

# THE FREETHINKER

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

Sub-Editor—J. M. WHEELER.

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GOD'S DINNER: A HINT FOR CHRISTMAS.

*Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.*  
GENESIS IV., 3-5.

## UNDER THE MISTLETOE.

OUR readers are doubtless preparing for Christmas, and so are we. There is no reason in the world why Freethinkers should deny themselves the pleasures of the season; on the contrary, they may enjoy them with the liveliest satisfaction. It is difficult to see why a Christian should celebrate the birthday of his God with carnal jollification, or ponder the mystery of the Incarnation over roast beef, plum pudding and "a little wine for his stomach's sake." But it is easy enough to see why a Freethinker should make merry at this time of the year, and gather his friends around the festive board. Christmas is far older than Christ. It is an ancient Pagan festival, commemorating the new birth of our Lord the Sun, the Royal giver of light and heat and life: the parent of this earth and all that therein is, whose presence is sunshine and whose absence is gloom. All the festivities and emblems of this joyous season indicate its heathen origin. Our Christmas trees are reminiscent of the old Scandinavian mythology; our holly points to the oak-worship of our Druidical ancestors, and our mistletoe to their habit of wreathing the winter-withered branches with the tendrils bearing the bright berries which prognosticated the coming Spring, and testified to the life which defied the rigor of ice and snow;

our dances are but a relic of the Roman Saturnalia; and our very Christmas boxes are a legacy from the old Roman times, when presents were made on the day of the new year, as they still are among the Catholic population of France. Asia Minor, indeed, where Christianity was first preached and where the earliest churches were established, never heard of the twenty-fifth of December as the birthday of Christ until he had been dead and buried for more than three centuries. The Freethinker, therefore, need not be troubled by any anti-superstitious scruples. He has a better right than the Christians to rejoice and be glad. The birth of Christ—if he was ever born—was a very questionable benefit to the world; but men of every race and every clime may hail the birth of the Sun, and especially may we in this land of cold and mist look forward with delight to the gradual ascent of our Lord from his winter cave to the glorious regnancy of heaven. Like the Nature worshippers of old, Freethinkers do well to dance and sing and play, making a sweet oasis in the dusty desert of life. Let old and young meet in family circle around the glowing fire. Let the old stories be told and the old jokes be cracked, with new ones if luck or invention is propitious. Let the youths and maidens trip upon the light fantastic toe. And if a kiss is snatched from coy lips under the mistletoe, where is the mischief, and who is the worse for the frolic?

But let not the unfortunates of our civilisation be forgotten. He is more or less than man who can enjoy himself without a reservation while myriads are suffering the pangs of hunger. What misery, ay, and what degradation, still exists after nineteen centuries of the Christian gospel! The Redeemer has come, but not the redemption. Christianity, like so many other creeds, has simply diverted men from the plain paths of duty and happiness. It has promised them felicity in another life as a compensation for their wretchedness in this life. It has robbed them of the substance and cheated them with the shadow. The result is the terrible evils which all reformers deplore. Yes, there is something besides pleasure in the world for everyone who feels for his kind. While our Christmas festivities are in full swing he is conscious of that dark background to the glowing picture. And when the merrymaking is over he will brace himself manfully to the task of slaying the monsters of ignorance and superstition which infest the world.

G. W. FOOTE.

## CHRISTMAS.

CHRISTMAS is a Pagan festival and is kept up with most zest by the northern nations, since they most appreciate the break in the monotony of winter, the lengthening of the days, and the signs that the period of cold and darkness will not last for ever. The customs connected with the institution take us back to some of the earliest of human myths and symbolism. What have the feasting, the ever-greens, the red-berried holly, the pearly mistletoe, the garlands, and the Christmas trees which accompany the occasion to do with that creed of sorrow known as Christianity? Simply nothing. What they celebrate is the continuance and renewal of nature's life, the power of the returning sun to clothe the earth again in green and hang new fruit upon the trees.

In worshipping the Mother and the Child, the Catholic Church can claim to have preserved one of the earliest and most universal symbols of reproduction. The symbol of the Virgin Mother and Child is world wide, and the Egyptian statues of Isis and Horus might pass as representations of Mary and Jesus. The ancient Germans worshipped a virgin goddess named Hertha, who was fecundated by the active spirit—i.e., the Holy Ghost.\* She was represented in images as a woman with a child in her arms.

The ancient Scandinavians, from whom we derive some of our Yuletide customs, worshipped a virgin goddess called Disa. Mr. R. Payne Knight tells us that "This goddess is delineated on the sacred drums of the Laplanders, accompanied by a child, similar to the *Horus* of the Egyptians, who so often appears in the lap of Isis on the religious monuments of the people."†

They also worshipped the goddess Frigga, mother of Baldour the Beautiful, the sun-god, his father being Odin, the supreme god of the northern nations. She was addressed as Mary is at the present day, in order to obtain happy marriages and easy childbirths.

It is well known there was no uniformity in the period of observing the Nativity among the early Christian Churches. Some held the festival in the month of April, others in January, others in September. The year in which Jesus was born is also as uncertain as the month or the day. Mosheim confesses it "has not hitherto been fixed with certainty, notwithstanding the deep and laborious researches of the learned."

According to Irenæus, the first Christian father who mentions the four Gospels, Jesus lived to be fifty years of age. According to Matthew he was born in the days of Herod, who died B.C. 4, while according to Luke it was at the time of the taxing under Cyrenius, which took place about 10 A.D. Gibbon says, with truth, "The Roman Christians, ignorant of the real date of his [Christ's] birth, fixed the solemn festival to the 25th of December, the *Brumalia*, or Winter Solstice, when the Pagans annually celebrated the birth of Sol."

The first certain traces of the keeping of the Nativity on the 25th of December are found about the time of the Emperor Commodus (A.D. 180—192), but this date had long previously been a religious festival. According to

Ernest Bunsen, Buddha was born on December 25th.‡ The learned Godfrey Higgins says, "It was the custom of the heathen, long before the birth of Christ, to celebrate the birthday of their god," and "the 25th of December was a great festival with the *Persians*, who, in very early times, celebrated the birth of their god Mithras."§

M. Le Clerk de Septchenes, in his *Religion of the Ancient Greeks*, p. 214, says "The ancient Egyptians fixed the pregnancy of Isis on the last days of March, and towards the end of December they placed the commemoration of her deliverer."

Bacchus, too, says Mr. Higgins, "was born of a virgin on the 25th of December and was always called the Savior. In his Mysteries he was shown to the people as an infant is by the Christians at this day, on Christmas Day morning in Rome."|| The Rev. Mr. Gross, in his account of *The Heathen Religion*, observes, p. 287, "In Rome before the time of Christ, a festival was observed on the 25th of December under the name of '*Natalis Solis Invicti*' [Birthday of Sol the Invincible]. It was a day of universal rejoicings, illustrated by illuminations and public games."

The early Christian Fathers censured these festivals. Tertullian, who flourished about A.D. 200, affirms it to be "rank idolatry" to deck the door "with garlands or flowers on festal days, according to the custom of the heathen." This shows that the heathen of those days did as the Christians do now. Christianity, in order to make way among the pagans had to incorporate within itself a large share of Paganism. In the time of St. Gregory, Bishop of Neo-Cæsarea, who flourished A.D. 240—250, the old Pagan festivals were deliberately changed into Christian holy days. This saint was commended by his namesake Gregory of Nyssa for making this alteration the better to draw the heathen to the religion of Christ.¶

St. Chrysostom, who flourished about A.D. 390, referring to this double celebration, says: "On this day also the birth of Christ was lately fixed at Rome in order that whilst the heathen were busy with their profane ceremonies the Christians might perform their holy rites undisturbed."\*\* The Church sought to meet heathenism half way, but the result, as our present methods of honoring the Savior's birthday prove, was virtually the triumph of Paganism.

J. M. WHEELER.

## ACID DROPS.

THE Welsh tithe war is spreading from Flintshire and Denbighshire into Carnarvonshire. The Rev. D. Jones has made a series of distraints, which were converted into popular demonstrations by the people, who were summoned to the scenes by the firing of guns. After the auctioneer and his bailiffs had seized the first haystack, a cart was placed in front of their procession. In it was placed the effigy of an intoxicated clergyman, having on his breast the words, in Welsh, "This is what we do with the tithes." In front of the clergyman stood a table with a bottle of wine and a tobacco-pipe. On the way to the next farm another effigy was met, representing a surpliced clergyman attired in a pair of shooting boots, which peeped out under his canonicals. At Lendreponbrys Mills the auctioneer was pushed into the water, and was rescued in a drenched condition. At another place he was pelted with clods of earth and roughly used. The Vicar was loudly hooted, and at a subsequent public meeting several effigies were burnt.

THE Salvation Army has been having its "Two days with God" at Exeter Hall, as advertised. Booth says he has over 7,000 officers, exclusive of juniors. The *War Cry* has a circulation of 31,000,000 annually; and 2,300,000 meetings are held every year. Orthodox Christians who despise the rapid success of the Salvation Army as due to sensationalism and playing down to the ignorant, must not boast too much of the success of Jesus Christ as a convincing proof of his divine mission. If, indeed, success is the true test in such cases, Booth is far more divine than Jesus Christ, for he has succeeded much more rapidly than Jesus and his apostles.

THE success of this latest outcome of Christianity is very galling to the stuck-up sects at whose expense it is gained. A writer in the *Church Times* says: "Those who live and work among the ignorant poor, and especially among the young, find that none of the dreaded 'isms' of the day is doing anything like the ruinous mischief that is being wrought by the teaching

‡ *The Angel Messiah*, pp. x., 25 and 110, and Lillie's *Buddha and Buddhism*, p. 73.

§ *Celtic Druids*, p. 163. || *Anacalypsis*, vol. ii., p. 102.

¶ See Middleton's *Letter from Rome*.

\*\* Quoted in G. W. King's *Gnostics*, p. 109.

\* See Knight's *Ancient Art and Mythology*, p. 21.

† *Ibid.*, p. 147.

and practices of the 'Salvation Army,' which, in pandering to the spirit of the age in its worst forms, aggravates them in such a manner as that ordinary Christian effort is well-nigh paralysed. The sensuous pseudo-worship, with the element of flirtation introduced by the 'Hallelujah Lasses,' combined with late hours, and the stimulating revelations of the officers' and recruits' unconverted lives, directly encourages evil curiosity, immodesty, and immorality."

GENERAL BOOTH used to be patronised by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, but his present patron is the *Star*. That journal, of course, has a perfect right to puff any sect it chooses, but it need not go to the length of violating its Radical principles. We scarcely expected it to favor General Booth's impudent request for £15,000 of national money. No doubt we shall be told that the money is to be devoted to relieving distress; but the obvious answer is that if it be expended by General Booth, through the agency of his officers, it will be a state subvention of the Salvation Army. If the *Star* regards this with complacency, not to say satisfaction, it is the veriest tyro in the principles of religious equality. Our circulation, though far from insignificant, is small compared with that of the *Star*, but we have fought a stiffer fight for freedom, and we have at least the right to ask this question of our prosperous contemporary—How do you square your opposition to the state-established Church of England with your winking at the state-establishment of the Salvation Army?

GENERAL BOOTH asks for this money as "a grant, or at least a loan without interest," which comes to the same thing. Now the State has no money but what it takes from the taxpayers, and General Booth's modest request therefore comes to this, that cash levied on Freethinkers, and all sorts of persons who regard his principles and tactics with anything but approval, should be handed over to him for purposes altogether foreign to the objects of a just and rational Government. A certain percentage of the £15,000 would come out of Mr. Swinburne's pocket, and he would thus be cheated by the Government which should protect his rights, for the profit of a pack of religionists whom he describes as "yelling yahoos."

MAX MULLER says: "What is wanted is not a new religion, but a renewed religion." Don't buy new stockings, but have the old ones re-legged and re-footed.

HOWEVER, we quite agree with Max Muller that a new religion isn't wanted. The world has had some thousands already, and it could very well afford to truck most of them—if not all—for a little humanity and common sense.

MAX MULLER says that Europe is turned into a military camp, and that the best genius is spent in drilling and in inventing new machines for killing our fellow-creatures. True; but what a result of eighteen centuries of the blessed Gospel of Peace! Religion has not pacified the world. That is clear enough. Yet Max Muller seems to think the reason is that we haven't had enough religion. He reminds us of the chairman of the Missionary Society, in Hood's *Black Job*, whose object was to bleach the sooty sons of Africa. The worthy chairman explained that no impression had been made upon their nigrity, but the society was far from despairing, and it was very obvious that the true policy was "More Soap."

MR. JAMES and Miss Jenkins are the son and daughter of two well-to-do farmers in the neighborhood of Aberystwith. They are also cousins, and an intimacy having grown up between them, the young man seduced the young woman under a promise of marriage. The result was the birth of a child in last May, and the sequel to this was an action for breach of promise, which terminated in a verdict of £300 damages. One peculiarity of the case is worth noting in these columns. According to the *Daily News* report, the defendant, after deserting the mother of his child, wrote to her, "hoping that the great Comforter would support her in her bitter trial."

MR. C. C. O'DONNELL, of San Francisco, must have been a good student of the cursing Psalms. Running for the post of mayor, he was defeated, and on the following Sunday, in the course of a speech, he said, "It is my prayer, so help me God, that whoever voted against me may be paralysed, and his soul go down to the infernal regions, where he belongs." If the effectual fervent curse of a pious man availeth much, Old Nick must be doing a good business with San Francisco.

THE "unsectarian" compromise in relation to Bible reading has been prettily illustrated in America. In the Wisconsin schools the Bible is prescribed as a text-book, and there has been a squabble over what Bible should be used. Some Roman Catholic taxpayers at Janesville brought a suit to prevent the reading of the King James's (authorised) version in the public schools. Judge Bennett, however, has decided against them; but he says there is nothing to prevent the children from reading a Roman Catholic version if they preferred.

"This proves the absurdity of calling any religious instruction unsectarian." Even if the Bible is read without a word of

comment—a most ridiculous proceeding—the Protestant has one version and the Catholic another, while the Jew objects to both.

CHRISTIAN charity is not such a miraculous success after all, at least in Nottingham, where less than £70 has been subscribed towards the £750 wanted for enlarging and improving the Midland Orphanage.

TALMAGE is right. Those blaspheming Atheists will commit suicide. The Rev. T. Sotham, of Leverton, Hungerford, shot himself with a revolver, and the jury have brought in the usual verdict in such cases. Talmage will have a fine lot of illustrations for his next sermon on this painful subject.

THE evidence showed that the deceased had been very depressed in spirits for some time past. But with all the blessings of religion and of personal popularity why should he have been so depressed? Do the consolations of religion break down when they are most wanted?

"ROMAN CATHOLICS don't persecute, and don't want privileges. Oh dear no!" That is what they say in England, where their chances are limited. Over in Boston (America), however, the Catholics, who are mostly Irish, have for some time had the upper hand in the municipal government; and they used the opportunity to rig the school-books and persecute the Protestant open-air preachers. This alarmed the other side, and 22,000 Protestant women got their names placed on the register. They worked with a vengeance, voted as straight as a line, and ousted the Catholic party from office. Let us hope that the Protestant party will not retaliate upon the Catholics.

ANTHONY COMSTOCK, a paid official of the United States, whose business is nosing out naughty literature, but who spends most of his time in prosecuting people who publish works on the population question, delivered a lecture the other day at Princeton College. The students of that institution are orthodox enough, but they couldn't help laughing at Comstock. Out of regard for his supernatural sensitiveness they draped the naked statue of "The Gladiator" with a pair of red flannel unmentionables.

T. W. WAKEFIELD, who had been a Sunday-school teacher and a pretty constant attendant of a chapel, has been committed for trial on a charge of bigamy. He deceived and finally deserted his wife, and formed a second home, although he was in pecuniary difficulties which ultimately led to his imprisonment in Holloway Gaol for systematic non-payment of rates. This led to a discovery of the bigamy. While in gaol the prisoner has kept up a pious correspondence with both women. He declares to his wife that he is all night long crying and praying in his cell. The penitent addresses the woman he has deceived as his "darling wife" and continues: "I do pray to the Holy Mary to pray for us, and I feel sure my prayer will be heard. I have now the true light of Heaven in my heart." This second wife has two children by him, and endeavored to excuse him by saying he told her he already had a wife. This statement was shown to be the result of pressure brought to bear on the woman by the prisoner, who implored her to tell this lie to save him. The pious hypocrite had evidently been contemplating a third marriage, for he had been courting a young servant, and had actually proposed to her.

THE Rev. G. W. Elliott, of Colsall, was fined £1 and costs for being drunk and incapable. On entering the reading-desk in a suburban church to conduct the service, he was unable to proceed, and suddenly left. He was found later on in the day lying in the road hopelessly drunk.

AN ecclesiastical commission has confirmed certain charges of drunkenness and using bad language brought against the Rev. C. J. Fox, vicar of Little Eaton. Defendant attempted to conduct a confirmation class while drunk. He had been seen lying drunk on his own doorstep and has used disgusting language concerning his own wife.

THE *Boston Budget* says: "Galton has pointed out some very curious facts concerning the children of professional men. He found, from a study of the heredity of the members of some of the largest scientific societies in London, that the legal profession presented the most eminent men and the fewest idiots. The medical profession came next, and lastly, clergymen, who produced the smallest number of eminent men and the largest number of idiots and feeble-minded. The lawyers gave origin to six times as many eminent men as the clergy. The clergy gave origin to six times as many idiots and feeble-minded as the lawyers."

THE Rev. D. S. Peters, of Greenock, has had four actions brought against him for butcher's meat, coal and groceries supplied by local tradesmen to the amount of £250. The clergyman complains that, owing to a dispute, the Town Council have

refused to pay him any salary since 1884. He was ordered to pay the amounts sued for.

THE Church party is trying to raise £100,000 to establish a bishopric in Birmingham on the pretence of commemorating the jubilee of the incorporation of that city. It is to be hoped that the citizens will have more sense than to squander their money in this useless fashion.

THE *Rock* complains that "another scurrilous attack has been made on the Bishop of Liverpool, because while he preaches against the desecration of Sunday he drives about his diocese on that day." But why is it "scurrilous" to point out the inconsistency of preaching one thing and practising another? That the *Rock* thinks there must be exceptions to God's law, and that the case of a bishop is one of them, ought not to be sufficient reason for pouring forth religious abuse on those who note the way in which the Bishop allows himself to disobey his own preaching.

AFTER noticing that "Mr. Spurgeon once remarked that his horse was of Jewish persuasion, as he rested on the Saturday and worked on a Sunday," the *Rock* supposes that the Bishop's horse does the same, and it recommends this course to the numerous doctors' horses that work for seven days in the week. So people must not be ill on the Saturday then. It is wrong to visit the dying and to save life or health on the Saturday, but it is right to drive about with horses and lackeys on the Sunday in order to preach. Nice guides these religious papers would be if their recommendations were carried out. What of the Bishop's lackeys too? Are they also of the Jewish persuasion, and does he give them their Saturday to go to synagogue?

AT a Conservative gathering the following attack on Mr. Gladstone was distributed broadcast among Lord Lansdowne's guests:

THE G.O.M.

When the Grand Old Man goes to his doom,  
He will ride in a fiery chariot,  
And sit in state  
On a red-hot plate  
'Twixt Satan and Judas Iscariot.  
Says the Devil, "My place is quite full, as you see,  
But I'll try and do all I can,  
So I'll let Ananias and Judas go free,  
And take in the Grand Old Man."  
But the Devil soon found the whole thing a sell,  
For old Gladly corrupted all people in hell.

If this had appeared in the *Freethinker* it would be dreadful blasphemy for which a year's imprisonment would hardly be sufficient punishment. But among Conservatives it is enjoyable wit, deserving a wide circulation.

THE Rev. C. L. Ivens, of Sowerby Bridge, has delivered a special sermon in reply to our criticisms in the *Freethinker* of Nov. 25 on one of his previous sermons. For some peculiar reason Mr. Ivens addresses these sermons "to men," but, according to the newspaper report, they contain nothing that might not be addressed to a mixed congregation. Has Mr. Ivens a contempt for the female mind, or does he suppose that women harbor no doubts as to the truth of Christianity?

MR. IVENS complains that our comments were couched in a contemptuous tone. "It seems to me," he says, "that there is a needless contempt expressed towards what was a perfectly honest attempt to defend what I believe to be the true faith—a contempt, too, which was not called for by any contemptuous remarks on my part." Now, we know nothing of Mr. Ivens personally, and he may be an excellent man in his way. But all this has nothing to do with his argument. The contempt we expressed—if he considers it so—was for his feeble effort to explain away the Bible doctrine of future punishment. Mr. Ivens now admits that he does believe in "a state of wretchedness for those who wilfully reject our Lord." But he does not believe in the fire and the worms except they are "the gnawings of remorse."

Now we put it to Mr. Ivens, whether it matters what it is that "gnaws" a man if he is to be "gnawed" everlastingly? And how does Mr. Ivens arrive at the conclusion that any one can "wilfully reject" a proposition concerning the Bible or any other subject? A proposition which appears to be true must be believed; a proposition which appears to be false must be disbelieved. A man has no choice in the matter, and Mr. Ivens's attempt to connect belief with the will only shows his inability to justify his faith at the bar of reason, in what Bacon called "the dry light of the intellect."

MR. IVENS fails to see our point as to the selfishness of Christianity. It is easy to quote a few fine maxims, but Jesus nearly always spoils them by adding a promise of individual reward. Mr. Ivens evades, instead of answering our objection, that the alternative of eternal happiness or eternal misery in a future world is a direct and uncompromising appeal to individual hopes and fears. According to Christianity every man must be saved or damned alone; according to Secularism the salvation of the

individual is bound up with the salvation of society. Which then is the more humanitarian gospel?

ST. GILES is the patron saint of Edinburgh, and the cathedral dedicated to that saint has been restored at considerable cost. In the immediate vicinity of that cathedral seven thousand persons are domiciled in houses of one room. In many cases the air space provided for each person is less than 150 cubic feet, though 400 feet is the minimum allowed under the Local Police Act for each occupant of a common lodging-house. In the same locality there is a public house for every 95 adults. Godly Scotland should ponder over these facts before subscribing to missions, ministers' sustentation funds, and other pious purposes.

"PEACE on earth and good will towards men" is supposed to have been the message accompanying the birth of a God in Palestine some 1888 years ago. The proper version, it has been explained, is, however, "Peace on earth to men of good will." Christian Europe is armed to the teeth, and between six and seven millions are ready to be marched to take each others' lives. England has, as usual, a little war on just to keep her hand in. Our naval and military expenditure is £31,918,319, and the interest and charges on the National Debt £26,615,879. A total fighting bill of £58,534,018 is Christian England's contribution to the gospel of peace.

CARDINAL MANNING says: "The chief bar to the working of the Holy Spirit of God in the souls of men and women is intoxicating drink." What he means may be quite true, but what he says is ridiculous. Just fancy the Omnipotent being thwarted by a bottle of whiskey!

RICHARD BROOKS, who is well known at religious meetings in Ealing, has been arrested for indecently assaulting a girl of seven.

WADDLE, the Birtley Fell murderer, read the Bible and cultivated piety in Durham Gaol. He made a full confession, but the details are said to be too horrible for publication. Yet in a letter to his brother he said, "I have made my peace with God, and if I die I know I am going to a better place." Oh, the blessed influence of religion! The fellow did not say a word about his unhappy victim whom he treated with such hideous cruelty. Oh, no. He made his peace with God, and very likely he expected to sit down to a hallelujah tea with his victim, unless the canting wretch thought he had sent her to hell. In that case, when Waddle reaches heaven he will twang his harp with extra gusto at the sight of her everlasting torture.

HUMAN sacrifices are still occasionally required by religion. At least this appears to be the opinion of the parents of Johanna Crawley, aged twenty-one hours, upon whose little corpse a coroner's jury have given their verdict. The father stated that "his religion compelled him to have the child christened," and the child was accordingly taken early in the morning to the Roman Catholic Church at Battersea Park, where it was duly prepared for heaven, and then died directly it was brought home. "What else could you expect?" asked the coroner. The physician gave his opinion that taking the child out was the worst possible thing that could have been done, but the parents possibly hold, consistently with their creed, that the immediate death of its body was nothing compared to the risk of the eternal punishment of its soul.

THE Navy Mission Society issues in pamphlet form "a quarterly letter to navvies." Number 42, dated Dec., 1888, lies before us, and it lies in more senses than one. This copy bears the official stamp of the London City Mission, so the thing is probably distributed wholesale. Like all such pious addresses to working men it seems written by idiots for idiots. There is the usual fling at "infidels," and the usual silly argument that Christianity must be true because the Christians—who have nearly all the cash—mostly support the hospitals. The navvies are given to understand that Freethinkers subscribe nothing. Hospital Sunday is glorified, but not a word is said about Hospital Saturday. Nor is it stated that those hospitals which are supported by people of all opinions, are sectarian institutions, with salaried chaplains and proselytising sisters.

THE navvies are reminded of the thousands of pounds subscribed in Christian churches, but not a word is said about the millions of pounds taken from the people every year by our State Church for the support of religion. They are also told that "the owners of Secular and Infidel papers make fortunes" by attacking the Bible. Fortunes! This scribe has a lively imagination, unless—which is more probable—he is lying, like Paul, for the glory of God. We'll give our yearly profits on the *Freethinker* for a very small clergyman's screw, and we'll throw in our occasional imprisonment into the bargain.

MR. ISAAC CHAPMAN, a Trowbridge guardian, objects to giving the paupers a glass of ale at Christmas, and says a good supply of wholesome tracts would be far more edifying. Mr. Chapman should dine on tracts at Christmas, and see if they are filling as well as edifying. We wonder he did not offer to write the tracts.

## MR. FOOTE'S LECTURES.

Sunday, Dec. 23, Secular Hall, 61 New Church Road, Camberwell; 7.30, "Mr. Balfour's Praise of Christianity."

January 6, Ball's Pond; 13, Liverpool; 20, London Hall of Science; 27, Camberwell.

February 3, London Hall of Science; 10, London Hall of Science.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

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

F. STERN (Stuttgart).—Thanks for the interesting sketch of your career. We much regret that you find your utterances cramped by the oppressive press laws.

CONRAD ETTTEL (Vienna).—We are much obliged. Seasonable compliments and good wishes.

W. BROTHERTON (Queensland).—*Boomerang* received with thanks.

A. H. HUNTER.—Always glad to receive newspaper cuttings.

LE BRUN writes, "I and my family of seven boys and girls have had such a jolly laugh over your Christmas Number. I am trying all I can to promote the good cause here. Many thanks for the mirth and jollity you have given us."

J. WHITE.—We will see what can be done. Thanks for your good wishes.

A. C. G.—Humorous verse would be preferable.

J. D. LEGGETT.—The story is a pious invention. Mrs. Law was not driven from the platform by Mr. Barker at Whitehaven in 1865, and reduced to such a state of collapse that she never appeared on a platform again. Mrs. Law lectured regularly until about 1880, when she retired from the platform on account of ill-health. She is still living.

R. E. H. writes, "I send the *Freethinker* to a parson or goody-goody man almost every week, and I mean to lend the Christmas Number to one or two. I like it very much, and sent the first copy I got to my father."

W. ROSSITER.—What Mr. Foote said in the debate with the Rev. H. Chapman was replied to by his opponent. Mr. Foote cannot see that he is under any obligation to repeat what he said in order that you may reply to it. You are at liberty to reply to it whenever you please. You appear to want an audience provided. Mr. Foote, however, does not arrange for debates in that way. If the Camberwell Branch thinks there is any use in a debate between Mr. Foote and yourself, it is free to make any reasonable arrangement. Mr. Foote does not pretend to judge; he leaves the matter with the Branch.

A. ABDO.—Much obliged. The sketch will hardly bear reproduction as it stands, but it will serve as a suggestion for our artist.

INVICTA.—Thanks for the cuttings.

D. PROVAN.—Pleased to hear you are so delighted with the Christmas Number. You say, "It is worthy of Voltaire." We don't know that, but we dare say Voltaire would enjoy a copy if it could be forwarded. Perhaps a spiritist medium could call the grand old heretic up at a *séance* and let him devour the contents of our "budget of blasphemy."

W. T. LEEKEY.—Thanks for the batch of cuttings.

INCOG.—Received with thanks. Shall have attention.

A LABORER.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

W. FRANCIS.—The name of David's mother is not given in the Jew books. Such conundrums are got up to set people hunting for marcs' nests.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Derbyshire Times—Boomerang—Freethought—Ironclad Age—Truthseeker—Secular Thought—Freidenker—Liberty—Western Figaro—Menschentum—Neues Freireligioses Sonntags-Blatt—Star—Western Morning News.

ALL orders for literature should reach Mr. Forder on Monday as the shop, 28 Stonecutter Street, will be closed on Tuesday and Wednesday.

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

## SUGAR PLUMS.

OWING to the raw foggy weather, Mr. Foote's morning audience at Manchester last Sunday was a thin one; but there was a good afternoon audience, and the hall was crowded at night, the meeting being very enthusiastic. Unfortunately some persons came an hour after the evening lecture began, having been misled by a wretched printer's error in the *Freethinker*. We tender them our sincere apology for the blunder.

THERE was a great demand for our Christmas Number. Mr. Watts, the stall-keeper, sold out every copy, and his customers were crying for more. We trust "Nunquam" of the *Sunday Chronicle* will "try a copy." Meanwhile we note his last week's vehement denunciation of our national religion. Every word of it is true, but had it appeared in the *Freethinker* "Nunquam" might have called it shocking. And it was shocking. Only we believe that religious people require to be shocked.

At the last meeting of the London Secular Federation the President (Mr. Foote) undertook to see what could be done to establish—at any rate for the winter months—a couple of week-night classes; one a Christian Evidence Class, and the other a kind of Question Class, at which those who attend could put queries on points that trouble them on the many questions connected with our propaganda. These classes are intended chiefly for the benefit of our young London lecturers, so that their indoor and open-air efforts may be made more effective; but all members of the N. S. S. in London would be free to participate.

THE Sabbatarians have met with a check (not a *cheque*—they are looking for one) at New Orleans. The Board of Health has decided that fruit is a necessity, even on Sundays; and the district attorney repeals the Sunday law so far as fruit-selling is concerned. The *New Orleans States* says "We like to see the Sunday law knocked crazy upon any and all occasions; we think everybody should break it who can."

GIRARD COLLEGE was intended by its munificent founder to be free from all theology. But the Christians have got inside and shamefully perverted the trust. The *New York Truthseeker* is raising a fund to test the question in a court of law. The first subscriber is down for a hundred dollars.

*Robert Elsmere* has reached its seventeenth edition in England, and over 100,000 are said to have been sold in America, where not only the Unitarian commendations, but the orthodox condemnations have helped to boom it along. At one place where the leading minister denounced it from the pulpit on Sunday as "a dangerous book" every copy was sold out by Tuesday morning. We have published Colonel Ingersoll's comments upon the work under the title *Repairing the Idols*.

AFTER a prolonged contest the Municipal Council of Rome has decided, by a majority of four, to grant a site for the statue of Giordano Bruno on the very "Field of Flowers" where he was martyred. This decision has given great umbrage to the Pope, who declares that if the insult is consummated he will leave Rome. His Holiness knows a great deal better than to do anything of the kind. But what a comment the threat is on the efforts of the Papal writers to show that Bruno was not burnt at all! That plea was a mask worn in the fight, and now it is useless it is flung away.

MR. GLADSTONE, in his self-imposed rôle of Defender of the Faith, has been corresponding with Mr. S. Laing, author of *Modern Science and Modern Thought*, etc., and has requested him to compile a short summary of the Negative Creed, or "body of negative propositions which have been so far adopted on the negative side as to be what the accepted creeds are on the positive." This Mr. Laing has done, and he has also added a summary of the reasons in support of his propositions. An abstract of portions of the correspondence will be published by Watts and Company.

WHEN J. D. Shaw, the editor of the *Texas Independent Pulpit*, was lecturing in Goldthwaite, Texas, recently, effort was made to convert him. He was visited at his hotel by a lawyer, who endeavored to dissuade him from so wicked a course as that of opposing the Christian religion. The lawyer labored under the temporary embarrassment of being most gloriously drunk, but for which, says Mr. Shaw, he might have done the Lord better service than he did. As it was, the Liberal preacher still clings to his unbelief in Christianity and his faith in humanity.

COLONEL INGERSOLL, it appears, is going to visit Toronto shortly, and it is reported that he will take the platform again this winter. From the American papers we see that "Colonel Bob" has been writing some dramatic criticisms. He is a tireless theatre-goer, says the *London Echo*, and is stated to have seen over a hundred performances this year.

A WRITER in the *Pall Mall Gazette* gives the number of pages occupied by familiar quotations from various authors in "Bartlett." Shakespeare occupies 118, then—a long way after—comes Milton with 34, Pope 26, Wordsworth 22, and Byron 21. The Old Testament stands at the same number as Byron, while the New Testament only amounts to 10. God Almighty is the author of the Bible, which altogether furnishes 31 pages of familiar quotations, while Shakespeare furnishes 118. The Swan of Avon beats his Maker hollow.

MR. BRADLAUGH and Mr. Labouchere both voted against the Sunday Closing Bill, and supported the amendment in favor of local option.

DESPITE the jollification at Cana, teetotalers will insist that the Bible countenances their *ism*. Vegetarians also are found to defend their doctrines from the inspired word. Our illustration this week, however, shows that God Almighty is a krepophagist himself, and that vegetarianism, as in the case of Cain, is attended with serious consequences. If Cain had only offered mutton along with his turnips, who knows but that the first religious strife might have been prevented?

THE Rev. S. Singer has decided to hold special classes for instruction in the difference between Judaism and Christianity. So many Jewish youth now receive their general education at Christian schools that such a course is found highly necessary, and the *Jewish Chronicle* urges that Mr. Singer's example should be imitated by other Jewish ministers.

THE December number of the *Freethinkers' Magazine*, of Buffalo, New York, contains sketches of Horace Seaver, editor of the *Boston Investigator*, and W. S. Bell, the Freethought lecturer. Some account of the late Courtlandt Palmer's opinions are given, together with a variety of other interesting matter.

MR. J. E. BRUMAGE has issued his address as a candidate for the Portsmouth School Board, and an excellent one it is. He goes in for free, compulsory and secular education. The Liberal caucus could not see its way (of course not) to include Mr. Brumage on its list, but he is heartily supported by the Radicals as well as the Freethinkers, and if they plump for him he is pretty sure of a good place on the poll.

THE Camberwell Branch is going to give another dinner to poor and aged people on the first Sunday in January. There will be seats, and something in front of them, for 120; and the dinner will be followed by an afternoon concert. Subscriptions towards the expenses can be sent to C. J. Rouse, 15 Vicarage Road, Camberwell, S.E.; Angus Thomas, 128a Grosvenor Park, Camberwell, S.E.; or R. S. Seago, 209 Hill Street, Walworth, S.E.

W. COOKNEY, 1A Willow Street, Paul Street, Finsbury, E.C., acknowledges the following subscriptions for the Hall of Science Children's Party, which takes place on Wednesday, Jan. 30:—A. Tarlton, 6d.; —Cheesewright, 2s.; —Leheup, 2s. 6d.; A Friend, 1s.; —Barker, 1s. Intending subscribers should forward as promptly as possible, so that the committee may be guided in making preparations.

DR. RUDT, of Heidelberg, who is doing much good work lecturing throughout Germany just now, sends us a copy of one of his discourses, entitled *Selbstachtung und Personencultus* (self-esteem and personal worship). Dr. Rudt takes an extensive view of human development, and eloquently advocates the claims of individual freedom against despotism.

GREAT scandal has been caused in Moorhey, near Chesterfield, by the conduct of a gentleman well known in the district as a Socialist lecturer. A short time ago his wife died, and, to the great horror of his neighbors, she was buried, without service or ceremony, in a field 200 yards from a residence. The daring iconoclast rents the field on a twenty years' lease, and so great is the indignation of the villagers that an appeal to the landlord is to be made.—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

#### MR. BRADLAUGH ON BLASPHEMY.

HAVING been asked to introduce a Bill for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, Mr. Bradlaugh says in the *National Reformer* that Freethinkers themselves put "difficulties in the way of carrying" such a measure. First, he complains that Freethinkers do not petition against the Blasphemy Laws. Quite true, but this is no proof of their lukewarmness. Rightly or wrongly, they are sick of petitions, and regard them as futile, or not worth the time and trouble they cost. This being so, what is the use of rating them for their negligence? Secondly, Mr. Bradlaugh says our "comic illustrations influence hostilely many members of the House of Commons." Perhaps so, but the *Freethinker* is not edited for legislators, who are just as bigoted as the average elector. Surely Mr. Bradlaugh does not mean that we should leave off "blaspheming" in order to make Blasphemy legal! With regard to our giving Christians "unnecessary pain or annoyance," we simply remark that we do nothing of the kind, for they are not obliged to look at the *Freethinker*, and if their "feelings" are hurt they have only themselves to blame. Such objections to this journal were urged by the present Lord Chancellor when he prosecuted us at the Old Bailey, but they sound strange from the lips of a Freethinker, and especially a Freethinker like Mr. Bradlaugh, who has spoken and published some pretty vigorous "blasphemy" in his time. It may be true that the introducer of a Bill to repeal the Blasphemy Laws would have to "go to Christians" for support, since they are in the majority. Still, he would not ask their aid as Christians (how could he if he were a Freethinker?), but as citizens and friends of religious equality. At any rate, we are not "going to Christians" to the extent of asking them how they wish us to advocate Freethought. We have indeed, as Mr. Bradlaugh says, "paid dearly in prison" for our policy; but we never whined over our sufferings; we asked no man's pity; and we would rather go to prison again—hell on earth as it is—than mince and measure our words to suit the fancy of Christians, who are dishonest enough to persecute Freethinkers for exercising the rights which they use without scruple themselves. When Mr. Bradlaugh questions whether our Illustrations "help to spread Freethought," he makes a very different appeal. He has no right to speak for Christians, but an incontestable right to speak for Freethinkers, though at the same time Freethinkers have also

a right to speak for themselves. We venture, therefore, to suggest that Mr. Bradlaugh is not an unprejudiced judge. He objects to some of our letter-press as well as our illustrations; that is, he objects to our distinctive policy altogether. His ideal of a Freethought paper is the *National Reformer*. That is perfectly natural. But tastes differ, and there is no reason why the *Freethinker* should be a copy of another journal. One journal of any one sort is quite enough in a world like this. The *Freethinker*—just as it is—may do good work in its way, though Mr. Bradlaugh happens to dislike it. We have the very best reason for saying it has converted many Christians to Freethought. Our illustrations may not be "valuable as arguments," yet they have been found valuable as eye-openers. We might also remind Mr. Bradlaugh that Voltaire found ridicule a most potent weapon against the absurdities of superstition. We remember, too, that Mr. Bradlaugh was a master of ridicule in the days when we first listened to his eloquence. And what difference is there, in essence, between ridicule in words and ridicule in pictures? Is the letter-press in *Punch* all right, and the cartoon all wrong? We are always ready to regard Mr. Bradlaugh's opinion with the highest respect, but everyone must act on his own judgment, and in this case he fails to convince us. Nor, indeed, should we have thought it necessary to discuss our policy, after eight years' trial, if Mr. Bradlaugh's remarks did not seem a direct challenge which could not be ignored.

#### CHRIST'S MIRACLES.

##### VI.—CASTING OUT DEVILS.

BELIEF in devils and exorcism is now a vulgar superstition which the modern Christian has to reject under penalty of the contempt and derision of society at large. Practically such a belief is thoroughly exploded. No exorcism is ever gone through by the Church of England though the form still lingers in her Canons. Even the Church of Rome follows educated opinion sufficiently to allow the ceremonies of exorcism to fall into practical disuse. Possession by devils is only believed in by the very foolish and fanatical. Natural diseases or afflictions are no longer regarded as the work of evil spirits.

What then are modern Christians to say of Christ's encouragement of this delusion? Either the belief is true or it is false. If true, why do they not acknowledge it, and see that possession by devils is treated as a reality? If false, why did Christ confirm and guarantee the falsehood? Why did he profess to work miracles which he did not work? Why did he associate systematic lying with his work of teaching morality and religion to mankind? If he lied in this particular why may he not lie in many others? Why may he not condescend to the level of human errors and frauds and superstitions in other respects, till no one can tell which of his teachings are true and which deceptive? If the conversations of the devils with Jesus are a fabrication, why not the conversation of Jesus with Satan, or of God with his prophets?

If the Gospels are to be trusted, Christ accepted the vulgar delusion thoroughly. When Herod was referred to, he said "Tell that fox, Behold I cast out devils" (Luke xiii., 32), and many texts assure us that devils or "unclean spirits" or "evil spirits" were cast out by his word (Matt. viii., 16; iv., 24; xii., 22; Mark i., 34; Luke iv., 41; vii., 21; viii., 2). He gave the same power to his disciples, who successfully used it in some cases, though they failed in others (Luke ix., 1, 40.; x., 17); and he promises that those who believe shall be able to accomplish similar miracles (Mark xvi., 17). Nay, without his sanction devils were cast out by the mere use of his name by strangers who followed him not (Luke ix., 49; Mark ix., 38). Jesus also acknowledges that the work of exorcism was performed without the use of his name by the sons of the Pharisees (Luke xi., 19; Matt. xii., 27). If Jesus had not worked such commonplace miracles of the day, the people might have regarded him as an impostor; so in order that they might not suspect him of being an impostor Jesus became one. If people could have perceived his Jesuitical motive they might have been confirmed in their belief that Jesus himself, like John the Baptist, was possessed of a devil (John vii., 20; viii., 48; Mark iii., 22; Matt. xi., 18).

Jesus, although omnipotent, did not always command such immediate and implicit obedience from these real or unreal devils as might have been expected. The first devil whom he evicted would not come out till he had first "torn" the man and "thrown him in the midst" of the synagogue (Luke iv., 35; Mark i., 25, 26). When the disciples failed to cast out a devil, and privately inquired the reason, Jesus assured them that "This kind can come

forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting" (Mark ix., 29). Yet Jesus had just before explained that their failure arose from their want of belief (Matt. xvii., 19, 20). Why is the devil that causes lunacy and epileptic convulsions so much more obstinate and perverse than other devils? When Jesus assured his disciples that to those who had faith nothing was impossible, why should he immediately have to check their expectations by warning them that this particular kind of devil could only come out by prayer and fasting? And if the omnipotent Jesus could cast him out, why could not Omnipotence delegate this power to another person without any condition about fasting and praying? This spirit, too, did not give up peaceable possession. Before yielding obedience to Christ's command to come out of the child, this "dumb and deaf spirit" "rent him sore" and cried, and left him as one dead.

The demoniac of Gadara also had an obstinate tenant. When Jesus said: "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit," the unclean spirit did nothing of the kind. He only replied, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God that thou torment me not." Then Jesus, finding this a difficult case, overlooked the disobedience, and went on with the conversation. He first asked the devil for information as to what his name was, to which the devil answered: "My name is Legion, for we are many." And, as Mark says with a beautiful confusion of number that should delight the shade of Lindley Murray, "And *he* besought him much that he would not send *them* away out of the country." According to Luke viii., 31, they asked not to be sent into the deep, and yet the first thing they did when they had the power was to rush into that very deep. Jesus finally, as a sort of compromise, agreed to the devil's request that they might enter into a herd of swine. Having thus secured favorable terms, they at length condescended to obey the command of Omnipotence, and took up their abode in the animals so much hated by the Jews.

It is curious to observe how idiotically the Bible devils act. They follow the silliest, vulgarest notions of the ignorant crowd. There is not a particle of the supposed wisdom or cunning with which Satan and his imps are credited. No sooner do the Gadarene devils obtain their request than the whole legion rush down headlong into the sea from which they just before asked Jesus to save them. When they first saw Jesus coming they made the demoniac run and worship him. Why should devils act so inconsistently? Why do they waste their efforts in causing deafness (Mark ix., 25), dumbness (Matt. ix., 32, 33), blindness (Matt. xii., 22), lunacy (Mark v. 4, 15), and epilepsy (Matt. xvii., 15; Luke iv., 35), instead of betraying men's souls into sin and ruin? Is it not evident that these are mere childish tales of the nursery through which the intellect of man has had to pass?

Those who assert the Bible account of such spirits to be perfectly true and accurate, may ask why Matthew has two demoniacs (viii., 28) when Mark and Luke have only one? They may also ask themselves how the "devil" occupied two thousand swine at once. Did he subdivide himself? How can the devil and the devils be identical? If there was a devil each for the two thousand pigs how did they previously find enough room in one man or in two men? And how did they agree together to regulate the lunatic's actions and conversation so promptly and readily? What kind of parliament or of dictatorship accomplished this miraculous unanimity and instantaneousness of decision?

If all these tales of devils are not sheer nonsense, if it is true that Jesus "rebuked the devil: and he departed out of him," why does not Jesus rebuke the chief devil and cast him out effectually from the world altogether? Why does he permit his rival to cause diseases and work evil generally, and why does he permit him to do so only when such superstitions are popularly believed in? In Old Testament times we do not read of men being possessed of devils, or of devils being cast out wholesale. Neither in modern times and among civilised nations do such things occur except among the credulous and ignorant. Why is this? Is it not tolerably evident that the belief was a delusion, that the Gospel legends of devils are mere popular fictions, and that if Jesus acted as described he acted a lie, and passed his career on earth as a charlatan and an impostor?

W. P. BALL.

#### RENAN ON JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY.

THE second volume of Renan's *History of Israel* has just appeared. The following, from his Preface, will flutter the orthodox dovescotes:—

"This volume contains what I consider the most important part of the history of Judaism. Jahveh, the national God of the Jews, undergoes therein a complete transformation. From a local and provincial God he becomes, through a kind of return to the old patriarchal Elohim, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. He becomes, above all things, a just God, which national gods, necessarily full of partiality towards their *clientele*, never are. The introduction of morality into religion becomes an accomplished fact. Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah, at the date at which this volume stops, have proclaimed it in passages the beauty of which has never been surpassed. At the first blush Judaism would seem to be a religion coeval with the world, or, to be more accurate, one that has had no beginning. That is a very erroneous conception. Judaism, like all religions, has had a starting point, and required nearly 400 years for its development. About 1,000 years before Christ the Israelite religion, which has since been called Judaism, did not exist. The religion of David and Solomon did not materially differ from that of the neighboring peoples in Palestine. No doubt a sagacious eye might detect the germs which were to develop later on; but if we reason in this way, a beginning and an end cannot be assigned to anything. The features of predestination to a religious vocation, which are foreshadowed in Israel from the remotest period, become clearly set forth only in the ninth century before Christ. At the advent of Hezekiah, about 725 years before Christ, Judaism had attained its full formation. The work of the Israelite genius was, in reality, only damaged in the eighteenth century after Christ, when it became very doubtful to somewhat cultivated minds, whether things in this world were regulated by a just God. The exaggerated idea of a peculiar Providence, which is the basis of Judaism and Islam, and which Christianity has only corrected through the substratum of Liberalism inherent in our race, became definitely vanquished by modern philosophy, the offspring, not of abstract speculations, but of constant experience; it has, in fact, never been established by observation that a Superior Being troubles himself, for a moral or an immoral purpose, with the things of Nature or the affairs of mankind. An extensive transposition, therefore, requires to be effected in all the religious ideas we have inherited from the past. It cannot be said that the formula which would satisfy us has yet been found."

#### BEAUTIFUL RELIGION.

BUT, dear as our law and Constitution have been to England, how much dearer has been our religion? The march of the faith of peace has been over the mangled corpses of millions of true men, through the ruins of good and happy homes, through sacked cities, and gutted temples, over the trampled fields and by the prison, and the shambles and the rack and gibbet; lighted by the flames where men and women burned; and with cries of tortured innocents and the clash of murderous steel for music. There is no outrage, no crime, no brutality, no lowest depth of bestial lust, or shameful cowardice, or devilish cruelty; no sin of fratricide, of regicide, of infanticide, of falsehood, or of incest that has not been incurred in the making of our glorious religion. The vestments of the Church are stained with the blood of innocent babes, its history is blackened with deeds that it were an offence against decency to name. With a cruel lust of anguish; with a malice and merciless hatred worse than tigrish; with a lavish outlay of curses, and flames, and tortures; with a wholesale engendering of vice, and shame, and civil war, and rupture between kin and friends, has the Holy Church carried its gospel of peace through the centuries. Is not this true? In the making of the faith have there not been more lives taken than our prayer-book holds words? Would not the screams of her tortured down the voices of all the choirs the Church now holds? We have bought this Church dearly; is it worth the cost?

Contrast the cost and value of our glorious national institutions with the cost and value of some things we could worse spare. What is the value of printing, with all its blessings of cheap literature and the diffusion of knowledge? What the value of written language, without which the press were dumb? What the value of agriculture, and the crafts of the smith, the builder, and the seaman? What the value of the steam-engine, of the railway, of the telegraph, of the loom? What the value of music, of poetry, of art? And did any of these things cost us ages of feud, or plunge our nation into lamentation, or defile our fields with blood? Did Shakespeare and Darwin and Bruno and Caxton march to their thrones over the writhing bodies of mangled victims? Has any of the most precious heritages of humanity ever cost one true heart a pang, or offered its gift to us with a bloody hand?—*Sunday Chronicle*.

ALMOST side by side with one of General Gordon's most pious letters written from Khartoum, expressing his familiar intimacy with the Lord, the newspapers publish the Mahdi's account of Gordon's death as "the enemy of God." What a sarcastic lesson for a man of reflection! Both Gordon and the Mahdi were sure of God's assistance, and if we are to judge by the result, it was not the Mahdi who was mistaken. Yet the Christians, despite their belief in special providence, still regard Gordon as a true religionist and the Mahdi as a rank impostor.

OBITUARY.—On Sunday, Dec. 16, interred at Byer's Green, Mr. James Noddles, late of Chester-le-Street, aged 57 years. He died as he lived, a staunch Freethinker.

Price Threepence.

# THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER

OF

## THE "FREETHINKER," 1888.

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ILLUSTRATIONS.—St. John's Menagerie (11 sketches). The Star in the East (6 sketches). Christmas at Nazareth, A.D. 1. J. C.'s Temptation. The Unfortunate Prince (8 sketches). Moses the Stone-mason. Catch Me if You Can. The Story of Man (6 sketches). Bible Jokes (4 sketches). Jehovah's Armory. A Flying God. His Tender Mercies.

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