesus Christ;" at 7, "Ananias and Sapphira."

Sept. 9 and 16, Hall of Science, London; 23, Manchester; 30, Camberwell.

Oct. 7 and 14, Milton Hall; 21, Newcastle; 28, Hall of Science.  
Dec. 2 and 9, Hall of Science.

## 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.

"IXCOG." sends 2s. for the Freethinkers' Benevolent Fund, and writes: "I received *Bible Heroes* and have devoured it voraciously. It has been a relish. To-night I post it to another hungry Freethinker."

R. S. SEAGO.—Glad to hear "the Camberwellites" are going to check the vagaries of the Christian roughs on Peckham Rye. The Secular meetings should be held at all hazard. But we fancy the pious rowdies will sing small when they see the platform is well supported. Bullies are always cowards.

H. RICHARDSON.—Thanks for the *Chicago Tribune*. A multitude of things naturally escape our attention, and our readers do the *Freethinker* a real service by sending us interesting items.

G. E. NAEVIGER.—Shall appear.

JENOVAH JIBEH.—Shall appear—perhaps in our Christmas Number.

A. DE LA VEGA.—We are obliged for the cutting and for the further list of Freethinkers, which Mr. Wheeler will find very useful. The publication of the Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers will commence shortly.

NORWICH.—Verses received with thanks.

W. J. R.—Sorry for the delay. See "Acid Drops." We see that the burning of a Christian maiden has been introduced at the Italian Exhibition—only the maiden isn't burnt, and perhaps isn't a Christian. You were a fortnight too soon.

T. G. BEATON and W. JACKSON.—Orders for literature should be sent to Mr. Forder as above.

F. MILLAR.—Your "bits" are always welcome.

E. LUCAS.—We dare say the *Pull Mall Gazette* article has been quoted in many papers besides the *Preston Evening Post*. The matter is dealt with in our leading article. It would be well if our readers could send a marked copy of this week's *Freethinker* to their local newspapers.

F. F. COLEMAN sends us a miniature picture of a Kentish posting station, where *Freethinker* and *Radical Leader* bills are mixed up with pious and other placards in amusing confusion. We are sorry we cannot reproduce it.

A. WHEELER.—Mr. Foote did not "promise" to pay Clerkenwell Green another visit. He only said he would come if he could. Unfortunately he is not able to make another engagement at present.

J. D. LEGGETT.—Pleased to hear the matter has been attended to. If orders for literature are not promptly executed we should be communicated with.

F. I. C.—W. R. Bradlaugh is a brother of Charles Bradlaugh, M.P., and flourishes on a name which he himself could never make famous. Jokes received with thanks.

A. DAWSON.—The Christian who told you that, as you were only eighteen, you were too young to discuss with him, apparently forgot that Jesus Christ began arguing with the doctors at the tender age of twelve. But perhaps as he died young he matured early. Glad to hear you have rescued your sister from "religious instruction" at school. We shall always be glad to answer your letters in this column, but we have already too much private correspondence.

R. KILLICK.—We are obliged for the cuttings.

F. W. PASCOE.—We have handed your letter to Mr. Forder, secretary of the N. S. S. We sympathise with you, but it is impossible for us to deal with such matters personally.

B. D.—Mr. Ramsey is in business as a printer at 14 Clerkenwell Green. Pleased to hear that you have "read the *Freethinker* for five years without missing a number," and that you hope to continue reading it till the end. That, of course, means the end of your life and not the paper's. The *Freethinker* "will appear" right up to the Day of Judgment, and no doubt the then editor will struggle through with a fresh number if the proceedings last a week.

FREETHINKER.—The pamphlet you mention was not written by Mr. Bradlaugh. He merely published it while it was prosecuted. The Hall of Science lectures could be reported, but it would involve a good deal of trouble and expense. There is hardly a shorthand writer alive who could take down a rapidly delivered hour's lecture unless he were perfectly familiar with the subject and the speaker's phraseology. Many sermons are reported, but most of them are preached from manuscript. There is plenty of ventilation at the Hall of Science; but the fact is, the only way to ventilate a hall full of people is to pull off the roof and level the walls. Your question as to the Bible theory of the earth's flatness was answered in the *Freethinker* for August 5.

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.

## OUR ILLUSTRATIONS.

We have received many letters, from time to time, complaining that the illustrations in the *Freethinker* interfere with its circulation; and during the last few weeks we have been more than once urged to take a *plebiscite* of our readers on the subject. After mature consideration, we have resolved to adopt the suggestion. Were it a mere question of honor, we should take advice from no man; but it seems hardly likely that our motives will be suspected by anyone whose opinion we esteem. We maintained our illustrations when it was dangerous to do so; and immediately upon our release from prison, in February, 1884, we resumed them after their discontinuance (at our express order) during our incarceration. While our right to publish illustrations was challenged by the bigots, we felt bound to continue them at all hazards; but as the danger is apparently over, we are now willing to treat the matter as one of policy.

Our object has always been to make the *Freethinker* a propagandist journal. Anything, therefore, that impedes its circulation is a disadvantage, which, unless a principle is involved, might be discarded. Now the complaints we have received all point in this direction. Newsvendors will not display the paper, and others will not sell it at all; while many candid-minded persons, who are willing to read the articles and paragraphs, decline to purchase it, or even to take it as a gift, on account of the pictures. Such are the objections raised, and to some extent we appreciate their force. But, on the other hand, it is possible that many readers find the illustrations useful. Those who are satisfied with a journal say nothing; it is the dissatisfied who speak. Consequently, we wish to put the following questions to our readers.

- (1) Do you find the illustrations an impediment to the circulation of the *Freethinker* among your friends and acquaintances?
- (2) Do you find them useful in other directions?
- (3) Do you think their discontinuance would, on the whole, be advantageous or disadvantageous to the paper and the cause?

We invite our readers to answer these questions by letter or postcard. The questions need not be written before the answers; the numbers will suffice. A synopsis shall be prepared and published as quickly as possible; and we beg all who are interested in the matter, one way or the other, to forward their answers at once.

Knowing the "charity" of our Christian opponents—who would imprison us for publishing illustrations, and deride us for discontinuing them—we have determined, in any case, to reprint in book form the best of our past pictures. Thus we should still be publishing Comic Bible Sketches, which Freethinkers could obtain and keep for their own use and enjoyment, and for which we should still be liable to the Blasphemy Laws.

We may add, in conclusion, that we are seriously considering the possibility of increasing the size of the *Freethinker* to twelve pages.

## SUGAR PLUMS.

DESPITE the fine weather, and the attraction of the band on Peckham Rye, Mr. Foote's lecture on "Did Christianity abolish Slavery?" drew a capital audience at the Secular Hall, Camberwell, last Sunday evening. There was no opposition. The question was one of fact, which could not be treated with illogical sentimentalism, so the usual critics discreetly stayed away.

FREETHINKERS in the vicinity of Peckham Rye should attend at the Secular lecture-stand this morning (Sept. 2) at 11.30, and assist in keeping order. Last Sunday morning the meeting was broken up again by Christian rowdies, the chief offender being a well-known Christian apologist who rejoices in a short name very common in the Welsh principality. This sort of thing must not be tolerated. The Secular platform must be supported, and Freethinkers must rally round it.

Mr. R. S. SEAGO, of the Camberwell Branch, informs us that he is going down to Peckham with some trusty—and we hope sturdy—friends of the cause, who mean to see that order is kept or know the reason why.

THE Peckham Rye rowdies are not working men. Oh no; working men know a great deal better. They are well-dressed disciples of Jesus, and would probably call themselves "gentlemen." They used to sally out in the afternoon, and kick up a row for the honor and glory of God; and to escape their delicate

attentions the meetings were shifted from the afternoon to the morning. But the fanaticism of these fellows is victorious over their laziness. They shuffle out of their beds in order to "make it hot for the — infidel," to use their own elegant and expressive phraseology. But they will find themselves checkmated; and, as before, they will probably vanish at the slightest show of force.

We are pleased to note in the *Portsmouth Evening News* that our friend Mr. John Brumage has been nominated as Radical candidate for the Portsmouth School Board. Mr. Brumage has been so many years to the fore in all advanced movements in Portsmouth, and is so respected for his sterling honesty that he is sure to command a large measure of support. No more genuine Radical could possibly be found. We trust that all our friends in the district will rally round and work with a will to put him at the head of the poll.

THERE are other places besides Portsmouth where a definite Secular candidate would, by the cumulative vote, have a good chance of success in the School Board elections. In view of the insidious attempts at reaction, it behoves all Secularists to work their very hardest to ensure a better representation on the School Boards next November.

THERE are seven School Boards under which no religious instruction whatever is given to the scholars.

THE *Diamondfields Advertiser* reports a lecture on "Freethinkers and Freethought," by Mr. E. B. Rose, who seems to be conducting a very successful lecturing tour in South Africa.

DAVID HUME, the great historian, whose serene infidel death so irritated the pious Dr. Johnson, saw clearly the folly and wickedness of England's war with America. This is proved by his letters to William Strahan, which Dr. Birkbeck Hill is seeing through the press. Hume prophesied that the war would be a failure, and he foresaw the great future of the American colonies.

MR. SYMES appears not to have been injured by his *contretemps* with the Anarchists. He now reports that Sunday audiences, morning and evening, were never better, never more hearty than at present. Except on one or two extraordinary occasions, the hall was never so crowded on Sunday nights as now. Besides that, the Socials keep up surprisingly; and the funds of the A.S.A. were never better. The Science Class is about three times larger than ever. Better still, the *Liberator* is fast increasing its circulation; and that shows renewed activity at a distance as well as in Melbourne.

M. RENAN is spending his summer holiday, as usual, in his native Brittany. Speaking at his mother's natal village, he recently declared that "the love of tolerance is the best lesson in life."

THE *Chicago Tribune* says that Mr. Gladstone intends to prove Hellenic and Hebrew Faiths identical, and speculates as to the possibility of his being added to "the unsurpassed procession of agnostics." The Grand Old Man does seem to have had some such fad, but we guess he has too many irons in the fire to give it any attention now, and the person must be sanguine indeed who expects a man approaching eighty to resign the settled opinions of his life.

THE *Ironclad Age* observes:—"Infidelity is making more progress than a superficial view reveals. The manifest scepticism of the rising generation is due to the general diffusion of knowledge by our free schools and the stimulus given to inquiry by the extensive circulation of liberal papers. Liberal lecturers now receive respectful tolerance instead of tar and feathers as formerly. The brand of Cain is no longer upon the brow of science, and a man can deny the faith without fear of the faggot. The iron collar has lost its power to convince; the orthodoxy has been argued out of the rack and the thumb-screw; and the divinity and awe that did erstwhile hedge about the office of priest, have been shorn of their holiness and driven to their holes. The priest is no longer a sacred character, but simply a man, remarkable mainly for his general ignorance, especially of the book he professes to expound."

THE second article in the *Jewish World* entitled "The Jews and Jesus—A Vindication," is a little more to the point. The writer takes up a very similar position to that advanced in a recent article on the Deicides in the *Freethinker*. He says: "Jesus, instead of declaring himself and making all necessary preparations for ruling the people, was in the prime of manhood, that is, from the age of twenty to thirty, hiding his light under a bushel in a carpenter's shop at Nazareth, and rendering his country apparently no higher service than that which could be performed by an ordinary Galilean peasant. The inhabitants of Jerusalem evidently knew nothing about him till a short time before his death, when he entered the city at the head of a band of excited followers and caused some disturbance. Even at the period of his death, it is highly probable that nine-tenths of the inhabitants of Palestine—to say nothing of the still larger community dispersed in other countries—had never so much as heard

of his existence. The fact that not the slightest allusion is made to him by Philo and other contemporary Jewish writers, while the much-discussed passages in Josephus are now admitted to be forgeries, is a sufficient proof that during his lifetime he must have been a very obscure personage. There is clearly no foundation, then, for the common charge that the majority of his countrymen rejected him, for they could not possibly reject a man claiming to be the Messiah of whom they were as entirely ignorant as if he had never been born."

#### MARRIAGE, CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS.

AMONG side issues raised by the discussion of the matrimonial problem during the "silly season" in the *Daily Telegraph*, is that of the status of man and wife as accorded by the Church. Marriage is regarded by Christians as a sacrament, or a quasi-sacrament, in which the decrees of God come before any other considerations. This at any rate is the old and genuinely religious view. Those who regard it as purely a civil contract are, in this respect, not Christians but Secularists. So regarding it, marriage is necessarily put on a different footing. It is an institution for promoting not God's glory but human happiness. Divorce which in the one view is a sundering of what God has joined may on the other be the best thing possible. A curious mixture of the two views is seen in our present law. Any one who wishes to marry a divorced person is quite at liberty to do, but it is also legal for any clergyman to refuse to perform the marriage in such circumstances; in which case the registrar will officiate.

So dominant was the view that marriage was a matter with which the Church had primary concern that down till July 1st, 1837, the only marriages recognised by the law of England as valid for English persons, not being Jews or Quakers, were such as were performed by a clergyman of the Church of England with the rites of that Church. Under the Act 6 & 7 William IV., which then came into operation, it became legal for Catholics and Dissenters to contract marriages according to their own forms, while those who preferred a civil ceremony were enabled to dispense with religious mummeries of any kind in the contract—provided these marriages were attested by a registrar. This was a simple piece of justice which had been too long withheld. Of course the Church did not resign her monopoly without a struggle. Previously, all who were in such open revolt against her as to refuse to allow her any finger in the domestic pie had to submit to the stigma of living in concubinage, and the still greater injustice of having their children illegitimate. As a matter of fact few went this length. The law holding what, indeed, the most eminent Church authorities have taught, that every member of the Commonwealth of England is *ipso facto* a member of the Church of England, it was considered proper to utilise the services of the provided parish minister for marriages and burials irrespective of whether his teachings were agreed with or not. To this day the Church is so largely used for marriages even by those who rarely or never otherwise attend it, that churchmen always call attention to marriage statistics in evidence of their Church still being the Church of the people. The burial statistics cannot now be so effectively appealed to, owing to the chapel fees usually being less than those of the Church. The presumed sanctity of the priestly blessing, love of ceremony and show, with the adjunct of marriage bells, etc., doubtless contribute to the popularity of the Church, especially in the feminine breast.

But there is one argument in favor of the civil ceremony which cannot fail to have force with conscientious women who contemplate matrimony. There are no vows of obedience. The ceremony, it is true, is of the simplest kind, and in this respect, to our mind, the more appropriate to the institution. All that is requisite is twenty-one days' notice, or a special license, the presence of the superintendent registrar, a registrar of marriages and two other witnesses, and declarations by the parties in the presence of these four witnesses as to the absence of impediment and the taking each other as man and wife. Neither can afterwards reproach the other with broken vows. The husband cannot claim that the woman at the altar has sworn to "obey him and serve him." The wife is not bound to for ever respect and reverence one who may have ceased to be worthy. Both are placed on an exact equality.

The Church ceremony, on the other hand, as the present controversy has shown, is quite unsuited to the spirit of the age. It was drawn up by the Anglican reformers who

were fully imbued with Paul's view that marriage was but a condescension to the frailty of human nature, a sort of "bad's the best" bargain with the world, the flesh, and the devil, in which the only chance of salvation lies in keeping the woman in strict subjection. It is said to her at the end of the service how she must submit herself to her husband "as unto the Lord." As "Caroline" writes in the *D. T.*, "What wonder that when a man hears himself described as his wife's god he should consider her in the light of his dog, or his horse, or anything that is his? Why should an old bachelor like St. Paul influence our ceremonies of to-day?" Happily the old bachelor's influence is declining. The Bible was solely written by men. The Church has been established and dominated solely by men, and both have given but a one-sided view of marital relations. Women have only to realise this to refuse vows but too likely to involve them in "flat perjury."

Although, as we have said, the Church still boasts that the largest proportion of the people are married before its altars, a great improvement is taking place. Civil marriages in England, as in every other part of the world, are largely on the increase. Whereas in 1860, out of every thousand marriages, eight hundred and seven were in Church and only sixty-six at a register office, in 1886 there were only seven hundred and seven per thousand in Church, and one hundred and thirty at the register office. This is encouraging. It shows, perhaps more conclusively than anything else, how the secular view of life is gradually superseding the religious view. The Church's greatest strength has lain in the fact that at birth, marriage, and death she had her finger in every man's pie. With these in the priest's hands, he was bound to dominate the intervening sections of life. It is the business of every Freethinker to see that this domination is as far as possible restrained there where it derives its strength.

J. M. WHEELER.

#### A SERMON FOR SOLDIERS.

THOUGH I am forbidden to write about or orally proclaim the doctrines of Freethought, I have received no instructions as to what I may do, and as I am now away for a brief holiday, I summoned up courage on Sunday last to attend church, took a few notes of the sermon, and now send a report to your columns. It was a fine old church in a garrison town not far from Portsmouth, that I honored with my presence. The ordinary morning service had no attraction for me, so I left that for the exclusive enjoyment of the old ladies of both sexes of the town. The service I chose to attend was the "soldiers' service," which begins at the comparatively early hour of nine o'clock in the morning. It was a short service, and was over before half-past ten, the sermon lasting only twelve minutes. I fancy I hear some modern Christians exclaim: "Ah, that's the sort of sermon we enjoy; none of your firstly, secondly, and so on up to ninthly, and then a long-winded summing up beginning with 'Finally'; followed by an abortive peroration with the meaningless preamble of 'One word more and I have done.'" No! not that; but a short and sweet and crisp sermon which starts at once, gallops straight over the field, turning neither to the right nor to the left, and which as it nears the winning post, I mean the goal, or more correctly speaking "The now to God the Father," puts on a spurt and comes to the end in triumph.

My impression of Army Chaplains has been for a long time that they are not unlike in manner to their spiritual *confreeres* who officiate in gaols. I have no experience of the interior of gaols, but I am acquainted with some of the parsons who minister to the spiritual requirements of the inmates. The soldier's parson lays down his dogma metaphorically proclaiming to his hearers:

"Theirs not to reason why,"  
"Theirs but to do and die."

The convict's parson says ditto to this, but he says it in a more imperious manner, for his clients are already on the "stool of repentance." The parson on Sunday was a very good specimen of the cloth. Of medium height, dark complexion, with sharp, piercing eyes and firm determined lips, he stood there in his neat-looking pulpit, the embodiment of dogmatism and authority. For his text he took the statement of Acts x., 34: "Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons."

Three hundred marines listened quietly, but whether they mentally questioned Peter's declaration I have no means of knowing. But might not some of them have asked how it was if God was no respecter of persons he had just had special prayers offered to him on behalf of the "Queen and the Royal Family"; or why he should be specially asked to endow important public officials with "grace, wisdom and understanding" if John Smith, the clodhopper in the eyes of Deity was as important as any of them? Some of them might have further

inquired why if God was no respecter of persons he should be prayerfully requested to give the Queen "victory over all her enemies"?

The parson however, did not wait for any interrogations on these subjects, but made bold to point out in the first place that the text implied that God was sometimes to be found in "unexpected places"; though how the text implied anything of the sort, or the exact point where such implication came in he did not from his lofty position condescend to explain.

One among the congregation might at least have asked him how, if God was to be found in "unexpected places," there was any guarantee of his certain presence at expected places, and why if God was everywhere, there should be any unexpected place in which he might be found? But the wickedness of such inquiries must be apparent to all save the most perverse and sceptical of minds. The parson therefore proceeded to inform us that Cornelius was a Roman soldier; a devoutly religious man; a man of prayer; and was probably well read in Jewish scripture. And although the Romans as a rule were not believers in Christianity, Cornelius who knew what Christianity really was, recognised at once its superiority over other religions, and acted out in his daily life its incomparably grand injunctions.

It was a beautiful assumption on the part of this Christian apologist to affirm that "probably" Cornelius was a master of the contents of the Bible. Certainly no unsophisticated person reading the narrative without the aid of theological spectacles would have ever discovered the slightest rag of evidence upon which to base such an assumption. Suppose, however, we grant the probability, it could only have been the Old Testament that Cornelius could have known anything about, since the Gospels were not yet in existence. And no matter how well read he may have been in the books of the Old Testament, how was that calculated to make him understand anything about Christianity, whether the teachings were superior or otherwise to other existing religions? But the clerical gentleman went on to affirm that Cornelius practised virtue, was courageous and diligent in the performance of all his duties, and above all was "a prayerful and God-fearing man," and to this latter quality rather than to the former qualities he attributed the success of this Roman soldier.

Then, by way of enforcing the moral of his sermon, the divine informed his hearers that, let their lives be howsoever moral, or their aspirations never so noble, all this would count as nothing if they had not the fear of God in their hearts; which, being interpreted, probably meant that fear and superstition were of more value in the eyes of the priest than virtue and morality. Apart from the logical and moral defects of the sermon, the rest of the service had many charms for me. The Church of England service, though in many respects absurd from an Atheistical point of view, has many admirable points. The fine band of the Marines discoursed sweetly in lieu of the organ, and the whole performance reminded me vividly of the days of my youth when I was a regular attendant at Church, and joined lustily in the musical portion of the service; and as I sat in that noble edifice I could not help thinking that Secularism as a practical philosophy will never take a proper hold of the people until it is propagated in connection with a service in which the whole audience can take part; but before this can happen Freethought will have to be better organised than it is at present. Meanwhile, our first duty is to discover truth, and proclaim it wherever and whenever we can:

"Truth must prevail; meanwhile endure,  
Of worldly peace let worldlings boast;  
Amid the storms of life be sure  
The loftiest spirits suffer most."

In good time buildings dedicated to superstition will be converted into halls wherein science and art will be taught, and in these places our children will receive such useful instruction as will fit them to become good and useful citizens in this or any other world beyond the grave.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

## PROFANE JOKES.

Mother: "Tommy, why don't you say your prayers like your sister Alice?" "I would, mother, if I knew a short prayer like Alice says." "Well, what is it that Alice says?" "Why, she jumps into bed and says, 'O, Lord! I wish I had a new bonnet.'"

"Dao ye ken," said a Caledonian as he walked homeward from church with a fellow-countryman, "dao ye ken, I think oor minister's in the habit o' gomblin'?" "What gars ye think that?" "I'll toll ye. Ae Sunday no lang ago in his prayer instead o' saying, 'O Thou who hast the hearts of kings in Thy hands,' he prayed, 'O Thou who hast the king of hearts in Thy hands.' Wha dao ye think o' that? An' then he said the Laird wad come wi' a trump."

In the penitential region, where the ghost of Hamlet's father was doomed for a time to dwell, the departed spirit of a pious lord, met, in that tropical latitude, the disembodied soul of his former pastor. The clerical shade was surprised to see his lordship there. "Ah," sighed the defunct noble, "I am here for having neglected my God, rack-rented my tenants, and cheated everybody, in order to enrich my son. But why, O reverend sir—oh, why are you here?" "Ah," responded the expounder of God's Holy Word, "I am here because I was the father of that son!"

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